INSTITUTUM
HISTORICUM POLONICUM
ROMAE

XVIII

ANTEMURALE

NON EXSTINGUETUR

ROMAE
1974

INSTITUTUM HISTORICUM POLONICUM ROMAE
VIA DEGLI SCIPIONI 284 - ROMA

IAM PRIDEM ROMAE PRODIERUNT HAEC VOLUMINA
(continuatio *Studia Teologiczne* — Wilno, vol. I-X):

XI — MEYSZTOWICZ, V., *Repertorium bibliographicum pro rebus Polonicis Archivi Secreti Vaticani.* Vaticani, 1943.

XII — MEYSZTOWICZ, V., *De achivo Nuntiaturae Varsaviensis quod nunc in Archivo Secreto Vaticano servatur,* Vaticani, 1944.

XIII — SAVIO, P., *De Actis Nuntiaturae Poloniae quae partem Archivi Secretariatus Status constituunt.* Romae, 1947.

XIV — MEYSZTOWICZ, V., *Prospectica descriptio Archivi Secreti Vaticani* (Ed. chirotypica, exhausta).

ANTEMURALE, I-XVIII ROMAE, 1954-1974

ELEMENTA AD FONTIUM EDITIONES

Vol. I — *Polonica ex Libris Obligationum et Solutionum Camerae Apostolicae.* Collegit J. LISOWSKI, pp. XV+292, 704 doc. (A.D. 1373-1565) ind. nom. propr. 1960. (Archivum Secretum Vaticanum).

Vol. II — *"Liber Disparata Antiqua Continens"* Praes. E. WINKLER, pp. XVIII+190, 281 doc. (ante a. 1424) 19 facs. Ind. nom. propr. 1960. (Archivum Capituli Trident.).

Vol. III — *Repertorium Rerum Polonicarum ex Archivo Orsini in Archivo Capitolino,* I pars Coll. W. WYHOWSKA - DE ANDREIS, XVIII+162, 1144 doc. (A.D. 1565-1787) 29 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. 1961.

Vol. IV — *Res Polonicae Elisabetha I Angliae Regnante Conscriptae ex Archivis Publicis Londoniarum.* Ed. C. H. TALBOT, pp. XVI+311, 166 doc. (A.D. 1578-1603) 9 tab., Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. glossarium verb, ang. ant., 1961.

Vol. V — *Repertorium Rerum Polonicarum ex Archivo Dragonetti de Torres in Civitate Aquilana.* Ed. P. COLLURA, pp. XI+86, 483 doc. (A.D. 1568-1682) 4 tab. 1962.

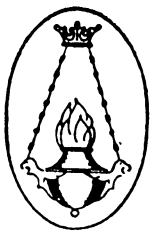
Vol. VI — *Res Polonicae Iacobo I Angliae Regnante Conscriptae ex Archivis Publicis Londoniarum.* Ed. C. H. TALBOT, pp. XI+396, 281 doc. (A.D. 1603-1629) 8 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron., glossarium verb. ang. ant. 1962.

Vol. VII — *Repertorium Rerum Polonicarum ex Archivo Orsini in Archivo Capitolino,* II pars. Coll. W. WYHOWSKA - DE ANDREIS, pp. XIV+250, 1205 doc. (A.D. 1641-1676) 11 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. 1962.

INSTITUTUM
HISTORICUM POLONICUM
ROMAE

XVIII

ANTEMURALE



NON EXSTINGUETUR

ROMAE
1974

SUMPTIBUS
FUNDATIONIS
LANCKOROŃSKI
FRIBURGI HELVETIAE

EDIDIT:
INSTITUTUM HISTORICUM POLONICUM ROMAE
VIA DEGLI SCIPIONI, 284 — ROMA

INDEX RERUM

I. STUDIA

II. NECROLOGIA

STUDIA

JOSEPH KASPAREK-OBST
(Monterey, Calif., U.S.A.)

KINSHIPS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND POLISH CONSTITUTIONS (to 1831)

Edited by Christopher Kasparek-Obst

In memory of my parents—
Emilia née Obst von Minnenthal and Teodor Kasparek

FOREWORD

As the eight-century-old Polish Republic was entering into its hundred-twenty-three-year eclipse as a political entity, on the other side of the ocean there was springing to independent life a young people, the bulk of them settled there for no more than a few generations. A joint consideration of these two historical events, an attempt to associate in any fashion countries spatially so distant from one another—particularly while having before one's eyes our contemporary economic-political map of the world—is likely to induce a sense of ludicrous mis-juxtaposition. Accordingly it is helpful to bear in mind that the relative situations of these two countries in the world today are not those of the period when the Polish Republic slid into eclipse and the United States rose to the dignity of nationhood.

In area the two countries were at the time nearly equal. The population of Poland came to twelve and a half million, "not counting the population increment between the first two [partitions] and [the third and final partition in] the year 1795";[1] the population of the United States amounted to not quite four million.[2] Poland at that time had behind her eight hundred years of recorded history—a colourful history woven out of labour and struggle, achievement and reversal, victory and disaster—a history of social evolution over a span of over thirty generations. Still more noteworthy, the Polish Republic comprised a voluntary union of Poland and Lithuania (the latter including what was then called Ruthenia and is now the Ukraine and Byelorussia) which over the centuries were gradually becoming transformed by a process of cultural integration into one people, and if only on that account constituted a phenomenon such as the United States were in their own turn to become.

---

[1] Marian Kukiel, *Dzieje Polski porozbiorowe: 1795-1921*, 39.

[2] "United States," *Funk & Wagnalls Standard Encyclopedia*, 1931, XXIV.

An awareness of these truths facilitates an examination of partial parallels, and a still more probing study leads to the conclusion that kinships and mutual influences have long existed between the two peoples. Offhand one can spot evidence of these influences in the participation of Poles in the American Revolution of 1776-83 and in the American Civil War of 1861-65. Names of those who gave their services in the struggle for the independence and preservation of the United States include those of generals such as Kościuszko, Pułaski, Krzyżanowski, Karge and Schoepf. The search for still earlier affinities will conjure up the image of Dr. Curtius, who as early as the colonial period established the first college in North America.[3] In passing one must mention the first arrivals from Poland: craftsmen who are recorded in the early annals of America not only for having founded the production of glass and wood tar, but also for having organized the first strike in America: a strike which, employed successfully in the struggle over equality of rights, earned them recognition as the first heroes in American history.[4]

History also recalls the American physician Dr. Paul Fitzsimmons Eve, who participated in the Polish Uprising of 1830-31 (and whose home at 619 Green Street in Augusta, Georgia, is today a historical monument);[5] as well as the American novelist James Fenimore Cooper's organizing, during that Uprising, of an American-Polish committee of assistance for the Poles who were fighting for their independence.[6] Nor can we pass over the fact that the "Blue Division"—so called by the Poles after the colour of the soldiers' uniforms and formed of Polish-Americans with the official approval of the United States government—fought during 1919-20 to secure the rights of the Polish nation to the historical soil of the Republic; or that American pilots headed by General Merian C. Cooper—a relative of James Fenimore Cooper's and at that time a young lieutenant-colonel in the Polish Air Force—blasted out renascent Poland's eastern borders even as, toward the end of World War I, she made her return debut to the map.[7]

But in fact the roots of mutual Polish-American influence go back deeper still.

---

[3] John F. Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants*, 36.

[4] Edward Channing, *A History of the United States*, I, 170.

[5] John Lutz, a private letter dated January 8, 1969.

[6] "Amerykańsko-polski Komitet Pomocy," *Wielka Encyklopedia Powszehna PWN*, I.

[7] Merian C. Cooper (Brig.-Gen. USAF, Ret., formerly Lieut.-Col., Polish Air Force, Commander Kościuszko Squadron /7th/), "How I Happened to go to Poland," *Poland* (an occasional publication, March 1972), Mark J. Mazyński, ed., 15-6.

CHAPTER 1. AMERICA TO THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

I. *From the discovery of the continent to the Constitution of 1789*

The American hemisphere has been discovered no less than three, and possibly as many as five or more, times. There being no evidence of *Homo sapiens* in America at an earlier time, the first discoverers and denizens—arrived between twenty-five and twelve thousand years ago—are taken to be a group of people whose physical characteristics indicate their origin in Asia.[1] How they traversed the distance—whether by foot across an ice-covered Bering Strait, or by some sort of primitive raft—will in all likelihood forever remain their own secret. It is possible that they crossed over on dry land during a period of greatly lowered waters[2] whose occurrence is pointed to by recent scientific findings.[3]

These men from Asia fanned out over the North and South American continents. Those who settled in the areas about the Isthmus of Panama and along the shores of the warm-water oceans, developed interesting cultures. However, those who scattered out over the mountain, plateau and plains areas of the North American continent never strayed far out of the Stone Age.

This tremendous range of cultures among the same race inhabiting both the American continents, and the lack of any intermediate cultural forms, struck the early scholars and prompted the Frenchman de Guines to theorize, backed up by Chinese literary classics, that the Chinese were in contact with America about 2,250 B.C. and revisited it about 500 A.D.[4]

De Guines' theory of 1761 seemed in 1831 to collapse beneath the critical blows of the Prussian scholar Klaproth, but our own time continues to supply a growing knowledge of the Indians, and with it de Guines' revitalized arguments are taking on a compelling force.

Next to discover the hemisphere framing the western Atlantic were the Norsemen. The names of two are known: those of Bjarne Heriolfsson and Leif Eriksson, who—independently of each other— reached the northern coast of North America at the turn of the eleventh century.[5]

---

[1] Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People*, 7.

[2] Rachel Louise Carson, *The Sea Around Us*, 106.

[3] Peter Farb, *Man's Rise to Civilization*, 237-8.

[4] Henrietta Merz, *Pale Ink*, 158.

[5] Herman Palsson and Magnus Magnusson, *The Vinland Sagas: the Norse Discovery of America.* Also, Helge Marcus Ingstad, *Land under the Pole Star: a Voyage to the Norse Settlements and the Saga of the People that Vanished*, 116-71.

The attempts at settlement made at that time were unsuccessful, though for over five hundred years Norse settlements did flourish in Greenland. Subsequently the Scandinavian-descended population died out in utter misery, forgotten by their mother country,[6] and the Norsemen appeared to suddenly lose interest in the northern rim of the Atlantic and turned their attentions instead to the European continent.

The Polish contribution to the discovery of America was recorded in 1597 by the Dutch geographer Wytfliet, who stated that the honour of a "second discovery" of America "fell to *Johannes Scolvus Polonus*, who in the year 1476 . . . sailed beyond Norway, Greenland, Frisland, penetrated the Northern Strait under the very Arctic Circle, and arrived at the country of Labrador and Estotiland." [7] Scolvus has since become known to Poles as Jan of Kolno.[8] Morison is sceptical about this Jan of Kolno, but—as he himself recounts—another American historian, George Bancroft, once dismissed the Norse sagas that were first adduced as evidence for the now well established Norse expeditions to America as "mythological in form and obscure in meaning." [9]

On the twelfth of October, 1492, a Genoan in the service of Spain, Christopher Columbus, landed on an island known today as Watling Island or San Salvador, which he mistook for the Indies.[10] There ensued further expeditions of discovery by Columbus and by his imitators, and their result was the gradual colonization by Europeans of the entire New World.

England, in the period from the beginning of the seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth centuries, took possession of 325,000 square miles in the northern part of North America.[11]

The English colonies were organized by companies—corporate bodies to whom the Crown granted royal charters—and by individuals or groups of individuals who received a territory together with the power of exercising authority on behalf of the Crown. Within the framework of either type of colony, the free settlers enjoyed certain fundamental rights: their freedoms, and participation in a limited local autonomy.[12]

Stretching as they did down the coastline over a distance of hundreds of miles, and taking in lands of diverse qualities and isobars and isotherms, all presenting diverse potentials for utilization, the colonies

---

[6] Morison, *The European Discovery of America: the Northern Voyages: A.D. 500-1600*, 58-60.

[7] *Ibid.*, 90.

[8] "Jan z Kolna," *Wielka Encyklopedia Powszechna*, V.

[9] Morison, *European Discovery*, 36.

[10] T. Harry Williams, Richard N. Current and Frank Freidel, *A History of the United States (to 1877)*, 12.

[11] "United States," *Funk & Wagnalls*, XXIV.

[12] Williams *et al.*, 101.

from their very inception displayed a heterogeneous character. Initially there were attempts at agricultural communes in which groups of settlers received tracts of soil which they divided up among them into homesteads, while preserving common ownership of pasturage and forest, as well as of tilled soil—which, however, was divided up for cultivation among the members of the community. This system did not persist for long; the communes were broken up, and after 1700 only completely private farms existed. Their sizes varied from that of bare self-sufficiency to that of large landed estates.[13]

During their early period, the Colonies were dependent for supplies on the mother country, and lacking as they did their own facilities for producing many objects of everyday use, they long accepted their state of dependence. England was then in the grip of mercantilism, in accordanece with which the Colonies fulfilled certain well defined roles: they produced the raw materials needed by English industry and bought the finished products of that industry, while the shipping of both raw materials and finished goods brought profit to the English merchantmen.[14] Aside from that, the Colonies served to drain off England's excess population as well as elements for a variety of reasons considered undesirable by England.[15]

In order to ensure the full attainment of these goals, Parliament issued the "Navigation Acts," [16] a set of regulations governing the commercial intercourse of the Colonies with other countries. The series of Acts of 1660, 1663, 1673 and 1696, together with the *Molasses Act* of 1733, put an increasingly tight rein on the independent economic operations of the Colonists. A thorn in the side of English industry was the developing native Colonial industry. In order to stifle competition, the English Parliament passed a number of laws: the *Woollens Act* (1699) forbidding the Colonies to produce woollen fabrics for export; the *Hat Act* (1732) forbidding the Colonies to produce hats; and the *Iron Act* (1750) enjoining the Colonies from producing certain articles of iron.[17]

The enforcement of these regulations required administrative vigilance on England's part; the tendency of the London government became to turn the Colonies—still at that time of diverse types—into homogeneous royal domains, and to consolidate small ones into larger ones. The royal governors—at times exceedingly despotic men—in implementing the policies of the London government antagonized the Colonists and in some places provoked conflicts.

The process of administrative homogenization led to the Colonies

---

[13] *Ibid.*, 60.

[14] John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution*, 4.

[15] James A. Williamson, *The Evolution of England: a Commentary on the Facts*, 257.

[16] Morison, *Oxford History*, 134.

[17] Williams *et al.*, 66.

by 1754 being—save for Connecticut, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island—all royal colonies. Their administration crystallized into a system under which:

1. the supreme authority in each colony was vested in a governor who enjoyed the power of vetoing acts of the colonial legislature, as well as the power of enforcing the Navigation Acts; an appointed council not only advised the governor but sat as the upper house of the colonial legislature and as the supreme court;

2. the members of the legislature, or more precisely of its lower house, were chosen by those citizens who could fulfil the property qualifications for voting; this body could make laws, subject to veto by the governor or by the royal Privy Council;

3. Judicial powers were exercised in each colony by courts at three levels: local, county and superior; the judges were appointed by the king or, in his name, by the governor—which was not without its consequences for their rulings.[18]

The problems of the Colonies and their situation underwent drastic changes in 1763, when as a result of the annexation of Canada and the Floridas into the ethnically quite heterogeneous British domains, more new groups of entirely different cultural backgrounds entered into the picture. Moreover, while up till then the Colonies had had continually to reckon with the possibility of attack from French Canada, now the disappearance of France from North America freed the Colonists from that threat and consequently also from the necessity of hanging on to Britain's apron strings.

For England the eviction of the French from America meant a new situation, with its own attendant benefits and burdens. The English government attempted to transfer the financial burdens at least in part onto the Colonies by employing "requisitions" which nearly all of them refused to honour. Already during the Seven Years' War with France, the Colonists had exhibited their indifference towards Britain's interests by continuing to trade with French and Spanish possessions in the West Indies and by running the English blockades.

The Colonies had all the while been drifting away from the mother country, an effect augmented by the mass influx of Germans, Scots, Irish and Negroes into the population. From all the groups there had gradually been developing a distinctly "American" type; a sense of separateness was ever more strongly manifesting itself, and a society initially founded with the idea of duplicating English society was being transformed into something entirely new. Additionally, the existence of a virtually unlimited western frontier encouraged the development of strong personalities disinclined to acknowledge the traditional English social scheme.[19]

The old order was continued the longest by the Southern planters,

---

[18] Ray Allen Billington, *American History Before 1877*, 25-6.

[19] *Ibid.*, 33-7.

tied to England by their lucrative tobacco transactions. Elsewhere the Colonists carried on—and had no intention of curtailing—a trade conducted with other countries without any regard for the English economy. They likewise demonstrated their independence of the Crown when, without waiting for the conclusion of the war with the French, they proceeded to move on to the lands being lost by France in the west, thereby rousing the displeasure and hostility of the local Indians.

English attempts at curbing these wildcat colonizations by individuals contemptuous of all authority and by self-proclaimed "companies" met with complete disobedience, thereby leading to an increasingly real menace of organized attack by the Indian tribes. The government in London felt obliged to station ten thousand troops along the frontier. Their expense was to amount to three hundred and fifty thousand pounds a year; of this sum one-third, by London's decision, was to be defrayed by the Colonies. The attempt to make the Colonies pay the special tax provided the first impetus for the organization of armed resistance against British authorities. Henceforth the Colonies and the Crown persisted unalterably on a collision course, as Parliament—dominated by adherents of George III, equally as ignorant as he of the state of affairs—enacted one law after another designed to discipline the Colonists.

The government instituted strict customs controls in the Colonies; the navy pursued smugglers, and the vice-admiralty courts operated without juries. The year 1764 brought the *Sugar Act* designed to put a stop to the Colonies' trade with the island possessions of France and Spain. The *Currency Reform Act* of the same year forbade the Colonies to issue paper money, thus aggravating the already short supply caused by the rigorously enforced customs duties. The year 1765 added the *Stamp Act*; henceforth legal and business documents, newspapers and other printed matter were required to bear revenue stamps. The purpose of the latter act was to raise funds needed for at least partial coverage of the costs associated with maintaining British troops on the American continent.

All these laws were greeted in the Colonies with vociferous discontent, which took the legal form of a resolution by the colonial legislature of Virginia—imitated by other colonies—denying Parliament's right to levy taxes and fees on the Colonies without their consent. The resolutions of the individual colonies were crowned by a resolution of the Stamp Act Congress of 1765—the first joint action taken by the colonists. The well-to-do and educated segments of society acted through more or less legal channels; the organized merchants boycotted British goods (the "Nonimportation Agreements"); the lower orders simply exercised violence against the fiscal agents of the Crown.

Probably as a result of the troubles experienced from the commercial boycott, the English Parliament in its *Declaratory Act* of March, 1766, lowered the import duties on molasses, while at the same time affirming its inalienable right to legislate in all matters whatsoever for

the Colonies. Practically at the same time, at the instance of Chancellor of the Exchequer Townshend, Parliament lowered the English land tax, planning to offset the diminished government revenues through increased revenues from the Colonies. When the New York legislature refused to make appropriations for the English troops, Townshend secured the dissolution of the refractory legislature and strengthened the instruments of royal authority in the Colonies in order that they might execute a strict application of the Navigation Acts and thereby assure the collection of funds for the royal administration without His Majesty's Government having to seek the cooperation of the colonial legislatures.

In 1767 Townshend took a further step by obtaining from Parliament the power to impose customs duties on articles imported by the Colonies: on paper, painters' materials, glass and tea. Here it should be mentioned that during the previous period of crisis between England and the Colonies, the Americans themselves had acknowledged the British government's right to regulate trade between England and her colonies through so-called "external taxes." However, they did not recognize Britain's right to impose on the Colonies "internal taxes," or taxes designed to balance the English budget. Townshend, in introducing the customs law, described the customs duties as "external taxes," to which the Colonists objected that even such taxes were illegal if their chief purpose was not the regulation of trade.

The polemics concerning the Crown's rights in regard to the Colonies were the first essay at questioning the constitutional basis of English rule over the inhabitants of the Colonies. The conflict once again manifested itself at several levels: led by Samuel Adams, the radical intellectuals expressed their objections in written form in a "Circular Letter" calling upon all the Colonies to apply the Nonimportation Agreements; and the mob harassed the customs agents, here and there tarring and feathering them. Troops sent to protect them were attacked by a street crowd on March 5, 1770, and the resulting "Boston Massacre" at long last demonstrated to England the gravity of the situation. A short time later there occurred a change of prime ministers, and with it—upon the urging of the new prime minister—repeal of customs duties in the Colonies, with the exception of that on tea.

If the Colonists did not carry off a complete victory, at any rate they acquired the conviction that through concerted and persistent action they could break down London's opposition. Nor did they forget the wrongs that they had suffered at the hands of the English authorities. Feelings ran particularly high among the lower classes, which were unable to reconcile themselves to a system in which the antiquated guild law hampered free employment, the requirement of property ownership deprived them of voting rights, and the church was legally a state institution. Although during the period from 1770 to 1773 there was a certain relaxation of tensions, it proved to be merely the proverbial calm before the storm; the repeal of duties brought about by the Boston demonstrations failed to discharge tensions which had been building for years. In

1772 the Colonists organized "committees of correspondence" whose purpose was to register and publicize actions by the English authorities detrimental to the Colonies.

The year 1773 brought the *Tea Act*, releasing the British East India Company from customs duties on tea exported to America: a measure which, in conjunction with its provisions effectively eliminating American merchants from the tea trade, granted that company a monopoly on tea. The resentment of the well-to-do and of the masses was expressed in the so-called "Boston Tea Party," in which a consignment of East Indian tea was heaved overboard into Boston harbour.

Parliament next issued a series of measures known as the *Coercive Acts* (1774) which the Colonists christened the "Intolerable Acts." These acts struck at the vital interests and rights of the Colonies: the *Boston Port Act* closed down that port until Massachusetts made good the losses resuling from the Tea Party; the *Administration of Justice Act* deprived the New England courts of jurisdiction over cases involving royal officials; the *Massachusetts Governing Act* suppressed town meetings and made the upper chamber of the legislature appointed by the governor; and the *Quartering Act* gave the colonial governors the power to requisition buildings to house troops.

The Colonists called a Continental Congress. In September of 1774, fifty-five delegates from twelve colonies arrived in Philadelphia. The Congress resolved to urge the Colonies to resist the English "Coercive Acts," adopted a *Declaration of Rights and Grievances* recognizing royal authority but denying Parliament's right to impose taxes on the Colonies, and established the "Continental Association," which subsequently engineered a suspension of trade with England.

In February, 1775, the British Prime Minister, Lord North, published a *Resolution of Conciliation*, promising to lift the taxes from any colony that covered the expenses of its own government. The Continental Association rejected this declaration, and the English military command sent detachments to the town of Concord to seize the military supplies stored there by the Continental leaders. The colonial militia gathered to oppose the army, and on April 19, 1775, a skirmish took place in which eight militiamen were killed.

Bold and decisive steps were needed; on May 10, the Second Continental Congress resolved to organize an army and placed it under the command of General Washington. The skirmishes rose in frequency and intensity, eventually turning into full-scale revolutionary warfare that was to last for the next seven years. An attempt at conciliatory settlement via a petition of July, 1775, was hardly facilitated by the Crown's response: in August the King declared the Colonists rebels, dispatched Hessian mercenary troops to the Colonies, and declared a blockade of American ports.

On July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress directed a committee headed by Jefferson to prepare a document which on the fourth of July was adopted as the "Declaration of Independence." For the first time

the word "independence" fell openly, expressing the desire of the colonial population for a joint existence as a separate nation; but seven years of bloody struggle were required to turn the word into the deed.[20]

At the behest of Congress, all the former British colonies, with the exception of Connecticut and Rhode Island, drew up their own constitutions based on the principle of a tripartite government:

1. The executive power was vested in a governor with a one-year term of office.
2. The legislative power reposed in a legislature comprising members with a short duration of office.
3. Justice was to be dispensed by life-term judges appointed—depending on the state—either by the governor or by the legislature.

Each of the constitutions incorporated a section—a "bill of rights"—guaranteeing civil liberties: freedom of speech, of press and of religion; immunity from arbitrary arrest; and the right to trial by jury.

Here and there the constitutions did contain provisions that stood in conflict with democratic principle. Thus the rights to vote and to seek office remained contingent on property ownership, and so most of the citizens were barred from either voting or holding office. Some of the constitutions expressly restricted the rights of certain categories of the populace, such as Jews, Catholics and atheists.

The considerable similarities among the constitutions notwithstanding, the differences among them—derived largely from their somewhat divergent sociopolitical patterns developed during the colonial period—bespoke the necessity of codification. Standing in the way of this were deep-seated feelings of separateness and an all but fanatical resistance, on the part of colonies just transformed into *states*, against any concessions to the other states. This situation indicated to the more politically mature leaders the necessity of laying foundations for a formal union of states.

The Declaration of Independance of 1776 was followed in 1777 by the Articles of Confederation, the first attempt at a constitution binding together all the states. But the result was merely a very loose union. Each state retained complete independence and sovereignty, and the United States were little more than a league of nations for the resolution of common problems. The Congress—a unicameral legislature which also functioned as an executive and judicial authority—was composed of delegates from the various states. A vote by two-thirds of all the states decided any measure, and the powers delegated by the states to Congress were restricted to:

1. the declaration of war and the conclusion of peace;
2. the drawing up of treaties and alliances;
3. relations with the Indians; and
4. the conduct of the mails.

Congress' functions as a joint government boiled down to the role

---

[20] *Ibid.*, 53-61.

of a common administrative agency for the states. Congress had no power to levy taxes or to regulate commerce, those powers being reserved to the individuals states. This first attempt at a constitution created no single dispositional centre, provided no coherent system for the administration of justice, furnished the joint government with no sanctions. The only true step toward genuine unification was the establishment of a common citizenship.[21]

The consequences arising from the impotence of such a Confederation were not long in coming. The once booming commerce with foreign countries stagnated; England refused to participate in any economic exchange, and worse still denied American ships access to the West Indies; Spain refused to engage in any trade.

In economic self-defence, the individual states proceeded to levy tariffs against each other. The result was a economic standstill which turned the dissatisfied populace against Congress—a helpless, powerless body burdened with responsibility for forty million dollars in war debts, lacking in power to tax, and dependent for its funds on the sale of land belonging in common to all the states and on so-called "requisitions," i.e. requests to the various states that they cover parts of the common expenses. This last means of covering the Confederation's expenses Washington termed "A timid kind of recommendation from Congress to the States." [22]

This situation was complicated to the point of chaos by the individual states releasing massive printings of paper money. Inflation grew, together with all the inescapable consequences. According as whether the debtors or the creditors held the majority, the legislatures favoured either one group or the other. In Massachusetts, events culminated in a debtors' rebellion led by Daniel Shays, a former captain in Washington's army, which was put down only by troops, and in all the states there were demands for the abolition of all private debts and for an equal distribution of property.

There must have been some signs of positive change, inasmuch as Washington noted during this period that the country was making good the destructions of the revolutionary period and was laying the "foundations of a great empire." At the same time he made no secret of his fears: "I am mortified beyond expression when I view the clouds that have spread over the brightest morn that ever dawned upon any country." [23]

A somewhat more sanguine view was given by Thomas Jefferson in a letter to Madison: "I hold that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical." [24]

---

[21] *Ibid.*, 70-1.

[22] Catherine Drinker Bowen, *Miracle at Philadelphia: the Story of the Constitutional Convention, May to September, 1787*, 5.

[23] Williams *et al.*, 181.

[24] *Ibid.* ...

However, that the situation appeared grave is indicated in another piece of correspondence from the times. A former subordinate of his during the Revolution, General Knox, wrote Washington: "[The mob's] creed is, that the property of the United States has been protected from the confiscation of Britain by the joint exertions of all and therefore ought to be the common property of all." [25]

Confirmation of the alarming state of affairs is found in another letter from Washington: "There are combustibles in every State which a spark might set a fire in;" and in a letter from Stephen Higginson:

> we cannot long exist under our present system; and unless we soon acquire more force to the Union by some means or other, Insurgents will arise and eventually take the reins from us. We shall evitably be thrown into . . . convulsions which will result in one or more Governments, established with the loss of much blood.[26]

The difficult situation was complicated by strong pressures on Washington that, in order to save the country, he take power into his own hands and declare himself dictator—pressures which, however, the former commander-in-chief would not yield to.[27]

The discontent among the lower classes alarmed the well-to-do. The letter perceived the necessity of furnishing the government of the Union with force capable of checking the mob. After delegates from Maryland and Virginia had convened in 1785 for the purpose of discussing their disagreement about their rights on the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay, it was resolved to call a conference of delegates from all the states to discuss commercial questions.

The following year, the conference took place as planned, but representatives of only five states showed up. Chiefly through the efforts of Hamilton, the gathering took a resolution not on the matters comprising the original purpose of the conference, but bidding all the states to send their delegates to Philadelphia for a convention to discuss necessary changes in the Articles of Confederation.

At Philadelphia, just as the Convention was to gather, former officers of Washington's assembled.

> Disgruntled at the refusal of Congress to grant them half pay for life, some of the military men through their exclusive and hereditary Society of the Cincinnati hoped to control and to invigorate the government, some of them even aspiring to a kind of army dictatorship.[28]

---

[25] Allen Nevins and Henry Steele Commager, *The Pocket History of the United States*, 111.

[26] *Ibid.* ...

[27] Bowen, 20.

[28] Williams *et al.*, 179.

> These gentlemen, "panting for nobility and with the eagle dangling at their breast," could well become the nucleus of an American aristocracy or of a Cromwellian military government. And Washington was president of the Cincinnati! [29]

The General regarded this circumstance as highly embarrassing. He saw it as

> serious and sufficient reason for his staying away. It had required the combined efforts of Madison, Hamilton, Edmund Randolph and Washington's special friend General Henry Knox to get the General to Philadelphia at all; he feared that as president of the Cincinnati his presence would inconvenience the Convention.[30]

At the Convention all the states were represented save for Rhode Island. Fifty-five delegates assembled. They were mostly young; their average age—despite the attendance of several venerable members whose senior, Benjamin Franklin, numbered eighty-one years—was forty-two.

From the beginning several men stood out: Washington (the president of the Convention), Madison, Franklin and Hamilton. Additionally influential—if not physically present—were John Adams (then the American minister to London) and Jefferson (away negotiating agreements and loans in Paris). Adams had just published the first volume of his three-volume work, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America,* and Jefferson sent members of the Convention several hundred volumes from Paris: the new *Encyclopédie Méthodique,* works on history, political science and the law of nations, and writings by Voltaire, Diderot, Mably, Necker and d'Albon.[31]

The members of the Convention represented an enlightened element well acclimatized to public life. The majority had already served in Congress or in the state legislatures, and nearly all came from the wealthy classes. They did not include the leaders of the late Revolution; the signatures of Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry and Thomas Paine were not later to appear at the bottom of the Constitution. True, there was still Franklin, together with a group exhibiting democratic leanings, but no trace of the revolutionary fervour of several years earlier. Other men were putting their efforts to working out the new social foundations, but even those whose names reached Jefferson in Paris seemed to him "an assembly of demi-gods." [32]

These men proved equal to the undertaking, and although undeniably having a personal interest in the economic consequences of their work, they did not lose sight of their true goal: the preservation and strengthening of the Union. Realism and the clear recognition that the new law of the land would have to win acceptance outside the Conven-

---

[29] Bowen, 20.

[30] *Ibid.* ...

[31] *Ibid.*, 14.

[32] *Ibid.*, 4.

tion to acquire the force of law, made the members realize the necessity of coming to agreement with their opponents, and distrust of aristocracy on the one hand and an aversion towards the system of democracy as experienced under the Confederation on the other, inclined them toward a path of moderation.

There were many problems. Virginia—one of the large states—submitted a plan envisaging a bicameral legislature in which measures would be passed by a majority vote, and which would likewise choose the President of the United States and the federal judges. The plan proposed by New Jersey—a small state—disagreed with Virginia's: it provided for a unicameral legislature, with each state enjoying a single vote, and empowered to set duties and tariffs, to regulate commerce in general, and to exercise sanctions in order to obtain from the states the so-called "requisitions" needed to cover the essential expenses of the federal government.

The numerical advantage was with the large states, and had they wanted to, they certainly would have been able to force through their plan. It bespeaks their considerable political maturity that, instead, they sought to avoid further crises and to reach a compromise.[33]

II. *The Constitution of 1789*

The United States Constitution as it was finally worked out was founded on six cardinal principles:

1. The people were recognized as the source of the Constitution's force—as the superior of a government of limited powers;

2. a federation (tight union) supplanted the Confederation (loose union) of the states;

3. the federal executive authority was granted strictly delimited powers; the powers not granted by the Constitution to the federal government were *eo ipso* reserved to the state governments or to the inhabitants of the states;

4. the decision of the federal Supreme Court closed, without further recourse, any dispute between a state and the federal government or between one state and another. In subsequent decisions, the Supreme Court ruled that the states could neither tax federal agencies nor hinder their functioning on state territory;

5. the powers of the government were divided into legislative (the Congress of the United States), executive (the President of the United States), and judicial (a system of federal courts with the Supreme Court at the top and with the judges installed for life terms); and

6. the Supreme Court was empowered to pass upon the compatibility of legislative acts with the Constitution (this doctrine actually being inferred subsequently from the doctrines of limited government and divided powers).

---

[33] William H. Young, *Ogg and Ray's Introduction to American Government*, 22-3.

III. *Ratification.*

The presentation of the draft Constitution, in September of 1787, to the states for ratification signalled a violent campaign of opposition, led chiefly by liberals and by pre-Revolutionary radicals. The prospect of a strong government delighted neither those of limited means, who feared the suppression of the unrestricted printing of money by the states, nor the populace of the western frontier, who suspected that the federal government might trade away their access to the Mississippi. On the other hand, Jefferson was dismayed that the new constitution might produce a President who was "a bad edition of a Polish king." [34]

More than eager to endorse the Constitution were the people of means, concentrated chiefly in New England—the merchants and planters. They found themselves privileged by the constitutional allocation to them of senators equal in number with those of the large states; accordingly the Constitution was eagerly snapped up by Delaware and Connecticut.

Difficulties were caused by the state of Massachusetts, where the interests of the small property owners and of the unpropertied necessitated political promises and the pledging of an additional section guaranteeing civil rights. The same happened again with Virginia, and only the appending of the first ten amendments—known collectively as the "Bill of Rights"—made ratification possible. The ten amendments guaranteed:

1. separation of church and state and freedom of religion;

2. freedom of speech, press, assembly and petition for redress of grievances;

3. the right to keep and bear arms;

4. prohibition against peactime quartering of troops in private domiciles without the consent of the owner, such quartering being permissible in wartime only in accordance with the law; and the nonseizure of private property for public use without just conpensation;

5. personal security in one's lodgings, papers and belongings, and immunity against unreasonable search and seizure;

6. the rights of persons accused of crimes;

7. the right to trial by jury;

8. no excessive bail or fines, nor infliction of cruel or unusual punishments;

9. the preservation by the people of other rights not expressly mentioned in the Constitution;

10. the retention by the states or by their people of rights not specifically delegated by the Constitution to the United States.

---

[34] Joyce Appleby, "The Jefferson-Adams Rupture and the First French Translation of John Adams' 'Defence'," *The American Historical Review*, LXXIII, No. 4 (April, 1968), 1091.

IV. *Amendments.*

The amendments to the Constitution did not stop with the Bill of Rights, and an analysis shows three periods to have produced them:

1. the period of 1789-1804, during which the first twelve amendments modified the original Constitution, making it more attuned to the realities and dominant concepts of the time;

2. the period of 1865-70, which brought three amendments resulting directly from the Civil War and from the freeing of the slaves; and

3. the final period, which has given the balance, in the main directed toward the democratization of American life.

The amending procedure, regulated by the Constitution itself, from the very beginning roused sharp criticisms. One of the most frequently advanced complaints has been that the mechanism is too slow and cumbersome. But the framers of the Constitution hardly wanted it otherwise. Hamilton argued that making changes easier would have deprived the Constitution of its intended stability.

A second prominent charge has been that the procedures for amendment are undemocratic. Demands have been voiced to permit initiatives by the people at large, or to submit proposed amendments to a popular vote. Strong objections have been raised against a procedure which makes it possible for thirty-eight states—regardless of their populations—to put through an amendment, with not much over a third of the citizens being theoretically able to exert a decisive voice against the will of nearly two-thirds. Similarly, thirteen states can block an amendment, even though their combined populations may represent not fully a twentieth of the total population of the states.

Nevertheless, the prevailing view is that an easing of the amending procedures would not be salutary to the mechanism of political change, and that the flaws in the existing procedure are compensated for in other ways: by legislation, by acts of the executive branch, by judical interpretation and by custom.[35]

V. *"Checks and balances."*

One of the most striking comments on the United States Constitution is that it contains a built-in self-correcting mechanism,

> a realization in political form of the legendary perpetual motion machine. According to this view, our division of authority between states and nation under a federal system and our separation of powers and functions among three branches of the national government provided a series of institutional rivalries and internal checks which prevented any part of the system from breaking down or running too fast.[36]

---

[35] Young, 39-42.

[36] Emmette S. Redford *et al., Politics and Government in the United States*, 94.

The framers of the Constitution constructed a system to govern a federated country, with sufficient powers to counter centrifugal forces, while at the same time avoiding the danger of its becoming monopolized by one of its own branches. This last effect was achieved through a system of checks and balances.[37]

Legislative responsibility was vested basically in the Congress of the United States, but a bill passed by the latter becomes law upon signature by the President of the United States. However, a bill vetoed by the President can still become law, provided Congress upholds it by passing it once again.

The Supreme Court of the United States has the power to deprive any law of its force by formally, as part of a judical decision, asserting its incompatibility with the Federal Constitution. But the composition of the Supreme Court is dependent on nominations by the President and on the consent of the United States Senate, which by voting in the negative can prevent the installation of a presidential nominee as a Supreme Court justice. The latter was illustrated by the Senate in 1969 and 1970, when it rejected President Nixon's nominations of Judges Haynsworth and Carswell to the Supreme Court.

By the same token, the Senate can reject the President's nominees for the highest federal posts and refuse to ratify treaties concluded by him.[38]

VI. *The general nature of the United States Constitution.*

The Constitution of 1789 was a work of compromise, and its essential purpose was to federate the United States and to assure them a republican form of government. Just after the announcement that a constitution had been drawn up, a lady passer-by in a Philadelphia street inquired of the senior member of the Convention, "Doctor Franklin, what kind of government have you given us?" The latter replied, "A republic, madam," then added, "if you can keep it." [39]

The framers of the Constitution drew up a brief and simple document; together with the amendments, it does not exceed six thousand words. It is lucid and logical; its language is uncomplicated, and it does not contain a superfluous or ambiguous word. Nonetheless, the Constitution is purposely "loose," permitting of free interpretation. This is illustrated in the clause pertaining to citizenship and in the clause enjoining the Federal Government "to provide for . . . the general welfare of the United States."

The United States Constitution is characterized more by an avoidance of (often unpredictable) detail than by misleading provisions. It is precisely in this that American political scientists see "the work of plain

---

[37] *Ibid.*, 352.

[38] Young, 347-8.

[39] Redford *et al.*, 94.

honest men." [40] It is their approach that assured the Constitution its durability: the Constitution was created during the Enlightenment and has persisted esesntially unaltered into this day of nuclear reactors and of voyages to earth's natural satellite.

VII. *The sources of its success.*

It has been observed that this same Constitution, when transplanted to other soils—particularly to the South American countries—does not secure their stability but as a rule is eventually supplanted by dictatorships.

Two factors contributed to the success of the Constitution of 1789: favourable physical and social conditions, and the particular qualities of a people largely shaped by Anglo-Saxon culture. Clearly, too, its success was favoured by the period of several decades separating the Revolution from the Civil War during which the United States were free of major upheavals, and which made possible the achievement of a large degree of national homogeneity as well as the development and accumulation of considerable resources.

The Americans showed a talent for developing their institutions which has been described as an

> "instinct for practical, workable government." While we began by viewing the Constitution as fundamental law, embodying a higher claim to obedience and moral respect than the day-to-day rules made by legislators and executives, we have also tended to approach the problem of adapting the Constitution to new conditions and crisis developments with a highly pragmatic perspective.[41]

It is proper now to examine certain institutions and procedures which play an enormous role in American political life today, even though they were quite unknown to the framers of the Constitution.

VIII. *The government*

The Americans' pragmatic approach to political problems is illustrated in the genesis and evolution of the government.

> The cabinet . . . grew up outside the Constitution and unknown to the law. President Washington looked first to the Senate to share some of his burdens and to offer him timely advice, and then to the Supreme Court. He was rebuffed by each of them in turn. And, finally, when the House of Representatives discouraged the appearance of his departmental heads in the midst of their deliberations, he was forced to turn in upon the resources of the executive branch. Washington came to rely entirely on his own subordinates, the heads of the four executive departments, for advice and assistance and thus the cabinet was born.[42]

[40] Young, 30.
[41] Redford *et al.*, 95.
[42] Young, 356.

IX. *"Executive agreements."*

The broadening of presidential powers came about through the granting to him of *carte blanche* authority to conclude international—"executive"—agreements without their having to receive the "advice and consent" of two-thirds of the Senate.

In the period from 1789 through 1941 the presidents of the United States made over 1,250 such international agreements—a third more than were concluded by the process spelled out by the founding fathers.

The power of "executive agreements," during the period of World War II, brought about Lend-Lease,[43] just as in 1933 it had the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement arranging American recognition of the U.S.S.R. and later would the Yalta Agreement of 1945.[44]

X. *"Executive orders."*

Another example of presidential powers which have arisen outside the original framework of the Constitution are the so-called "executive orders," which "are in plain fact laws made by the executive." [45] Whether they were anticipated by the founding fathers is unknown; the Constitution neither clearly authorizes nor forbids them. Their nature is illuminated by a remark of President Johnson's: "I don't care what the law says! I'm going to . . . if I have to issue a special executive order to do it." [46]

XI. *The bi-structurality of the United States Constitution.*

The previously mentioned aids to constitutional evolution (legislation, acts of the executive, judicial interpretation, and custom) have been jointly described as "the living word and deed of living men." [47] They have produced a structure which the original Constitution did not provide for—a progressive layering on the British pattern, with an increasingly evident duality of construction:

1. a relatively strict construction—the original Constitution of 1789, together with the amendments; and
2. a loose construction, evolved either unofficially or semi-officially.

---

[43] *Ibid.*, 602-4.

[44] Marian D. Irish and James W. Prothro, *The Politics of American Democracy*, 371.

[45] Young, 346.

[46] Sam Houston Johnson, "My Brother Lyndon," *Look*, 33, No. 25 (December 16, 1969), 54.

[47] Young, 43.

CHAPTER 2. POLAND TO THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

I. *The dawn of Polish history to the Constitution of 1791.*

The elements of Poland's genesis—and hence of her earliest political system—are lost to view in the proverbial mists of time. It is known that at the time of the references to Poland in the chronicles of Ibrahim Ibn Jacob in the tenth century, she was regarded as an organized country. Eastern merchants visited Poland without any apprehensiions.[1] Her historical beginning must be regarded as coeval with her first certainly known political decision: the adoption of western Christianity.

Poland's baptism promoted her to the status of a civilized nation, assuring her recognition as a state by the West and thus by all the world with which it was a political necessity for her to reckon, endowing her with an alphabet, and—by virtue of Europe's geopolitical situation—making Poland the easternmost bastion of western civilization.

If we are to accept Gumplowicz's dictum that "the state is the product of force and exists by force," [2] then consistency enjoins us from imagining that Poland's statehood sprang from some inspiration of sages or from the innate altruism or peculiarly peace-loving disposition of certain Slavic tribes. Probably a more accurate supposition would be that Poland arose through some one ruler subjugating a number of other tribes. Whether he acquired his position of preeminence by vanquishing first one neighbouring tribe and then another, or whether the earliest settled tribes—having switched from pillage to agriculture—were then overpowered by a nomadic tribe still dwelling in the hunting and gathering stage, and whether its victorious leader thus imposed his rule upon the settled populace [3]—in all likelihood will never be determined. The fact remains that Poland's earliest historically demonstrable statehood is associated with the existence by 963 A.D. of a common ruler and that she was already by then embarked on the path of political progress, thus apparently confirming the theory that "without autocratic rule, the evolution of society could not have commenced." [4]

The rise of a common prince initiates a period of centralized rule which encompassed the totality of the national life. But the scope of the prince's—or later the king's—authority underwent changes, and the

---

[1] Paweł Zaremba, *Historia Polski, I*, 20.

[2] W. G. Sumner and A. G. Keller, *The Science of Society*, I, 704; Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, vol. I: *Our Oriental Heritage*, 23-4.

[3] A. R. Cowan, *A Guide to World History*, 18.

[4] Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, III, 316.

society proceeded to differentiate until in the period more or less beginning with the death of Kazimierz the Great in 1370 there came into existence a number of social classes with disparate rights and obligations. This period lasted until the second half of the sixteenth century, when Poland became a republic of the nobility, governed by that one social class, which dominated the king as well as the other social classes. Poland also became an elective monarchy, and this system of electing the king was regarded as a vital safeguard of "golden liberty," much as each election was viewed as the act of entrusting supreme power to the individual regarded as fittest by the electors. (In actuality elections were not a sixteenth-century invention; election of ruling princes had been known in Poland during the regional divisions of the twelfth century, and during the thirteenth had occurred when the prince's throne was required to pass not to his son but to another member of the family—to a close relation or to a member of a collateral branch.[5])

One of the milestones in Poland's political development was the privilege conferred by King Władysław Jagiełło in 1425, known as *Neminem captivabimus,* which by two and a half centuries antedated the similar English *Habeas Corpus Act* of 1679. *Neminem captivabimus* was followed by the *Nieszawa Statutes* of 1454, granting legislative powers to the provincial *seyms* or parliaments. Half a century later, in 1505, *Nihil novi* was added, by which King Alexander obligated himself not to issue any new laws without the consent of the Seym and Senate, thereby giving the beginning of Polish parliamentarism.[6]

The year 1573 brought *Pacta conventa,* binding every newly elected king to affirm the rights and privileges conferred by his royal predecessors. The clause on "de non praestanda obedientia" gave the nation the right to resist the king if he should act contrary to the constitution and the law. It is not unreasonable to compare the position of the Polish elective king with that of a modern president; the difference resided merely in the fact that the king as a rule held power for life. Even the very name of the Polish "Republic," as Wagner observes, demonstrated the fact of power being wielded in common by the people. The full-fledged citizens (the "szlachta"—the gentry or nobility) participated in the government of the country, and this noble class approached ten per cent of the population.[7]

While in other European countries absolute monarchy was on the rise, in Poland over the centuries royal power was being progressively curtailed in favour of the sizeable noble class. It deserves emphasis that, in contrast to the feudalism prevalent then in other European countries —and certainly in contrast to the extreme autocracy of Russia—in

---

[5] Stanisław Kutrzeba, *Historia ustroju Polski: Korona,* 39.

[6] Wieńczysław Wagner, "Laurentius Grimaldus Goslicius and His Age: Modern Constitutional Law Ideas in the XVI Century," *The Polish Review,* III, No. 1-2 (Winter-Spring, 1958), 37-42.

[7] Ibid.

Poland the ordinary nobleman was the equal of the king. Poland had no native aristocratic titles, and when he was acclaimed king, the nobleman Sobieski clambered up onto the throne without the slightest hint of inferiority. This unparalleled position of the Polish nobility was noted by von Moltke:

> No Polish noble was the vassal of a superior lord—the meanest of them appeared at the diet in the full enjoyment of a power which belonged to all without a distinction. It is here that we find the fundamental difference between the Polish [political system] and the feudal states of the West and the despotism of the East.[8]

But Poland, exposed as she was to hurricanes of invasion from the south-east and north by the Mongols, Turks, Swedes and Russians, in the eighteenth century in response to the growing militarism of Austria, Prussia and Russia, failed to draw the proper conclusions concerning the changes going on about her. Economically and militarily weak, stunted in her intellectual development, demoralized, her class of fully enfranchised citizens committed to the single aim of enjoying themselves—she rolled with gathering momentum down the incline of progressive disintegration.

In this condition she entered the eighteenth century, from the middle of which the nation—or more precisely, the enlightened individuals within the nation—began to rouse themselves out of their lethargy. The year 1740 saw the founding of the Collegium Nobilum, and 1765 the creation of the Szkoła Rycerska (Military Academy); in that same year the National Theatre arose. Literature, architecture and the fine arts flourished anew; thought concerning sociopolitical progress appeared.

Poland underwent a cultural revival, but unfortunately too late to forestall, in 1772, the first of the three progressive partitions of her lands, by Austria, Prussia and Russia. Nevertheless, this blow to Poland's sovereignty was sufficiently powerful to aid the enlightened element in their efforts: as early as 1775 there was a reorganization of the central authorities, creating Ministries (styled "Government Commissions") of National Education, of the Treasury and of the Army; municipal reform was initiated. In 1788 the Great Seym was convoked, but by the end of 1790 it had failed to accomplish much; only toward the end of that year did its effectiveness increase, and by March 1791 it had passed an act on the reorganization of the regional seyms, in April an act on the reorganization of the cities, and in May an act on the national government which established the Constitution of May 3rd, 1791.

The idea of introducing a constitution had advanced only with difficulty until finally the Seym's fragmentation into parties and factions and their fruitless, endless debates over trivia had convinced the more enlightened that in the existing atmosphere the redesigning of the social structure did not stand much of a chance. But politically mature minds

---

[8] Helmut von Moltke, *Vermischte Schriften*, II, 121, cited by Wacław Lednicki, *Life and Culture of Poland*, 5.

were also aware of the discord that existed between two of the late partners in the criminal First Partition—Prussia and Russia—which offered a chance, not likely to be soon repeated, of introducing social reforms. The idea of drafting a constitution outside of the plenary Seym and then submitting it ready-made for a vote forced itself upon them.

As early as the end of 1790 and the beginning of 1791 there had begun secret caucuses bringing together the most mature members of the Seym: Stanisław Małachowski, Ignacy Potocki, Adam Czartoryski, Hugo Kołłątaj, Aleksander Linowski, and Lanckoroński. After Potocki's unavailing initial efforts, Father Piattoli, the private secretary to the King and a resident of the royal castle in Warsaw, was successfully recruited to win the King over to the idea of social reforms. There are conflicting versions as to who were in fact the authors of the draft constitution. The document was reputed to have been drawn up personally by King Stanisław August, though he and, following him, others as well indicated Kołłątaj and Potocki to be the authors.[9] Pragier ascribes it to the aforementioned Father Piattoli.[10]

The minister of Saxony to Warsaw, Essen, was let in on the secret, inasmuch as it was important to gain the agreement of the Elector of Saxony to the provision restoring the Saxon dynasty to the Polish throne. The plan was realized slowly and prudently, and in the meantime the maximum attainable was secured from the plenary Seym: a *Regional Seyms Act* (*Prawo o sejmikach*) and a *Free Royal Cities Act* (*Miasta nasze królewskie wolne*), both subsequently declared in the May 3d Constitution parts of the latter. The passage of these two acts must have been hailed as breakthrough events, as the foreign press devoted considerable attention to them, and the surviving notices are of a sensational nature and anticipate still more sensational events to come. "Political events are expected here," writes a contemporary correspondent, "which will excite universal astonishment." The article, written in Warsaw on the sixthteenth of April, 1791, and reprinted from the London press, continues:

> The 14th of April, the day before yesterday, will hereafter be a memorable day in the annals of Poland. In the session of that day a law was passed by the Diet relative to cities and their inhabitants, which restores them to their primitive rights, associates them with the Legislative Power, and will serve as a basis for still more extensive regulations, to reduce the different orders of citizens, to that relative equality which constitutes the very soul of a solid and just constitution. Upon this occasion the plan of M. Suchorzewski, member for Kalish, was adopted. The substance of the principles which have been decreed agreeable to this project, is, "to destroy the difference of orders and classes, to grant liberty to all citizens,

---

[9] Marceli Handelsman, ed., *Konstytucje polskie: 1791-1821*, 7.

[10] Adam Pragier, "Z historii wolnomularstwa polskiego," *Na Antenie*, VI (April 21, 1968), VII.

> without distinction; to restore Nobility to its true origin, that is, to the prerogative of merit and virtue . . ." Poland may therefore date her restoration from that day; for, with such principles as these, uniformly followed up, she will become powerful from her external strength, and will be truly independent.[11]

The import of the sociopolitical restructuring underway in Poland prompts the author of the article to compare it with the French Revolution, and there follows a quotation from a speech by Deputy Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz castigating the privileged nobility and pointing to the example of democracy in America. (Hardly could Niemcewicz have foreseen that seven years later he would be entertained cordially by Washington at his residence at Mount Vernon.[12])

> None of us [Niemcewicz is quoted as saying] knows who were the ancestors or what was the religion of Washington and Franklin; but all of us know what important services these Illustrious Characters [have] rendered to their country. Let not, therefore, the modesty of citizens prescribe limits to our generosity. Let us not ask, nor look into old papers to ascertain what they have a right to demand; but let us grant them, out of our own free accord, all that the welfare of our own country requires that they should possess.[13]

As the prospect of a possible detente between Russia and Prussia gained urgency, the tempo was stepped up and a somewhat broader group was admitted into the secret in order to assure the bill the greatest possible support within the Seym. The Easter recess appeared to complicate the undertaking: the recess lasted until May 2nd, and under the established order of business the first two weeks of the month were to have been devoted to fiscal matters. The fear of an improvement in Russian-Prussian relations capable of bringing the Constitutional project to nought dictated the earliest possible introduction of the act, even if it meant violence to the Seym's calendar, May 5th was set as the day.

About a week earlier the circles of bittest opposition to social reform, tipped off about the progress on the draft constitution, had called for a meeting of their own to be held on May 4th. It looked as though there would be strong organized opposition; accordingly, with the approval of the King, the reformers decided to steal a march on the conservative block by introducing their bill on May 3rd. But the circumstances which obliged haste necessitated that even this date be set forward by a day; already on the evening of May 2nd, at an informal gathering in the palace of the Radziwiłłs, the draft was read out, and that same night a

---

[11] "Revolution in Poland," *The Newport Mercury* (July 30, 1791), quoted in *The Polish Review*, III, No. 17 (May 3rd, 1943), 4-6.

[12] Eugene Kusielewicz, "Niemcewicz in America," *The Polish Review*, V, No. 1 (Winter 1960), 70.

[13] *The Newport Mercury*, quoted in *The Polish Review*, III, No. 17 (May 3rd, 1943), 4-6.

meeting took place at the residence of the Marshal of the Seym, Stanisław Małachowski; there an "assurance" was written out, by which the participants, eighty-three in number, obliged themselves to "the bravest possible support of the act, pledging . . . the undertaking with the watchword of love of Country and with their own individual honours." [14]

The next day's session of the Seym opened with a report on the state of foreign affairs, after which the King directed the secretary to read the draft constitution. The resultant discussion lasted until late in the evening, a veritable tourney of oratory. The Constitution had the support of the majority, but far from the still legally required unanimity. Nevertheless, ignoring the formal niceties, the King arose and swore an oath which rendered the Constitution law. In their turn, at the cathedral the oath was taken by the deputies who had come out in favour of the Constitution. However, it was not officially registered—a fact which its opponents the following day attempted to take advantage of by moving that it be invalidated on the grounds that it had not been passed by even a simple majority of the votes. The forceful arguments of the social reformers overcame their resistance: the *Government Act* was signed at the Seym's meeting on May 5th and registered the same day.

One must consider as an integral part of the May 3rd Constitution the *Mutual Declaration of the Two People* (i.e., of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the latter including Ruthenia) of October 22nd, 1791, which closes with an affirmation of the unity and indivisibilty of the Republic and with a resolution incorporating that Declaration "inter pacta conventa." [15]

The American press recorded these events of May 3rd, 1791. In a lengthy resumé it presents not only the facts, but also King Stanisław August's speech and a twelve-point summary of the new Constitution.

> He [the King] said in substance that notwithstanding all assurances on the contrary, there was an alarming rumour, confirmed by the advices daily received, that the three neighbouring powers (Russia, Prussia and Austria) would make up and terminate all their jealousies and divisions, at the expense of the pessessions of the republic: that the only method of assuring to Poland the integrity of its possessions, and of preserving it from the ruin which foreign politics were preparing for it was to establish a Constitution, which should secure its internal independence. That in this view there had been prepared a plan of a Constitution founded principally on those of England and the United States of America, but avoiding the faults and errors of both, and adapting it as much as possible to the local and particular circumstances of the country.[16]

---

[14] Handelsman, 12-3.

[15] *Ibid.*, 56-8.

[16] *Kentucky Gazette*, September 1, 1791, quoted in *The Polish Review*, III, No. 17 (May 3rd, 1943), 5.

The American journalist's comment appears quite apropos. The principle contained in the May 3rd Constitution, that "the King, doing nothing of and by himself, is answerable for nothing to the people," is a transplant of the principle in English constitutional law which holds that "the king can do no wrong." Both in Poland, under the Constitution of May 3, and in England the respective minister is responsible for the king's acts. Perhaps the very fact that Europe found in the Polish Constitution something already familiar to her, caused her to greet it with applause, and even Edmund Burke himself deigned to admire it.[17] In this connection, it is said that when he described it as "the noblest benefit received by any nation at any time" and averred that "Stanislas II [August] had earned a place among the greatest kings and statesmen in history," he was actually giving vent to his pleasure at the discomfiture experienced by Catherine the Great.[18]

But a more probing scrutiny of the first written Polish—and European—constitution shows it to bear a greater kinship to the United States Constitution than to the British, although there is no doubt that the latter had already been made use of in some measure as a model by the Americans.

II. *Kinships between the Polish Constitution of May 3rd (1791) and the United States Constitution*

Both the United States Constitution of 1789 and the Polish Constitution of 1791 bear out von Mohl's dictum that it is circumstances that compel changes in social systems.[19] In both cases the constitutions were forced by the necessity of remoulding a malformed system with strikingly inadequate governmental powers. Both constitutions—deliberated and drawn up in secret and only later submitted for approval—set out to strengthen the cohesiveness of the body politic: in America a federation (tight union) displaced the Confederation (loose union); in Poland, integration into a single henceforth indivisible state supplanted the erstwhile union of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and the springs of the Republic's impotence—the free election of the king and the *liberum veto*—were swept away.

(Actually, royal elections were not *per se* destructive of the state; they were not the cause but the consequence of sectional divisiveness. The elections *became* perilous when they led to vote-buying by the candidates for the Polish crown. And the *liberum veto*—conceived as a guarantee to the several lands that they would not in consequence of the union be drawn into situations contrary to their own interests, e.g. into

---

[17] William John Rose, *Poland Old and New*, 77.

[18] Will and Ariel Durant, Vol. X: *Rousseau and Revolution*, 487-8.

[19] Robert von Mohl, *Enzyklopaedie der Staatswissenschaften*, 157, cited by Franciszek Kasparek, *Prawo polityczne ogólne z uwzględnieniem Austryjackiego: razem ze wstępna nauką o państwie*, II, 144.

wars in the eastern territories—was rendered destructive by ignorance, private interests and venality. Apart from its sad existence in the United Nations, it is also found in the United States: the verdict of a trial jury is required by law to be unanimous. Certain religious organizations in the United States respect the veto, holding that if an individual withholds his support, then he must have good and weighty reasons for doing so; discussion continues until the matter has been clarified, and finally either unanimity is secured or the proposal goes down to defeat. This procedure is based on the principle that each honestly cast vote must carry weight, and that if the group cannot convince the individual, then this indicates a lack of strong arguments on the group's side.[20])

The distribution of powers in the state, under both the American and Polish constitutions, shows their authors to have accepted Montesquieu's concept of the division of powers, based on the idea that, "In order to prevent abuses by any of the branches of authority which could turn it into a tyrannical power, one [branch] ought to check another through a proper system of balances." [21]

Furthermore, Montesquieu saw utility in a bicameral legislature, in that, "The legislative body being composed of two parts, they check one another by the privilege of rejecting." [22]

This recommendation of the French thinker's too registered approval with the fathers of the respective constitutions: both established a bicameral legislature. Even the very order in which each constitution deals with the three branches of governmental power—the legislative, executive and judicial—lends confirmation for the common origin of the concept.

The legislative branches

These, under both constitutions, comprise bicameral bodies.

United States	*Poland*
Congress is composed of a House of Representatives and Senate.[23]	The Seym was composed of a Chamber of Deputies and a Chamber of Senators.[24]

---

[20] Leonard R. Sayles and George Strauss, *Human Behaviour in Organizations*, 296.

[21] Andrzej Mycielski, *Polskie prawo polityczne*, 40-1.

[22] Charles Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Book II, 60, cited by Redford *et al.*, 67-8.

[23] U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 1.

[24] Polish *Constitution* (1791), art. VI.

The lower chambers

1. Members are elected from among, and by, the enfranchised citizenry and represent all the people.

Voting rights *were* conditional—in accordance with the laws of the respective states—on property ownership. The House of Representatives chooses its own presiding officer (the Speaker).[25]	Voting rights were conditional on ownership of land; the landless nobility were barred from the regional seyms. The Chamber of Deputies selected its own presiding officer (the Marshal).[26]

2. The lower chambers enjoyed legislative initiative.

All bills for raising revenue shall be introduced only in this chamber. All other bills may be initiated from either chamber.[27]	All bills were to be considered first in the Chamber of Deputies.[28]

The upper chambers

1. The Senators were not popularly elected.

The Senators *were* selected by the legislatures of the respective states.[29]	The Senators were appointed by the King.[30]

2. An executive functionary presided over the Senate.

The Senate is presided over by the Vice President of the United States. He votes only in the event of a tie.[31]	The Senate was presided over by the King, who was entitled to his own vote as well as—if the need arose—to a tie-breaking vote.[32]

3. The Senators do not represent all the people.

The Senators — two from each state — represent their own respective states.[33]	The Senators represented the highest spheres in the country.[34]

---

25 U.S. *Const.*, art I, sec. 2.
26 Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII; Regional Seyms Act (1791).
27 U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 7.
28 Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VI.
29 U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 3.
30 Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.
31 U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 3.
32 Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VI.
33 U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 3.
34 Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VI.

4. The peculiar role of the Senate.

In contradistinction to the Chamber of Deputies—the "temple of legislation"—the Senators were assigned by the May 3d Constitution the role of seniors privileged to express reservations. In the case of civil, criminal and political laws, these reservations led to the suspension of the law in question as passed by the Chamber of Deputies "until the next regular Seym, at which, if it be passed a second time, the law suspended by the Senate must take effect." At a session of an extraordinary Seym, the Chamber of Senators could express disagreement, but this could not result in the suspension of a law.[35]

The Senators, men of well stabilized views and of great political experience—as was to be expected of them by virtue of the positions which they occupied—were to constitute a balancing element which with a sober cautionary word exerted a check upon over-hasty decisions. But they themselves were not to take part in decision-making.

It was a similar case with the United States Senate. A compelling picture is provided by Kennedy.

> [The] very concept of the Senate, in contrast to the House, was of a body which would not be subject to constituent pressures. Each state, regardless of size and population, was to have the same numbers of Senators, as though they were ambassadors from individual sovereign state governments to the Federal Government, not representatives of the voting public . . . the Senate was to be less of a legislative body . . . and more of an executive council, passing on appointments and treaties and generally advising the President, without public galleries or even a journal of its own proceedings.[36]

The powers of the legislative chambers

In the most important matters of state, both the United States Congress and the Polish Seym were furnished with enormous powers of decision. They levied taxes and fiscal duties; they had responsibility for debts and government loans; they decided about war and peace as well as about the making of treaties; finally, they were empowered to influence the personnel make-up of the executive branch [37] [38] and to impeach those who exercised the highest executive powers.[39] [40]

---

[35] *Ibid.* ...

[36] John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage*, 21-2.

[37] U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 8.

[38] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

[39] U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 3.

[40] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

"The House of Representatives . . . shall have the sole power of impeachment." [41] "The Senate shall have the sole power to try all impeachments." [42] "No person shall be convicted without the concurrence of two-thirds of the members present. Judgment in cases of impeachment shall not extend further than to removal from office, and disqualification to hold and enjoy any office of honour, trust, or profit under the United States; but the party convicted shall, nevertheless, be liable and subject to indictment, trial, judgment, and punishment, according to law." [43]

"Desiring that the Guardians of the National Laws [i.e. the royal cabinet: the King cannot be held to account!] shall be bound by a strict accountability to the nation for any misconduct whatsoever by them, we do determine that if ministers shall have been indicted of a breach of law by a deputation appointed to examine their deeds, then they are to be held responsible in their own persons and out of their own property. In any such indictments the gathered estates shall by a simple majority vote of the conjoint chambers convey the accused to parliamentary courts for just punishment commensurate with the crime or, their innocence having been established, for their release from further proceedings and punishment." [44]

The executive authorities

"The executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America." The President shall be chosen by electors; the electors shall be selected by each state in accordance with its own laws.[45] Thus the President is chosen through indirect elections.

"We repose the supreme authority in the execution of the laws in a King within his council." The Constitution puts an end to royal elections, but establishes "elections through families": in the event of the Saxon dynasty expiring, the nation (the Seym) will choose a new dynasty.[46] Thus the King is in a sense indirectly elected at the election of a new dynasty.

1. The President and the King enjoy decision-making powers.

The President has the power, with the consent of the Senate, to make treaties and to appoint government functionaries.[47]

"The King's decision, after all the opinions [of the Guardians of the Laws] have been heard, shall prevail, in order that there may be a single will in the execution of the law." (But the minister is accountable for the King's acts.) [48]

---

[41] U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 2.
[42] *Ibid.*, sec. 3.
[43] *Ibid.* ...
[44] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.
[45] U.S. *Const.*, art II, sec. 1.
[46] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.
[47] U.S. *Const.*, art. II, sec. 2.
[48] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

2. The American President and the Polish King both are assured a legislative initiative by their respective constitutions.[49] [50] Both also call their legislatures into session.

The President may convene the legislature on extraordinary occasions.[51]

The Seym is convened by the King, and only in the event of his refusal to do so or of his death or grave illness is this done by the Marshal of the Seym.[52]

3. The executives both in Poland and in the United States are constitutionally responsible for informing the legislature on the state of the union.

The President "shall from time to time give to the Congress information of the state of the Union . . ." [53]

The executive "shall conduct only interim negotiations with foreign states and shall take temporary and current measures in matters involving the safety and peace of the country, about which it shall apprise the next gathering of the Seym." [54]

4. The defence of the country is regarded of such import that both constitutions place the command of the armed forces in the hands of the head of state.

"The President shall be commander-in-chief of the army and navy of the United States, and of the militia of the several States when called into the actual service of the United States . . ." [55]

"To the King shall belong the supreme dispositions of the armed forces of the country in time of peace and the appointment of the commanders of the army." [56] The army "shall remain always in obedience to the executive." [57]

---

[49] U.S. *Const.*, art. II, sec. 3.

[50] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

[51] U.S. *Const.*, art. II, sec. 3.

[52] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

[53] U.S. *Const.*, art. II, sec. 3.

[54] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

[55] U.S. *Const.*, art. II, sec. 2.

[56] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

[57] *Ibid.*, art. XI.

5. The head of state makes appointments to the highest offices in the government.

The President appoints ambassadors, diplomatic representatives and consuls, judges of the Supreme Court, and other functionaries. The appointments go into force "by and with the advice of the Senate." When the Senate is in recess, the President fills vacancies, but such appointments expire at the end of the next session of the Senate.[58]

The King names the members of the government, senators, bishops, senior government officials, judges of the Supreme Court and diplomatic representatives. (Upon the demand of two thirds of the conjoint chambers, the King is required to relieve a minister from the Guardianship of the Laws or from his office and to name another.[59] Here the powers of the Seym exceed those of Congress; this was a parliamentary government.)

6. The respective constitutions emphasize the executive nature of the President's and the King's authority.

The President "shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed." [60] He will "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States." [61]

The King, together with the Guardianship of the Laws, shall "take care that the laws are executed." [62]

7. The executive has power to initiate international treaties, but they acquire force only after legislative ratification.

The President is empowered to make treaties "by and with the advice and consent of the Senate." [63]

The King together with the Guardianship of the Laws is empowered "to conduct provisional negotiations with foreign [representatives]" but these acquire force of law only following ratification by the Seym.[64]

8. Both constitutions furnish the executive with the power to act by force if need be.

---

[58] U.S. *Const.*, art. II, sec. 2.

[59] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

[60] U.S. *Const.*, art. II, sec. 3.

[61] *Ibid.*, sec. 1.

[62] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

[63] U.S. *Const.*, art. II, sec. 2.

[64] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

The President has at his disposal the state militias, which—though called out by Congress—have the assignment of enforcing the laws of the Union, as well as of suppressing insurrections. "Governing such part of them as may be employed in the service of the United States" is reserved to Congress, and they are trained uniformly "according to the discipline prescribed by Congress." [65]

The executive "shall act of itself, the laws permitting, where the laws require supervision of their execution or even the application of force."[66] "Thus the national army may be used . . . in aid of the law, if any person shall be disobedient to its execution." [67]

9. The constitutions assure the material independence of the head of state.

The President receives compensation whose amount may not be changed during his term of office.[68]

Neither the royal incomes nor "the prerogatives proper to the throne" may be changed.[69]

10. The chief executive may exercise certain prerogatives of the judicial branch.

The President has "power to grant reprieves and pardons for offences against the United States, except in cases of impeachment." [70]

"The King, who shall preserve every power of beneficence, shall have power to apply the *ius agratiandi* in behalf of persons sentenced to death, except *in criminibus status.*" [71]

The judicial authority

In stating the powers of this branch, both constitutions are remarkably brief. Only the purpose of this branch, the provision of justice, is actually spelled out.

Automatic system of checks and balances

Like the year-and-a-half older American Constitution, the Polish May 3d Constitution had a system of checks and balances designed to safeguard society against a disproportionate growth in the powers of any one branch of government.

---

[65] U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 8.

[66] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

[67] *Ibid.*, art. XI.

[68] U.S. *Const.*, art. II, sec. 1.

[69] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

[70] U.S. *Const.*, art. II, sec. 2.

[71] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VII.

The Seym's Chamber of Deputies is made the basic source of laws. After passage by the Chamber of Deputies, bills go to the Chamber of Senators. But failure of passage by the Senators does not necessarily kill them, as repassage by the Deputies will make them law anyway.[72]

The King chooses the Guardians of the Laws, but the Seym by a secret two-thirds vote may force the King to dismiss a minister and to appoint another.

The King conducts the government in the Guardanship of the Laws. But the Marshal of the Seym has a seat in the Guardianship, without the right to participate in discussions. The King makes decisions, but these require a minister's signature. The ministers, aware that a decision may meet with disapproval by the Seym and that they may then pay for their endorsements with their own dismissal—forced upon the King by the Seym—are in no great hurry to furnish their signatures.

In the event of a general refusal to sign, the King is to abandon his decision, and in the event of his refusal to do so the Marshal asks him to call the Seym. In the event of delay, he calls the Seym into session himself. The Marshal may exercise this prerogative whenever he deems it proper, but the Constitution also enumerates circumstances when such a calling of the Seym is mandatory.[73]

Thus the Seym probably had the leading role: it ordained the law, decided about government expenditures, made international treaties, and maintained a check upon the executive. Much like Congress in the light of the United States Constitution, the Seym appeared (even in spite of the system of checks and balances) the strongest branch of government, consigning the chief executive to a chronic state of impotence.

Additional kinships

1. The intellectual currents of the Enlightenment run through both constitutions. Both reflect the heritage of Locke, with his concept of limited government, and the legacy of Rousseau, who demanded power to the people.

"We, the people of the United States . . ." goes the preamble to the United States Constitution, "do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." [74]

"All authority in human society," declares the Government Act of 1791, "takes its beginning in the will of the people." [75] The source of authority is also indicated in the preamble to the Constitution: "by the will of the people the King of Poland . . . Together with the confederated estates . . . representing the Polish people." [76]

---

[72] *Ibid.*, art. VI.
[73] *Ibid.*, art. VII.
[74] U.S. *Const.*, preamble.
[75] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. V.
[76] *Ibid.*, preamble.

2. The stated aims of the two constitutions are virtually indentical.

"to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity . . ." [77]

To perfect the national constitution "for the general welfare," to "preserve the country and its borders;" to secure "external independence and internal liberty" to themselves and their posterity.[78]

3. Both constitutions reflect a concern for social equality. Nevertheless, one must bear in mind the early period and certain attitudes prevalent among the authors of the constitutions.

"No title of nobility shall be granted by the United States..."[79] This provision was dictated by the desire of the class framing the new system to secure for itself a position equivalent to that of the old titled magnates, and by a felt need to get back at the remaining ex-loyalists. There is no sense yet of the propriety of abolishing slavery: emancipation of the Negroes would have clashed with the interests of the wealthy and administered a jolt to an economy based on slave labour.

"We recognize the dignity of the noble estate in Poland as equal to any degree of nobility wherever it may be used." [80] This provision was a veiled slap at the magnates who sported aristocratic titles by courtesy of foreign courts. The Constitution also opens up the possibility of ennoblement and of attainment of an officer's commission to the burgher class, and thus of membership in the class of fully enfranchised citizenry.[81] But there is not a word about freeing the peasants; that would have antagonized the still preponderantly backward nobility.

4. An indisputable goal of the two constitutions was to create a sense of the stability of the enfranchised citizen's rights, as stemming from his membership in society.

"No bill of attainder . . . shall be passed." [82]

"we shall permit no alteration or exception in the law directed against any person's property . . . we affirm . . . the personal safety of, and the security of any property rightfully belonging to, a person, this being the true bond of society . . ." [83]

---

[77] U.S. *Const.*, preamble.

[78] Pol. *Const.* (1791), preamble.

[79] U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 9.

[80] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. II.

[81] *Free Royal Cities Act* (1791), art. II., pars. 4 and 8.

[82] U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 9.

[83] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. II.

5. Both the American and Polish constitutions welcome able-bodied persons who are willing to work.

"The migration or importation of such persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight . . ." [84]

"Desiring as effectively as possible to encourage the multiplication of the people, we announce complete freedom to all persons either newly arriving or who, having removed themselves from the country, now wish to return to their native land, insofar as each person newly arrived from any part to the Republic or returning thereunto, as soon as he shall set foot upon Polish soil is completely free to apply his industry as and where he shall please, is free to engage in agreements for settlement, labour or rents as he shall agree and until termination of the agreement, is at liberty to settle in city or in village, and is free to reside in Poland or to return thereunto, having previously acquitted such obligations as he may have freely . . . entered into." [85]

The brevity of the American clause and the lengthiness of the Polish call for comment. The Polish Constitution addressed itself to free men, in part to fugitives from Poland; it detailed their rights from the moment when they would have settled upon or returned to Polish soil. The American Constitution guaranteed to the various states the unrestricted right to import slaves until the year 1808; the extension of the legal importation of slaves was one of the prices of compromise.

How powerful must have been the currents for and against the "peculiar institution" in the United States is eloquently attested by the fact that as early as 1783 Chief Justice Cushing of the Massachusetts Supreme Court declared slavery illegal in that state, but that his ruling was not published until 1874—that is, after slavery had legally ceased to exist in all of the United States on July 1, 1865.[86] (Coincidentally, at just about the same time serfdom disappeared from Poland.)

The clause extending the legality of importing Negro slaves did not cloak some kind of pseudo-scientific racism of a Nazi hue. The

---

[84] U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 9.

[85] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. IV.

[86] Williams *et al.*, 148; Redford *et al.*, 605.

Negroes were in fact often admitted to a considerable degree of intimacy with the planters' families, as is evidenced by today's substantially bleached-out blacks. Toynbee indicates that there has never been any fundamental black-white antipathy:

> The planters had illegitimate children by Negroes. George Washington caught a cold while visiting Negro quarters on his estate for this purpose. It is never put into the official biographies, but this was the cause of his death. After all, it was the normal thing for a gentleman to do.[87]

One of the great landowners was Jefferson, who took great personal satisfaction from his authorship of the Declaration of Independence declaring the "self-evident" equality of all men. Thanks to Jefferson, B. Banneker, a black mathematician and surveyor, was named to a three-man commission that worked out plans for the expansion of Washington, D.C.[88] Jefferson was a slave-owner. The paradox is explained by one of his biographers, who states that Jefferson

> was well aware of the contradiction, and over a period of 60 years sought some way to bring about a gradual and voluntary emancipation. Meantime, to accomplish the other reforms he had at heart, he had to accept the institution of slavery, and make it as beneficent as possible for his own slaves. His position may be roughly compared to that of persons who today see grave moral evils of the existing capitalnstic order, but who must live in, and by, that order, because there is no escape from it—unless they go to Russia, where they will find other and perhaps greater evils.[89]

Undoubtedly the same necessity of compromise forced progressive men such as Kołłątaj to give up the thought of making all the classes equal under the May 3d Constitution. In both cases the framers of the constitution contented themselves with what appeared to be the attainable maximum.

6. It was not the intent of the constitutions' framers to destroy the achievements of earlier times; both preserve the old laws guaranteeing the personal security of citizens.

"The privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus* shall not be suspended, unless when in cases of rebellion or invasion the public safety may require it." [90]

Neminen captivabimus was preserved and extended to cover the burgher class.[91] [92] (But its protection was conditional on property ownership in the city.)

---

[87] Arnold Toynbee, "Peace, Power, Race in America," *Look*, 33, No. 6 (March 18, 1969), 26.

[88] William Loren Katz. "Let's Set Black History Straight," *Reader's Digest* (July 1969), 60.

[89] Henry Wilder Foote, *The Religion of Thomas Jefferson*, 16.

[90] U.S. *Const.*, art. I, sec. 9.

7. A humanitarian concern is evinced in clauses referring to bail.

Article VIII of the Bill of Rights states that "Excessive bail shall not be required . . ." [93]

The Cities Act of April 18, 1791 —incorporated as an integral part of the Constitution—contains a clause excluding from the law of *Neminem captivabimus*, among others, "persons not posting sufficient bail with the court of law." [94] The use of the adjective "sufficient" instead of—say—"established" or "required" suggests that the intent was a reasonable bail.

8. The guarantee of free religious belief was a major advance of both constitutions, though not to an equal degree.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ." [95]

"All persons, of whatever persuasion, are entitled to peace in their faith and to the protection of the government, and therefore we ordain freedom for all rites and religions in the Polish Lands, in accordance with the laws of the lands." [96] The name of the article in question, "The prevailing religion," and the Cities Act incorporated into the Constitution, denying non-Christians citizenship in the cities,[97] shed doubt on the substantiality of the guarantee of religious freedom. These provisions reflected the traditionally privileged position of the Roman Catholic Church. Not without significance, too, was the economic competition from non-Christian — i.e., Jewish — merchants.

---

[91] *Free Royal Cities Act* (1791), art. II, par. 1.

[92] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. II.

[93] U.S. *Const.*, amend. VIII.

[94] *Free Royal Cities Act* (1791), art. II, par. 1.

[95] U.S. *Const.*, amend. I.

[96] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. I.

[97] *Free Royal Cities Act* (1791), art. I, par. 10.

9. Finally, both constitutions took cognizance of the mutability of things and hence of the possible need for changes.

In the United States, constitutional amendments may be introduced at any time, in accordance with certain precisely spelled out requirements.[98]	The May 3d (1791) Constitution provided for changes every twenty-five years.[99]

CHAPTER 3. POLAND: 1791-94

I. *From the May 3rd Constitution to the Kościuszko Constitution*

The blow of the First Partition had made it possible for more modern political views to come to the fore and to exert an influence on Poland's social development. The possibility of detente between two of the partitioning powers—Russia and Prussia—and of their renewed intrusions into Poland's internal affairs had made dispatch of the essence. In part that is why the May 3d Constitution had not gone very far in the way of reforms; it had not gone into the details of the country's government but had created only the basic skeleton of the system, which was to have been fleshed out later through appropriate legislation. This, however, never came about; instead, there followed regressive laws nullifying the May 3rd Constitution and substituting a different law of the land.

Professor Kutrzeba notes the acts of the Targowica Confederation of 1792, repudiating the May 3rd Constitution, and of the Grodno Seym of 1793, at a single fell blow sanctioning a Second Partition and introducing the *Cardinal Laws.*[1] Writing before Kutrzeba, Franciszek Kasparek breaks off the history of Poland's constitutional evolution at the May 3rd Constitution, indicating unveiledly that forces inimical to Poland had brought that Constitution to nought: "The external causes that prevented the implementation of these redemptive laws and brought about the fall of Poland's political existence are generally known." [2]

Kutrzeba states that "these circles connected with the Confederacy [which regarded the Constitution as going too far in the way of reforms] resorted to foreign assistance." [3]

It is known that "At the Seym in Grodno on the sixth of September, 1973, a committee was delegated to work out a different form of

---

[98] U.S. *Const.*, art. V.

[99] Pol. *Const.* (1791), art. VI.

[1] Kutrzeba, 396-7.

[2] Kasparek, *Prawo polityczne ogólne*, II, 289.

[3] Kutrzeba, 396.

government and was presented the ideas approved by Sievers [the Russian ambassador] or developed at his initiative." [4] The statute established under the dictation of, or in collaboration with, the ambassador of the partitioning power is striking in that, while it does away with the May 3rd Constitution, it was itself modelled in a certain degree upon it. Kutrzeba points out that "often in the arrangement of the various parts of the system use was in fact made of it, and certain dispositions established under it or in elaboration of it were even copied almost verbatim from it." [5]

The framers or instigators of the Cardinal Laws proceeded to neutralize all that was not to their own liking. In retaining certain of the mechanisms introduced by the May 3rd Constitution, they did so partly perhaps because they found them practical, and partly to assuage those who had greeted the May 3rd Constitution with enthusiasm. The Cardinal Laws are marked by sheer cynicism. There can be no other description when, for example, they in advance deny the force of law to the cessions of Polish territory subsequently carried out by the government and legislature. The purpose of the Grodno Seym was quite obviously to ratify the treaties with Prussia and Russia by which Poland ceded sizeable territories to them. Its second goal was to formally rescind the May 3rd Constitution and to supplant it with something more in line with the purposes of the partitioning powers and of their adherents.

In carrying out these missions, the Grodno Seym did not advance Polish political thought but set it back. The Cardinal Laws, though in places aping the Constitution of 1791, are not derivative of it. This prompts us to exclude them from consideration as a *Polish* constitution and rather to undertake a closer inspection of the *National Uprising Act* of 1794 and of the latter's derivatives.

The Uprising was preceded by Kościuszko's mission to Paris in January of 1793. Kościuszko attempted to secure the assistance of revolutionary France for Poland's struggle for independence; he pledged—in the event of France's engagement—an uprising by the peasants and townspeople. He made assurances of the King's readiness to abdicate in favour of a republic, as well as of the Polish army's participation in France's war with Prussia. The French were prepared to go along with the proposal, but the eruption of war with England in July, 1793, and the invasion of France put an end to plans for joint Polish-French action.

Kościuszko's mission hung fire while the leaders of the independence movement organized a new Polish army which was placed under Kościuszko's command.[6] The National Uprising Act made Kościuszko "the one supreme leader and governor of the entire uprising." The Act also authorized the Leader to appoint a body, the Supreme Council, to carry out the government of the country, as well as provincial commissions, a

---

[4] Handelsman, 12.

[5] Kutrzeba, 397.

[6] Will and Ariel Durant, Vol. X: *Rousseau and Revolution*, 491.

supreme criminal court and provincial criminal courts. The Supreme Council was to function through departments administered by appointees of the One Supreme Leader.

The Uprising Act equipped the Leader with dictatorial powers: he could make changes—of organization as well as of personnel—in the Supreme Council; military matters were reserved to him exclusively, and the Supreme Council was charged with immediately executing all his orders.

The Decree of May 10, 1794, embraced the country progressively within its jurisdiction as the Uprising grew, and the expansion of jurisdiction was marked by the setting into motion of provincial commissions of public order. A new scheme of territorial organization developed, harking back to the memorable laws of the Four-Year (or Great) Seym.

Kościuszko—a liberal who had fought for the independence of the United States, where he had made himself known as a champion of men's equality unqualified by the colour of their skins—no doubt sincerely desired to make all citizens equal before the law, but taking a realistic appraisal of the situation he only went so far as to assure the peasants, by the Połaniec Manifesto of May 7th, 1794, certain rights which had not been granted them by the Constitution of 1791:

1. the protection of the national government;
2. freedom to change their place of residence, conditional on previous acquittal of debts and taxes and on informing the provincial commission of public order of the new place of residence;
3. a general, proportional reduction in the number of days worked on the property of the landlord (an interim measure, but to be made permanent by the legislative authority after the Uprising);
4. the irremovability of the peasant from the land, provided that he carried out his obligations; and
5. freeing of the peasant from his normal duties during his military service, the estate of his landlord in the meantime being guaranteed care.

The commissions of public order established supervisors in the proportion of one for every 1,200 households; these settled disputes. Appeal could be made to the parent commission of public order.

The provisions of the Manifesto were expanded by the Supreme Council's act of July, 1794. Henceforth the landowners, municipal offices and hamlets would submit their nominations for supervisors, and the commissions would make their selections by secret ballot. The required qualifications pointed to the growing democratic spirit: a supervisor could be "of any estate or condition whatever, provided only that he be virtuous, judicious, not under suspicion of avarice or of harmful associations nor under a base obligation to any, be able to read, write and reckon, and enjoy a good reputation in his region." [7]

The duties of the supervisors included not only overseeing the peasants in their rights and obligations, but also resolving disputes be-

[7] Act of July, 1794.

tween the peasants and their masters and maintaining public safety, keeping up the roads and bridges, and conducting a register of population.

A curiosity was the establishment of "supervisory teachers." Anybody could become one, regardless of class, religious persuasion or condition, provided he could demonstrate a knowledge of the laws and displayed an unblemished patriotism. The supervisory teacher was to assist the supervisors, chiefly by acquainting the people with the intent and substance of the measures issued by the authorities and by fostering in them a sense of the duties stemming from acts of private law and from the relationship of a citizen to the state.

The series comprising the Uprising Act (March 24th, 1794), the Połaniec Manifesto (May 7th), Kościuszko's Decree (May 10th) and the July Act of the Supreme Council are expressions of Polish political thought desperately at work: the same thought that three years earlier had made itself manifest in the May 3d Constitution. In the altered circumstances a step forward was taken. Where the purpose of the May Constitution had—according to Kołłątaj—been a "mild revolution," [8] the acts issued during the 1794 Uprising engineered a bloodless social restructuring. The monarch—the wielder of power—disappeared; the necessity of equalizing the classes found a clearer expression: anyone could become a supervisor, and the only qualifications were those of mind and character. Serfdom was not abolished, but it was curbed, and preparatory steps for its abolition were taken through the inculcation of a social awareness in the peasants. The latter were shown a way toward the attainment of complete freedom—through active struggle for the freedom of their nation.

The series of acts introduced during the 1794 Uprising, even as the Polish state was being liquidated, fulfill the criteria for a constitution in that they set down the fundamental principles of the social system, the manner of selecting the supreme agents of power and the limits of their competence, and the rights and duties of the citizens; more than that, they aimed at the education and enlightenment—indeed ultimately at the enfrancisement—of the largest social classes.

These acts of political reform are passed over in silence by Kasparek in 1877 and by Handelman in 1922. They are considered by Kutrzeba in 1905 and emphasized by Kukiel in 1961. Their consideration by Professors Kutrzeba and Kukiel is most definitely justified, since the social acts of the Kościuszko Uprising, taken together, form *sui generis* the first republican constitution of Poland.

It is true that it was conceived primarily as an instrument for the duration of the Uprising and that it bore no clear relationship to the 1791 Constitution; but it is likewise true that it advanced the latter's Article IV by providing government protection to the peasant and his land. This is hardly surprising when one considers that the authors of the measures

---

[8] Kukiel, *Dzieje*, 24.

introduced during the Uprising included a number of people whom the events of 1791 had forced to accept modest achievements. If the Uprising had proved successful, the new social norms would have become irreversible steps leading toward the healing of the Republic—which after all was the paramount aim of the Uprising, "the men whom Kościuszko led," as one historian writes, having been "pledged to the modernization of their country." [9]

Much as the May Constitution probably hastened the Second Partition in 1793, the Kościuszko Constitution—upon the collapse of the Uprising—speeded the final liquidation of Polish statehood in the Third Partition of 1795. But both constitutions, despite their tragic direct consequences, left the Poles a legacy of immense value: they documented the Polish people's resolute efforts to rebuild their government and their strength, the real guarantor of independence. Both were a source of moral support to the nation, as they produced an awareness that their country had succumbed not because it had begun to go rotten inside but because it had begun to regain its strength—a process which its militaristic neighbours had had no intention of permitting. It is to these two constitutions that one must ascribe the fact that generations "born in bondage [and] fettered in their very swaddlings" time and again rose up in armed rebellion. It was the heirs not of a Poland foundering in decay, discord and venality, but of the Poland preserved in the visions of 1791 and 1794, who with their superhuman efforts and sacrifice in 1918 restored Poland to the map of Europe.

II. *Kinships between the Kościuszko Constitution and the United States Constitution*

The framers of the Kościuszko Constitution can hardly be charged with imitating the American pattern. There are no analogies or even close resemblances either in form or in content. And yet there is something that connects them and makes them kindred: they are both the handiwork of enlightened men of the same period, informed by a genuine longing for individual as well as national freedom.

The strongest influence on the social legislation of 1794 was exerted by Kościuszko himself. The scion of eastern Polish-Lithuanian nobility, while away studying in Paris, had "diligently read Rousseau and the

today. "Country" meant a man's patrimony, his farmstead or America, where he spent seven years fighting for American independence.

> Kościuszko was much closer in spirit [than his compatriot Pułaski] to the American farmers, with whose struggle against the tyranny of the British he deeply identified. Thus, in Kościuszko's scanty writings the American motif, the American mode of guerilla war-

---

[9] R. F. Leslie, *The Polish Question: Poland's Place in Modern History*, 15.

[10] Jan Górski, "Kościuszko Tradition," *Polish Perspectives*, XI, No. 2, 20.

fare waged by free farmers and puritan townsmen frequenly recurs; he also often expresses his attachment to the democratic traditions of America. . . . this man, who imbibed the radical ideology of America and France and was to a large extent formed by it, did not dogmatically apply the ideas he was wedded to. He tried to adapt them to the existing structure, to the existing pattern of social and political forces. . . . Through Kościuszko and what he stood for, words . . . acquired a new meaning. In the 18th century the words "my country" and "nation" had a different meaning than today. "Country" meant a man's patrimony, his farmstead or landed estate and "nation" was identified with the gentry. It was through the Insurrection that a transformation of ideas took place, ideas which to us seem simple and obvious in the sense they then acquired in the West thanks to America's War of Independence and the French Revolution. Such re-definition would not have occurred in Poland but for the events of 1794 . . .[11]

Kościuszko adopted more from the American than from the French revolution. As the Uprising was embracing Warsaw, he took a position against military courts and resisting the pressures of the Polish Jacobins, and thus precipitated a major disagreement with Kołłątaj.[12] His position is very clearly set forth in a brochure printed in 1800, entitled *Can the Poles Break Free?* It did not issue from Kościuszko's own pen, but no doubt it did spring from his ideas—from "the idea of an uprising by the entire nation under its own power, with the entire mass of the people being drawn into the struggle by their emancipation and enfranchisement through a revolution similar to the French Revolution—but without the latter's fratricidal terror." [13] This approach laid him open to criticism by those who felt that "Kościuszko had raised his sword on behalf of insurrection, when he should have been fighting for social revolution as Kołłątaj urged." [14]

In summary, the set of social laws which were issued during the 1794 Uprising—considered here jointly as the Kościuszko Constitution —were of his own fashioning, and since he was, if not moulded, then at least confirmed in his views by his observations and experiences while in America, his Constitution is likewise to an indeterminate extent a product of America. The Kościuszko Constitution sprang from ideas common to both the Polish and American peoples and is essentially more affined the the American Constitution of 1789 than to the Polish Constitution of May 3rd, 1791—in its republican spirit, in its urgent sense of progress toward the freedom of man.

---

[11] *Ibid.*, 20-2.

[12] Kukiel, *Dzieje*, 27.

[13] Marian Kukiel, "Wojna o Kościuszkę," *Na Antenie*, VI, No. 61 (April 14-21, 1958), p.V.

[14] Jerzy Szacki, "Mochnacki: Rewolucja i tradycja," *Myśli i ludzie; Filozofia polska*, Vol. II, *Filozofia nowożytna i współczesna*, Bronisław Baczko, ed., 207-8.

The absence of superficial kinships between the two is a consequence of those "particular circumstances of the country" to which King Stanisław August had alluded when he introduced the May 3d Constitution. But the Kościuszko Constitution is related to the American Constitution in a profounder degree than to all the other Polish constitutions, since both were *par excellence* political and not legislative acts. Much like the American Constitution, the Kościuszko Constitution was "grounded on popular approval," which, as the American political scientist continues, "under the theory of popular sovereignty, was the only theoretically sound basis for a supreme political act." [15]

CHAPTER 4. POLAND: 1794-1831

I. *From the Kościuszko Constitution to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Poland at the time of the November (1830-31) Uprising*

France—although her Convention of 1792 had pledged her assistance to any country fighting for its freedom—was none too keen on rising to the defence of the Polish people. In the name of political realism the successive Jacobin leaders winked at the tragedy of the expiring Republic. For Napoleon, Poland was no more than another little square on the political chessboard of Europe; his position in regard to the Polish question shifted as, and to the extent that, involvement in it coincided with his own grand schemes. Some of his pronouncements must have electrified Poles with a considerable charge of hope:

"Russia annihilated Poland. France's indifference in this great matter was and always will be reprehensible." [1]

"It is in the interests of Europe, it is in the interest of France that Poland should exist." [2]

Thus he spoke when it suited his purposes to do so. Similarly, when it agreed with his own aims, he magnanimously accepted the Poles' offer to serve him with their arms.

Typical of Napoleon was the manner in which he brought to life a surrogate Polish state—the Grandy Duchy of Warsaw—and then gave it a constitution. He neither cared about nor felt bound by the nature of the late Polish state. He was not struck by the fact that the territory of the new pseudo-state did not quite include even the area taken from Poland by Prussia alone in the three partitions between 1772 and 1795.

---

[15] Redford *et al.*, 91.

[1] Kukiel, *Dzieje*, 33.

[2] J. Christopher Herold, *The Mind of Napoleon: a Selection from His Written and Spoken Words Edited and Translated by J. Christopher Herold*, 184.

Nor did he regard it meet to simply restore to the Poles a perhaps modernized May 3rd Constitution, or to call even a symbolic constituent assembly.

As he was wont to do with all his creatures, he threw together a constitution for the Polish ersatz state. He made no effort to keep up appearances; he could have presented his constitution to the Poles in Warsaw, their capital since 1596, but he did not consider that a material question. On his way from Tilsit to Paris he bypassed Warsaw and stopped by at Dresden, capital of the King of Saxony, whom he made head of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. It was as though he had decided to recognize Dresden as the new and fitting capital of the Poles.

There he was overtaken by the members of the Governing Commission, and there in their presence on July 19th, 1807, he dictated the constitution (or at least its basic principles). His minister Maret and the members of the Governing Commission participated in the actual drawing up of the constitution. Napoleon signed it on July 22nd and immediately set out again for Paris; and that was that. On July 23rd, "to the [Governing] Commission's remarks and presentations respecting certain of [the constitution's] features, His Excellency Minister Maret answered that this constitution, composed and signed by H[is] M[ost] G[racious] M[ajesty] the Emperor, may not be altered in any respect." [3]

Accordingly, the aforesaid constitution, prepared in conformity with the draft bearing Napoleon's signature, was signed and delivered to the newly created Grand Duke of Warsaw, the Saxon King Frederick Augustus I. Consistently enough, the original was deposited not in the archives of Warsaw but in those of Dresden.

The Constitution of July 22nd, 1807, was not a *Polish* constiution. It was ordained by an agency completely alien to Polish culture—by an Emperor of the French oblivious to the sensibilities and desires of the Polish.

The Constitution of July 22nd, 1807, bears no relation to the May 3rd Constitution except in its restoration—in reduced rank—of a ruler from the Saxon dynasty to a hereditary Polish throne. No wonder that it not only did not attempt to revive the social reforms of the Kościuszko Uprising, but did not even want to recall them to mind. They would have been too democratic for ex-Republican Napoleon Bonaparte.

Napoleon's collapse buried the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and gave birth—by fiat of the Congress of Vienna on May 3rd, 1815—to the next Polish pseudo-state, this time christened the Kingdom of Poland. The Kingdom of Poland comprised the mutilated territory of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and was attached by personal union to Russia. The event did not pass without the institution of a new basic law. Although the writing of the new constitution had occurred earlier—most probably already in Vienna in May of 1815—the final version bestowed upon

---

[3] Handelsman, 13.

pseudo-Poland bears the signature of the "czar and king" Alexander dated November 27th of the same year.

This constitution too—the second in a row granted to Poland by an external power, this time one of her partitioners—is no *Polish* constitution. The fact of its foreignness is unaltered by the intention expressed in the Principles of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Poland "that the new constitution to be bestowed upon the Kingdom of Poland may become more completely a national constitution and approach the Statute of May 3rd, 1791." The obvious intention of the czar-king's constitutional decree was to ensure the inseparability of the Polish ersatz state from Russia and to impose on it political patterns congenial to the czar and his ministers. During the elaboration of the constitution

> Alexander had made . . . not to nearly every article extensive autograph pencilled remarks of a restrictive character, very premeditated and calculated to leave him loopholes for autocratic licence in the constitutional structure, and then had heard an oral report regarding certain important articles (e.g., concerning budgetary matters) presented to him by Novosiltsev, a Russian senator and member of the provisional government, formerly a supposed friend of Czartoryski and of Poland and henceforth revealing himself as the most implacable and harmful foe of the Kingdom of Poland and of the Poles . . .[4]

The November (1830-31) Uprising shook the spurious foundations of the symbiosis that had been imposed upon the Poles, and an early problem of the Uprising became the constitution. With the passing of time the prevailing opinion among the leaders underwent a decided shift from that verbalized by Roman Sołtyk—"our last law is the Constitution of the Third of May; I regard all the changes effected since as illegal"—to the much more practical view that "the constitution is binding insofar as it is not changed by enactments either already passed or to be passed by the chambers of the Seym, which latter is the proper and now the sole legislative authority of the Polish Nation." [5] And so after the initial period of the Uprising, when power was constituted not so much in reference to legal foundations as to actual exigencies, the 1815 constitution was retained in effect, modified by—at times, quite fundamental—amendments.

A key measure is the *Government Act* of January 29, 1831, passed after political relations with the Russian Czar had been severed, invalidating portions of the 1815 constitution respecting the union of the Kingdom of Poland with Russia. The rest of the constitution was retained in force, although actual practice compelled the Seym to apply it in loose fashion. The Act of January 29th cleared up the situation resulting from the disappearance of the Russian ruler from the Polish throne: "The

---

[4] Szymon Askenazy, *Rosja — Polska*, 66-7.

[5] Michał Rostworowski, *Diariusz sejmu z 1830-31 r.*, 125.

execution of royal power under the Constitution is entrusted to the National Government of the Kingdom of Poland, insofar as the present law shall provide; the remainder of such power remains with the two chambers." [6] Under the remodelled Constitution—and this is spelled out still more explicitly in the *Oath Act* of February 8th, 1831—Poland was a constitutional monarchy; the oath of office was rendered to the Seym.[7] The powers of the Government included part of the royal powers and were set out definitively in the *Government Act* of August 17th, 1831. From that day forth the Government comprised the President, elected by the joint Chambers, within his Council of Ministers. The President appointed the ministers, who had an advisory voice, and made decisions at sessions of the Council. His decision was confirmed by the signature of one of the ministers.[8]

In this constitution there is no more anathemizing of the old sources of the Republic's impotence; the Constitution simply introduces the principle of deciding acts by a majority vote of the Chambers in place of the *liberum veto,* and outlines the succession to the throne in "a constitutional representative monarchy . . . with the right of succession secured to the family elected . . ." [9]

The need to symbolize the union of the old Republic's lands was not overlooked. The *National Colours Act* of February 7th, 1831, "in consideration of the need to ordain a uniform symbol under which Poles are to rally," had already established the national colours "of the coat of arms of the Kingdom of Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania." [10] The *Powers of the Supreme Commander Act* of January 24th, 1831, had also shown itself mindful of the union of the lands when it had established, as part of the supreme commander's insignia, "on the epaulets two hetman's batons crossed." [11] The symbolism of the two batons is obvious; they cannot designate the joint powers of the grand hetman and of the field hetman, since the field hetman was subordinate to the grand hetman, and so it would have made no sense to cross two emblems representing different levels of authority. But the Crown grand hetman and the Lithuanian hetman *were* on an equal footing; the powers of *these,* the supreme commander could reasonably unite. (It is a curious thing that the symbol of the double batons has been retained on the marshal's uniform of contemporary Poland.) And again somewhat later, "desiring that all the parts of the late Kingdom of Poland formerly subjugated to the force of Russian autocrats . . . may have a part in the present coun-

---

[6] Government Act of January 29, 1831, art. 4.

[7] Oath Act of February 8, 1831, art. 2.

[8] Government Act of August 17, 1831, art. 1-2.

[9] Oath Act of February 8, 1831, art. 1.

[10] National Colours Act of February 7, 1831, art. 1.

[11] Powers of the Supreme Commander Act of January 24, 1831, art. 1.

cils concerning the weal of their common country," [12] the *Representation for Lithuania and Volhynia Act* of May 11th-19th, 1831, had ordained the participation of Lithuania and Volhynia in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies.

Collateral to the efforts at adjusting the political framework to the needs of the Uprising was an effort to completely change the constitution. The memorials to these efforts are the preserved but never inaugurated draft constitutions from the years 1830-31.[13] The earlier draft—dating from the period when it was believed feasible to maintain the Polish-Russian personal union (hence certainly from before January 25, 1831)—predicated the coexistence of the two states on the separateness and independence of the Polish nation, and did this by means of a proposed amendment to the constitution of 1815. This draft drew the lessons of the previous fifteen years and was directed towards the elimination of everything that had shown itself harmful to the relationship between the two nations. The second project, drawn up after the formal dethronement of the Czar, broke completely with the 1815 constitution.

As has been noted, neither of these projects ever became law; nevertheless they are valuable to the study of the evolution of Polish political thought, of which they are indisputable expressions—something that cannot be said either of the document dictated by Napoleon for the Grand Duchy of Warsaw or of the one framed by Czar Alexander for the Kingdom of Poland. If the present study does not take these constitutional projects under closer scrutiny, it is only because its scope is limited to actual operating constitutions.

II. *Kinships between the Constitution of the Kingdom of Poland at the time of the November (1830-31) Uprising and the United States Constitution*

The Poles in 1830-31, waging open warfare to liberate themselves from St. Petersburg, were in a situation analogous to that of the American Colonists when they were struggling to free themselves from London. And much as the American revolutionaries set about creating a constitutional framework (the Articles of Confederation) in 1776 soon after declaring their independence, the Warsaw revolutionaries too altered their framework during the actual course of their struggle, through flexible application of a system of amendments.

The Americans preserved certain institutions from their colonial period, but they built anew whenever they either did not wish to preserve the old system or did not wish to copy the British pattern. The Polish revolutionaries similarly kept what suited them, changing what they felt required change.

A comparison of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Poland at the

---

[12] Representation for Lithuania and Volhynia Act of May 11-19, 1831, preamble.

[13] Handelsman, 124-34.

time of the Uprising with the United States Constitution ratified in 1789 reveals a whole series of kinships.

Three branches of power

These are the legislative, executive and judicial.

Bicameral legislature

In the Kingdom of Poland both chambers—the Senators and the Deputies—are empowered to initiate legislation, on a par with the Government.[14] (From August 17, 1831, on, the two chambers acted as joint chambers, "pending the liberation of the capital." [15]) A bill passed by one chamber goes immediately to the other, and on its passage by that chamber becomes law.[16] A bill passed by one of the chambers but rejected by the other "shall be discussed further in both chambers jointly, which . . . shall decide by a simple majority vote." [17]

The lower chamber

This chamber was elected by the full-fledged citizens.[18]

The upper chamber

This was chosen through indirect elections.[19]

Joint chambers

The two chambers jointly make the most momentous decisions: in "the selection and removal of the persons comprising the Government," in questions of war and peace, and in the ratification of treaties.[20]

The executive branch

Its structure and prerogatives show scarcely a faint kinship with the American executive. The manner in which the head of the Government is selected and the manner in which his authority is exercised are different.

Somewhat analogous to the corresponding function of the President of the United States is the appointment, by the President of the National Government, of the highest dignitaries in the Kingdom: of ministers and

---

[14] Legislative Procedures Act of January 22, 1831, art. 1.

[15] Government Act of August 17, 1831, art. 5.

[16] Legislative Procedures Act of January 22, 1831, art. 2.

[17] *Ibid.*, art. 3.

[18] Pol *Const.* (1815), art. 151.

[19] Government Act of January 29, 1831, art. 11.

[20] Legislative Procedures Act of January 22, 1831, art. 4.

other functionaries, of the commander-in-chief, of the generals, of clerics below the rank of bishop, and of "diplomatic agents." [21] The President, in his Council of Ministers, disposed of the Government's revenues in accordance with the budget approved by the Seym, but by the *Government Act* of August 17th, 1831, "Only the President himself or his substitute shall have the decisive voice, and the Ministers shall sit with an advisory voice." [22] The Government—by the aforementioned Act of August 17, 1831, the President—had power to remit or to reduce sentences.[23]

The judiciary

Still conspicuous by its absence from this Polish constitution is an element quite basic to American administration of justice, the jury system. The Kingdom possessed an analogue of the American Supreme Court; this was the Supreme Tribunal, the highest court of appeal but not empowered to issue binding interpretations of the law. The Supreme Tribunal did include judges appointed for life, but it also included a number of senators appointed for a limited term.[24]

General principles and guarantees of the law

1. Guarantee of religious freedom. The Constitution of the Kingdom still features a provision making "religious persuasion . . . an object of particular attention by the Government,"[25] but the modified Constitution does show some progress: whereas the Czar's version had set adherents of various Christian denominations equal in their civil and political rights, from May, 1831, on the right to vote was granted to citizens both "of Christian or Mohammedan persuasions;" [26]

2. guarantee of personal liberty: similarly as *habeas corpus* in the United States,[27] *Neminem captivabimus* assured personal security to all citizens of the Kingdom of Poland; [28]

3. freedom of the press (though in the Kingdom,[29] as contrasted with the United States,[30] limited in extent);

---

[21] Government Act of January 29, 1831, art. 9.

[22] Government Act of August 17, 1831, art. 2.

[23] Government Act of August 17, 1831, art. 1.

[24] Pol. *Const.* (1815), art. 151.

[25] *Ibid.*, art. 11.

[26] Representation for Lithuania and Volhynia Act of May 11-19, 1831, art. 4.

[27] U.S. *Const.*, art. I. sec. 9.

[28] Pol. *Const.* (1815), art. 18.

[29] *Ibid.*, art. 16.

[30] U.S. *Const.*, amend. I.

4. the privilege of posting bail; [31] [32]

5. the right to speedy trial in a competent court of law, and immediate release if investigation provides no grounds for trial; [33] [34]

6. the obligation to inform the accused of the causes of his detainment; [35] [36]

7. the right to hold property; [37] [38]

8. proscription against punishment inflicted outside the law or the courts: [39] [40]

9. the right of persons of foreign extraction to be naturalized and to seek public office [41] [42] [43] (except for the offices of President and Vice President of the United States [44]);

10. the right to move about freely (the kinship being only with the first paragraph of Article I, section 9 of the United States Constitution) [45] [46]

11. repudiation of confiscatory powers; [47] [48]

12. guarantee of the validity of public debts; [49] [50]

13. the source of governmental powers: the remodelled Constitution of the Kingdom of Poland does not have a separate clause concerning the source of the Government's powers, but the people and their will, as expressed through the Seym, are clearly indicated to be the source.

---

[31] *Ibid.*, VIII.

[32] Pol. *Const.* (1815), art. 22.

[33] U.S. *Const.*, amend. VI.

[34] Pol. *Const.* (1815), art. 21.

[35] U.S. *Const.*, amend. VI.

[36] Pol. *Const.* (1815), art. 20.

[37] U.S. *Const.*, amend. V.

[38] Pol. *Const.* (1815), art. 26.

[39] U.S. *Const.*, amend. V.

[40] Pol. *Const.* (1815), art. 23.

[41] U.S. *Const.*, amend. XIV.

[42] *Ibid.*, art. I, sec. 2.

[43] Pol. *Const.* (1815), art. 33.

[44] U.S. *Const.*, art. II, sec. 1.

[45] *Ibid.*, art. I, sec. 9.

[46] Pol. *Const.* (1815), art. 24.

[47] U.S. *Const.*, art III, sec. 3.

[48] Pol. *Const.* (1815), art. 159.

[49] U.S. *Const.*, art. VI.

[50] Pol. *Const.* (1815), art. 158.

This is made unequivocal in the prescribed oath of office: "I pledge my faith to the Polish nation and to the Polish people, as represented in the Seym. I swear that I shall recognize no authorities save those that the Seym has established or shall establish . . ." [51] The analogy with the American Constitution [52] is in this matter complete.

Checks and balances

The American Constitution worked out in Philadelphia shows internal consistency. The system of "checks and balances" prevents excessive growth in the powers of the several branches of government, and the amendments strive to secure individual and civil liberties. Those who in 1830-31 in Warsaw undertook to remake their constitution—probably at times to the sound of distant cannonade—were not as consistent. Their amendments do not form a well planned out series, and their checks and balances are only rudimentary.

The joint chambers selected the head of the Government (the President), who made decisions "in council," and "Every decision by the President in the Government's name shall issue from and—in order that it may have the force of law—shall be pronounced in council and shall be certified by the endorsement of one of the Ministers comprising the Council." But his entire Council consisted of his own appointees.[53]

The lack of certainty in the morrow characterizing the period of the November Uprising, and particularly the internal struggles over power and over the definition of its limits, inevitably had to leave an impress of instability on the remodelled Constitution.

---

[51] Oath Act of February 8, 1831, art. 2.

[52] U.S. *Const.*, preamble.

[53] Government Act of August 17, 1831.

CHRISTOPHER ROWIŃSKI
(London)

POLISH WORDS IN ENGLISH

The English language, according to the *Guinness Book of Records*, contains 490,000 words and 300,000 scientific terms. About 80,000 words are theoretically in use and this includes archaic legal jargon. It is said that William Shakespeare used about 29,000 words in his works; [1] an average English speaking person uses only several thousand; an uneducated person makes do with as little as 1,000 words in his everyday life.

Many of us would be surprised to hear that among the riches of the English language there is still room for Polish words. Their very existence may be a revelation to some.

Let us begin with *Polack*-Pole, the word used by Shakespeare in *Hamlet:* ". . . He . . . smote the sledded *Polacks* on the ice" [2] in the context of the Polish-Danish war. It was used as an ordinary name for a native of Poland during the 17th century in England, but it thereafter fell into disuse, being replaced by *Pole* or *Polander* (the latter soon went out of use). In the beginning of the 20th century, however, *Polack* reappears in the United States, but no longer as an exact synonym for Pole, but almost always holding a note of contempt or pity; it is now regarded as offensive.

Perhaps it would be opportune here to mention the chemical element *polonium*, coined in 1898 after the country of its inventor—Madame Curie-Skłodowska (from Medieval Latin name for Poland, *Polonia*). It is mentioned in most dictionaries.

Man doesn't live by bread alone. However, to discover the origin of some words man must "use his loaf". Let's take loaf, for instance. We all know about those lively travellers—the Germanic tribe of Goths, who at one time occupied a region extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and who attacked in 3rd century A.D., the Roman Empire, subsequently splitting their tribe into Visigoths and Ostrogoths . . . The Goths came in the Eastern Europe across the Slavonic *chlebu* (Polish *chleb*), and accepted it into their language as *hlaifs*, which came into the Old English as *hlav* and finally to the modern English as *loaf*, and modern

---

[1] 29,066—Marvin Spevack, *A complete and systematic concordance of the works of Shakespeare*, 1969.

[2] *Hamlet* I i.

German as *Laib*. Well, what do you know? It is not as simple as that—many etymologists think that the Old Slavonic *chlebu* came from the Gothic word *hlaifs* . . .[3]

"In medieval times the long shoes, as their names of *cracowes* or *poleynes* implies, were a fashion which, by repute, came from Poland, a land ruled by the grandfather of Richard's first queen"(*Encyclopeadia Britannica).* So spake *Britannica.*[4] It concerns Richard II (1377-99), and his first queen, Anne of Bohemia, the eldest daughter of Emperor Charles IV. The name *cracowe,* meaning "the pointed shoe", survived in large dictionaries to the present day. It was called after the old Polish University City of Cracow (Pol. Kraków). *Poleynes*—the word for the same thing and also "Polish Leather" is derived from obsolete French adjective, *Poulain,* meaning Polish.

In 1697 there came into English the noun *pospolite,*[5] from Polish "Pospolite ruszenie", which is described in English as "Polish militia consisting of gentry called up at the time of invasion."

The interesting group concerns the words which from Polish/Russian/Lithuanian entered English via Dutch: *siskin, pram* and *eland.* As we know, the Dutch had the control over the Baltic trade until followed by the British "Muscovy Co." during the reign of Elizabeth I. *Siskin* [6]—small yellowish-green finch—coming from Polish *czyżyk,* and Russian *chizh*—entered English via early Flemish *sijken* and Med. Dutch *siseken. Pram* [7]—nothing to do with babies, but a "flat bottomed boat used in Baltic", came from Old Slavonic *pramu,* Polish *prom*—ferry boat. *Eland* —the South African large antelope . . . came from the Dutch *eland*—elk, which in turn, was descended from Lithuanian *elnis*; however, the famous etymologist Rev. W. W. Skeat thought at the turn of this century that the word came from Polish *jeleń*—elk.[8] It is obvious, however, that Lithuanian *elnis,* and Polish *jeleń* are related.

Similarly the word *vampire* which came into English from Serbian via Hungarian *vampir* is related to Polish *upior* (ghost, revenant).[9]

The first word of Slavonic origin in English was *tapor aex* (the kind of small axe), which got to Old English from Old Norse (probably through Vikings—*tapar*—ox).[10] This word, which came from Slavonic *topor,* did not survive into Middle English, though slightly changed axe —which originates in Latin—did. It would be interesting to note that the

---

[3] *The Oxford English Dictionary,* 1933, volume 6, p. 370: see also Vasmer's *Russiches Etymologisches* at *chleb,* vol. 3, p. 245 and Feist's *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der Gotischen Sprache* at hlaifs, p. 260.

[4] 11th edition (1910) of *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* vol. 7, p. 238c.

[5] *OED* 1933, vol. 7, p. 1154.

[7 &6] Mary S. Serjeantson, *A History of Foreign Words in English,* Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1935, Third Imp., 1962, p. 210.

[8] Rev. W. W. Skeat, *Principles of English Etymology,* 1891 (Oxford).

[9] *OED* 1933, vol. 12, p. 33.

[10] Thorpe, *Diplomatarium* 317. Quoted by M. S. Serjeantson, see above.

word came originally from Scythian or Sarmatian, the languages of the Iranian nomadic tribes which were related to each other. Sarmatians, who originated north of the Black Sea, and later spread to what is now called Russia, settled, *inter alia,* in Poland in 3rd century B.C., and are supposed to have given rise to Polish gentry, after being assimilated by the local Slav population.

Sarmatian is defined in the "Concise Oxford Dictionary" [11] as "inhabitant of ancient Sarmatia (Russia and Poland), in poetry Pole, Polish" and "The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary" quotes Campbell's poem from 1799: "Sarmatia fell, unwept, without a crime", commemorating Poland's partitions at the end of the 18th century.[12]

At the beginning of the 18th century *hetman* entered the English language as "Polish military commander". The descent of Polish word from the German *Hauptman* (head man) is uncertain.[13]

Two centuries earlier, during the Polish-Swedish Kingdom, a dance *polska* (literarily Poland) was born and the name entered English, when the dance became fashionable here.

During the 19th century, Polish dances: *mazurka,*[14] *varsovienne/ varsoviana* [15] and *polonaise,*[16] polacca deriving from "a woman in the Polish province of Mazovia", "woman of Warsaw" and "Polish woman" in French and Italian respectively, became popular here and entered the English language. (*Polka,* on the other hand, is not a Polish dance as often wrongly assumed, but a Bohemian one.) *Varsovienne* is no longer known in Poland (though the Polish War Song (Warszawianka) is given the same name in Poland) but is danced to the present day in certain European countries and in Mexico.

Other Polish dances, particularly *Cracoviak* (Krakowiak), *kouiaviak* (Kujawiak), and *Oberek,* entered dictionaries of music, though they have not become naturalized.

By the way, not only *cracowe* signifies different meaning from *cracoviak,* the dance; also *polonaise* means also a kind of a fetching ladies dress, and an overcoat lined on ends with fur.

Also in the 19th century *britska/britzka,*[17] entered English via German from Polish "*bryczka* . . . an open four-wheeled carriage with shutters to close at pleasure, and only one seat."

---

[11] *The Concise Oxford Dictionary,* 4th ed., 1961, p. 1096.

[12] *OED* 1933, vol. 9, p. 112, also Campbell's "Pleas", Hope I, 376.

[13] *OED* 1933, vol. 5, p. 258; *Webster's Third New International Dictionary,* 1966, p. 1063.

[14] *COD* 1964, p. 739.

[15] *COD* 1964, p. 1417.

[16] *COD* 1964, p. 923.

[17] *COD* 1964, p. 148.

As far back as 1684, the word *piast* [18] appeared in the English language, meaning "a member of the first Polish Royal dynasty (Piast)," as well as "a person of purely Polish descent." "Also *seym/sejm* [19] (Polish parliament) has been quoted in English from time to time, together with *zloty* (Polish złoty—gold piece—goulden, monetary value) which was first quoted in English in 1917.[20]

Although many dictionaries (e.g. O.E.D.) derive the word *Uniate/Uniat* (member of any community of Oriental Christians that acknowledges the Pope's supremacy but retains own liturgy) [21] from Russian *uniyat* from Latin *unus—one*, the "Webster's Third Dictionary" people find Polish *Uniata* as the ultimate source of the English word, and I agree with them.[22]

The larger English dictionaries use sometimes the Tartar/Turkish words, which through Russian came into English, but are also found in Polish; *nagaika*—cossack horse whip (Pol. *nahaj* or *nahajka*) and *kurgan* —prehistoric mount (Pol. *kurhan*). Also from the Polish eastern borders where there were many skirmishes and wars with the Tartar, Cossack and Turk, comes the word found in English—*stanitza/stanitsa*—fortified cossack settlement (Pol" *stanica*).

As I mentioned Tartar/Turkish words—the Poles added the letter *h* to the word orda—meaning the Tartar troops and later the camp—and through Polish *horda* "Troop of Tartar nomads, gang, troop, usually in contempt", came to German, and later to English and French as *horde.*[23] By the way, Urdu, the official language of Pakistan, comes from the Persian word which is the same as Turkish/Tartar *orda* camp. This "camp language" originated between Mohammedan conquerors and their subjects.

In this connection it may be useful to mention that the Turkish word *yenitsheri* which means in Turkish "a new army", came into English as *janizary* or *janissary* and to Polish as *janczar.* This sultan's guard in which there served many Christians taken as children into Turkish captivity, and later trained for the élite troops, consisted of many Poles in its numbers, as the Polish Kingdom waged many wars with the Turks (culminating in saving Vienna from the Turkish siege by the Polish King, John III Sobieski in 1683).

It is interesting to note how *uhlan* [24] came into English. This word is descended from Turkish *oglan* boy, young man. During their numerous Tartar/Turkish wars, the Polish warriors often heard the

---

[18] *OED* 1933, vol. 7, p. 819; *WTNID* 1966, p. 1709.

[19] *COD* 1964, p. 1165.

[20] *WTNID* 1966, p. 2659.

[21] *OED 1933*, vol. 11, p. 222.

[22] *WTNID* 1966, p. 2498.

[23] *COD* 1964, p. 574.

[24] *COD* 1964, p. 1387.

enemy cavalrymen call to each other: *oglhan!* and began to call their own light cavalry/lancers as they heard the name: *ulans* (Pol. *ułan*, plural *ułani*). Then neighbours of Poland, Prussians, Russians and Austrians, liking the cut of the Polish lancer's uniform, formed their own lancer regiments, and called them *uhlans*. The word took root in the English language, when the First World War broke out, and the German *uhlans* fought with the British cavalry. This word first appeared in English in 1753.

After the Peninsular War (1808-14), when the Polish lancers fought in Spain on the French side against the British, the latter, admiring the courage, panache and uniform of these lancers, formed their own lancer regiments copying the uniform and *czapka* (lancer's cap, also known as *chapka* or *tsapska*) of the Poles.

Heyduck, occasionally met in English (usually in italics) means here "in Polish or Hungarian one of the body of foot soldiers or retainers." [25] The word, which comes from Pol. *hajduk*, and Hungarian *hajdu* came originally from Turkish *haydud* robber, brigand. . . .

Another word where Polish and Hungarian compete for the parentage is the English *sabre/saber* [26] (American English), meaning "cavalry sword with curved blade." There is a Polish word *szabla* and a Hungarian *szablyja* meaning the same thing. Those who believe that the word came from Hungarian, derive it from the lower tusks or fangs of a wild board in Hungarian; on the other hand, Prof. Aleksander Brueckner, the Polish etymological authority, and the author of *The Etymological Dictionary of Polish Language* (*Słownik Etymologiczny Języka Polskiego)* 1957, p. 538, derives it from Old Slavonic *Sabl*, cock, from its curving tail. It is believed that the word came to German from Polish.

Similarly *sable* [27]—meaning the animal and its fur—came to English from Eastern Europe, and is probably of the Balto-Slavic origin (Lithuanian *sabalas*) though in Polish it is called *soból* and in Russian *sóbol*, and it may have come into English via either language. *Zibeline* is its romantic derivative.

However, in case of *saddle*, although it appears in Old Germanic as well as Old Slavonic, it is agreed that the word comes from the—common to all—Indo-European ancestor, just as *apple, stool* and *tree.*

Zubr [28] (European Bison or Wisent), Pol. *żubr*, is occasionally quoted in English. It is doubtful whether it is generally known that this beautiful, almost extinct animal survives in the primeval Białowieża forest on the now Polish/Russian border. Perhaps because of the new frontier Polish *vodka* with a blade of the *bison* grass in it, called *Zu-*

---

[25] *COD* 1964, p. 563.

[26] *COD* 1964, p. 1082.

[27] *COD* 1964, p. 1082.

[28] *OED* 1933, vol. 12, p. 103.

browka,[29] was called by the "Webster's Third" dictionary "chiefly Russian liqueur." Then there is *Starka* (old vodka) which is occasionally quoted.

When we talk of Russo-Polish matters, it may be opportune to mention that *intelligentzia/tsia,*[30] which came into English from Russian *intelligentsiya* is now believed by many etymologists to have come to Russian from Polish *inteligencja.*

Very interesting words are *voivode/vaivode,*[31] and following it close *voivodeship/voivodship.* These are said to have come into English through three channels: 1-Polish, 2-Russian and 3-Serbian. In the Polish sense *voivode* means a governor of the province, and *voivodeship* means province, and both these words are commonly used in Poland to the present day (*wojewoda* and *województwo*).

Another word—*calash* [32]—meaning in Great Britain "light low hooded carriage; carriage hood" and "woman's hooped silk hood", and in Canada: "two wheeled one-seated vehicle with driver's seat on splash board" ("Concise Oxford Dictionary"), came into English from Slavonic: either Polish *kolasa,* or Czech (Bohemian) *kolésa,* through French *caléche.* It is spelled *calache* in American English.

By the way, the English accepted the Polish spelling of the word *Czech,*[33] probably because of the diacritical mark above the letter "c" in Czech with which the British printers may not have been familiar.

However, the combination of consonants *cz* in Polish, which together with *rz* and *sz,* terrifies the foreigner learning Polish, does not account for *czar,* which is often wrongly attributed to "obsolete Polish spelling of the polish word *car*".[34] (Webster). In this case some German etymologists followed too closely the obvious mistake of the Austrian traveller Herberstein, who gave this information in his book on his travels in Russia, entitled *Rerum Muscovitarum Commentari,* published in 1549—the first source of information on Russia via the West. In the 16th century this word was spelled *carz* in Polish. Later the form *car* was accepted, never *czar.* I must add that *Oxford Dictionaries* had never accepted Herberstein's suggestion.

Let us now turn to culinary matters and speak of *gherkin,*[35] now often found in the Fish-and-Chips shops, and often imported from Poland. This word descended from M. Persian *angrah,* through M.

---

[29] *WTNID* 1966, p. 2661.

[30] *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology,* 1966, p. 479.

[31] *OED* 1933, vol. 12, pp. 17, 18 and 290.

[32] *COD* 1964, p. 166.

[33] *WTNID* 1966, p. 568.

[34] *WTNID* 1966, p. 568.

[35] *WTNID* 1966, p. 954.

Greek *agouros*—water melon, cucumber, to Pol. *ogurek* (up to the 16th century; now spelled *ogórek*—cucumber) from L.G. *augurke*, from *augurk, gurk* and finally German *Gurken*. "(*Webster's Third*)".

Kasha (grit, groats), Polish *kasza, Vodka* (Pol. *wódka*) and *manna-croup* (Pol. *krupa*), though they entered English from Russian, are also 100% Polish words. In fact, *vodka* was commonly known in Poland since 12th century and came to Russia much later. It became commonly known in Russia only after partitions of Poland, i.e. in the 18th century, when many Polish distilleries were captured in the eastern provinces.

American English has accepted foreign words even more readily than the already liberal English. After all, the population of the USA consists of immigrants from most of the European nations.

Baba, meaning interalia *the cake* in Polish, came into the American English through French, before the mass emigration to the USA had begun. At present it is used as *rum baba* in the USA and Great Britain, and only in the USA as *baba-au-rhum*.[36]

Another word brought into American English at an early date was *sherryvallies*,[37] a loose eastern trousers called in Polish *szarawary* (though the word is originally of Persian origin). It is the earliest Polish loan made by American English; it is attested in 1788 and was probably introduced by Polish volunteers fighting in the American Revolution, such as Kościuszko. General C. Lee, who was at one time an aide-de-camp of Polish king, mentions *sherryvallies* in his letter. This word has long ceased to be used except as a name for the long obsolete garment.

The Polish, originally mainly peasant, immigrants to the USA brought in American English the words of culinary nature: *kielbasa*[38] covering many varieties of Polish sausage (in Pol. *kiełbasa*—sausage), which became fully naturalized, and the words, which, though often quoted, did not yet become part of the language: *kapusta* (cabbage), *kapusta* (*kiszona*) (sauerkraut—pickled cabbage), *golombki/galomki* (Pol. *gołąbki*—stuffed cabbage), *bigos* (the Polish sauerkraut/meat dish), *zrazy* (thin slices of beef).

The Jewish immigration to the USA a hundred years ago or so, brought in many Polish Jews from the so-called "The Pale"—the territory in Eastern Poland and Western Russia where the Jews had to settle under the edicts (ukases) of the *tsar* (alternative spelling: *tzar* and *czar*).

The Jews of Eastern Europe spoke Yiddish—*lingua franca*—based on the Middle High German, which accounted for 70% words in this language. However, Yiddish differs from German in structure, grammar, spelling and pronunciation. Yiddish also consists of Hebrew (20%) and other languages—10% (Polish, Russian, Czech, Hungarian, Romanian and Loez-language consisting of Old French and Old Italian). In this

---

[36] *WTNID* 1966, p. 156.

[37] H. L. Mencken, Supplement 1, 1945, p. 283, footnote, and *WTNID* 1966, p. 2094.

[38] *WTNID* 1966, p. 1241.

10% Polish is most prominent. Thus some words of Polish origin came to American English via Yiddish.

An interesting one is *nebbish*[39]—timid or ineffectual person—which came to American English from Polish *niebożę* via Yiddish *nebbich/nebbach*, the view supported by the *"Webster's Third"*, unlike Leo Rosten in his *Joys of Yiddish*, who derives the American word from Czech *nebohy* (though he spelled the word *neboky*). *Yarmulke*[40]—skull cap—and many variations of this name, came from Polish *jarmułka*. *Litvak*[41] in American English "a Lithuanian or generally East European Jew" comes from Polish *litwak*—Russian speaking Jew living in Poland. *Kishke*[42] came from Polish *kiszka*—gut—and means in American English "liver sausage". *Galician* is *inter alia* a Jew from south-western Poland.[43]

Borscht/borsch, and other variants came into English via Yiddish from Polish *barszcz*, and Ukrainian/Russian *borshch*.[44]

Then there is *bialy*, a flat breakfast roll that has depressed centre and is usually covered with onion flakes. It came from Yiddish *bialystoker*, which, in turn, is the name of the Polish town of Białystok where this roll must have been first baked.[45]

Then there are many words of Polish origin in Yiddish, which, though generally used by Jews, have not yet been naturalized in English in the U.K. or USA. Let me mention a few: *tchotchke*, from Polish *cacko* plaything, *schmmata business* (from Polish *szmata*—cloth)—rag trade. Occasionally one comes across in the cookery books the words of the Polish origin attributed to the Jewish dishes *schav*—cold sorrel soup (Polish *szczaw*—sorrel) and *chlodnik*—sour cream dish—from Polish word spelled almost exactly the same (*chłodnik*) and meaning "chilled soup".

It is worth mentioning the Yiddish humorous terms using the Slavonic endings *ik, ski*, and *sky*: *beatnik, peacnik* (peace demonstrators), *nogoodnik, nudnik* (from Polish *nudny*—boring, Russian *nudnyj*), *phudnik* (*nudnik with PhD*—Rosten), *allrightsky, hurryupsky, youbetsky, damfoolsky* and *buttinsky*.[46] The last mentioned word, which means: "an interrupting, troublesome fellow", together with *beatnik*.[47] fully entered American English.

---

[39] 1966 Addenda to *WTNID*.

[40] *WTNID* 1966, p. 2647.

[41] *WTNID* 1966, p. 1323.

[42] *WTNID* 1966, p. 1246.

[43] *WTNID* 1966, p. 930.

[44] *WTNID* 1966, p. 257.

[45] To be included in the new edition of *WTNID*. Notified by letter.

[46] *WTNID* 1966, p. 305: recently spelled "buttinski" in *Time Magazine*.

[47] *WTNID* 1966, p. 193.

Everyone but soil specialists would be surprised to learn that *rendzina*[48] a kind of rich marly soil, comes from Polish *rędzina*, as this type of soil was first studied in Poland. However, *chernozem* (the kind of black soil particularly rich in humus) came to English from Russian, not from Polish, wherein it is called *czarnoziem*. Similarly the word *kolach* (*kolacky*) a kind of sweet, cake, and *robot*, came to English from Czech not from Polish, though the similar words exist in Polish. Finally *Sokol*[49]—meaning a Slavonic sport organization, came to American English from Polish *sokoł* falcon (Czech *sokol*).

Not only the Polish words in English are often attributed to the language of the Poland's eastern neighbour; often the same fate meets the Polish Christian names.

Well known etymologist and writer, Eric Partridge, in his book entitled "Name your Child", calls the name of *Stanislas/Stanislaus* "a Russian name". In fact this name, which means "camp's glory" (see *Stanitza/sa* above) derives from Polish *Stanisław*, the name of two Polish saints: (Stanislaus of Cracow—Bishop Martyr Stanislaus Szczepanowski 1030-1079), Stanislaus Kostka (1550-1568), and two Polish kings: Stanislaus I Leszczynski (1677-1766), and Stanislaus II August Poniatowski (1732-98). Bishop Szczepanowski was slain by the Polish king Boleslaus II "the Brave" and the English history records similar case a century later: St. Thomas Becket slain by the orders of Henry II. It may also be noted that Stanislaus II was the last king of Poland.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*,[50] *Stanislaus* as well as *Casimir* (Pol. *Kazimierz*), were often used in France (and more rarely in England) by the Catholics. Under *Casimir* (meaning "announcement of peace") we read: "This name through intermarriage came to the German royal families and is not uncommon in France. Sometimes like *Ladislaus* (Pol. *Władysław*) it was used in England in the 19th century, when there was much sympathy for the national aspirations of Poland."

Then there is a group of technical terms called after their Polish inventors: *Pulaski*—a little axe in the USA; *Bronowski's* bullets or briquettes (for burning); medical terms: *Babinski's* reflex; *Brudzinski's* signs; Wolhynian fever (called after a district of Poland, now in the USSR); *Danysz* phenomenon of effect (a chemical reaction called after Dr. Jan Danysz a Pole, who died in Paris in 1928); *Wronskian* determinant (a mathematical term called after Józef Maria Hoene-Wroński, the Polish mathematician and philosopher, who died in 1853); *Poniatovski's* Bull (see below).

Finally, there are the terms *rachmanism* and *rachmanite*, called after the notorious Polish immigrant, Peter Rachman, who died in 1962, and

---

[48] *WTNID* 1966, p. 1922.

[49] *WTNID* 1966, p. 2167.

[50] E. G. Withycombe, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*, 1945, reprinted 1963.

who drove out low paying white tenants from their lodgings in London by harassment.[51]

Perhaps it would not be out of place to quote numerous terms preceded by *Polish* in English: *Polish rabbit* (small, snow white rabbit); P. disease (*Plica Polonica*, otherwise known as *Polish Plait)*; *P. millet*—which is not a millet at all but a special kind of grass; *P. berry* (*margarodes polonicus*)—a large insect used in the production of a red dye; *P. swan* (grey legged one); *P. carpet*—which is in fact a Persian carpet made from the 16th to 18th century, where a silken thread is interwoven with golden and silver threads. *P. sausage* is simply in A/English known as *kielbasa* (see above); *P. draughts* or *checkers* is the game developed in Paris by a Pole in 1721; it was called "le jeu de dames à la polonaise"; *P. American* is simply an American of the Polish descent; *P. baba*, meaning the cake, survived in English as *Rum Baba*, the rum soaked round cake (see above). Anyone who remembers the last war, knows about the *Polish corridor*—the strip of land which linked Poland to the Baltic Sea between the two wars. There was also the war of *Polish succession* (1733-5) between the rival candidates for the Polish throne.

Polish Bull, otherwise known as *Taurus Poniatowskii* (originally latinized as "*Taurus Poniatovii*") is said in the *Cycle of Celestial Objects* of William Henry Smyth to have been formed "in 1777 by the Abbé Poczobut of Wilna in honour of Stanislaus Poniatowski, king of Poland, a formal permission to that effect having been obtained from the French Academy." This asterism is not today recognized by astronomers as a separate constellation, but rather as a group of stars belonging to three other constellations.

There is also *P. sauce, P. ragout* (another name for *borscht*, see above), *P. bezique* and *P. bank* (also known as Rusisan bank), card games; shoe (see *cracowe* above); *P. bed* (a bed with a curved dome); *P. knot*—a knot used in tying bristles into bundles in making brushes; *P. stitch*—an overcast stitch used in sewing of rabbit furs.

Webster's Dictionary people tell me that according to an article in the periodical *American Scholar* for Spring, 1939 (page 166): "Strikes (in Poland) which are both frequent and violent, increased in number from 769 in 1928, to 2,074 in 1937. The most commonly employed technique —the 'sitdown'—is called the *Polish Strike.*"

Then there is *P. Arab*, occasionally mentioned in books on horses. It denotes a noble breed of horses, which goes back to the beginning of the 16th century in Poland. It was a high class stud of mainly Arabian blood often sold to Turks who in turn sold them to many countries, among them England as *Turks* or *Polands.*

Between the World Wars, Polish Arab champion *Skowronek* (Pol. łSkylark"), imported to England was made famous the Crabbet Park

---

[51] List of New Words and Meanings—*Britannica Book of the Year*, 1967, p. 804.

Stud. He was three times in succession second to the winners of the World Champion 300 guineas gold cup.

Sometimes one comes across the words signifying a Polish variety such as *P. juniper, P. manna* (grit-see kasha), *P. marmot* and *P. sheep-dog.*

Finally, as the Poles belong to the Western Slavs, let me mention the possible etymology of *Slav/Slavonian.* In Polish *sława* means *fame* and *słowo* means *word*; Slav may have come from Old Slavonic meaning either word. With *slave* we can be more definite; it comes from the captured Slavs.

Slave in Ancient Rome was called *servus.* However, when in medieval times the Germans under Otto the Great advanced east and took away many Slav prisoners, they were given the Latin name of *sclavus* in about the 10th century. From Latin the word entered many European languages (German, French, English and Italian) as well as Arabic, and with time the word described any captive slave.

JOACHIM T. BAER
(Greensboro, N.C., U.S.A.)

WACŁAW BERENT, HIS LIFE AND WORK

For my wife

INTRODUCTION

Wacław Berent's writing career spans almost five decades, from 1893 to 1939. He began writing in the style of the declining Positivism, reached his apex with a triptych of three novels in the tradition of Młoda Polska (Young Poland) and closed his career with a series of biographical tales in the genre which had been brought to great popularity and singular success in the twentieth century by Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) and André Maurois (1885-1970). Berent was also an important essayist and translator. He held a special admiration for Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) whose style of writing and ideas profoundly influenced him. Together with Leopold Staff (1878-1957) and Stanisław Wyrzykowski (1873-1945) Berent was the most important translator of Nietzsche's works into Polish. Berent also left his imprint in Polish intellectual life as the editor of *Nowy Przegląd Literatury i Sztuki* (New Survey of Literature and Art, 1920) and of the *Pamiętnik Warszawski* (Warsaw Literary Magazine, 1929-30).

In view of these varied achievements it is surprising that this author has been studied so little. The first major study, which has appeared only recently, is Władysław Studencki's *O Wacławie Berencie* (On Wacław Berent), Pts. I-II, Opole, 1968-69. Its limitations, in the view of the present author, will become apparent through the references later in this study. Nevertheless, Studencki's work has no substitute and is especially useful as far as Berent's biography is concerned. A structuralist study, valuable on its own terms though limited in scope, is the work by the Danish scholar Peer Hultberg: *Styl wczesnej prozy fabularnej Wacława Berenta* (Wrocław, 1969). Aside from these two recent studies, and a small number of papers scattered over various learned journals, we possess only two lengthy studies, dating from the 1930s, each discussing only a single work: Konstanty Troczyński, *Artysta i dzieło: Studium o "Próchnie" Wacława Berenta* (Poznań, 1938) (The artist and his work: A study of Wacław Berent's "Rotten wood"); and Janina Rosnowska, *"Żywe kamienie" Wacława Berenta* (Warsaw, 1937) (Wacław Berent's "Living Stones"). The present author believes that Berent was a major writer in his period above all in terms of literary craftsmanship, and that thirty years after his death (1940) the time has come for a comprehensive assessment of his art and his significance in Polish literature in this century.

Unfortunately, there are *lacunae* which it is hard to fill in this study.

Berent's biography is the first of these . Our information on the life and activities of this withdrawn and unsociable man is very sketchy. Only a few letters have apparently survived, almost none from within the Berent family. Since Berent lived outside Poland for extensive periods, letters to his relatives might have been an excellent source of information. Letters to fellow-writers would have been equally precious. Yet, we have practically nothing other than a few letters to Mme Zofia Jachimecka, a lady whose friendship was valued highly by Wacław Berent. These letters have been quoted in Studencki's study.

The second *lacuna* in the present study is a detailed discussion of Berent's translations. A comparison of these translations with their originals would provide us with additional information on Berent's manner of work. Yet, Berent's translations are inaccessible in the U.S.A., and the present author has therefore left a consideration of them for a future work.

A few acknowledgments are in order, above all to Professor Wiktor Weintraub of Harvard University who introduced me to Polish literature during the years 1957-1961, and in 1965 suggested a topic combining philosophy and literature in the Młoda Polska (Young Poland) period, specifically "Nietzsche and Młoda Polska." This led to my studies "Nietzsche and Staff" [1] and "Nietzsche and Berent," [2] of which the present work is a continuation.

I also owe a word of sincerest thanks to Professor Julian Krzyżanowski of Warsaw University, now emeritus, who arranged for me to work at the Instytut Badań Literackich PAN (Institute of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences) in 1965-1966 and 1969-1970, to the executive secretary of the Institute Dr. Zbigniew Goliński; the staff of the library of the Institute, particularly Mrs. Maria Gajewicz and Miss Alina Karpowicz. I also owe a special word of thanks to Dr. Michał Głowiński, senior research associate at the Institute, for arranging a discussion on *Żywe kamienie* (Living stones); to Mr. Janusz Odrowąż-Pieniążek, and to Dr. Ryszard Przybylski.

For untold kindnesses during my five years at Princeton University a word of sincerest thanks goes to Professor Richard Burgi, chairman of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, 1963-1970.

During my work I was supported by two Fulbright-Hays post-doctoral NDEA-related grants in 1965-1966 and again in 1969-1970. The latter was simultaneous with a one-year leave of absence from Princeton University.

New York University, which counted me among its faculty from 1971 to 1973, provided a small grant to cover essential last-minute expenses. For all this help I wish to express my profound gratitude!

---

[1] "Friedrich Nietzsche in the work of the young Leopold Staff," *The Polish Review*, XV, No. 4, 64-85.

[2] "Nietzsche's Influence in the early work of Wacław Berent," *Scando-Slavica*, XVII, 93-111.

Last, but by no means least, this work owes its appearance in *Antemurale* and its improved form after thorough editorial work to Mme Maria Danilewicz Zielinski and to the generous subsidy of the Lanckoroński Foundation, all of which stand here gratefully acknowledged.

It is especially gratifying to be able to publish this study on the centenary of the birth of Wacław Berent.

JOACHIM T. BAER

Greensboro, North Carolina.
August 1, 1973.

BIOGRAPHY

> Das erste, woraufhin ich mir einen Menschen "nierenprüfe", ist, ob er ein Gefühl für Distanz im Leibe hat, ob er überall Rang, Grad, Ordnung zwischen Mensch und Mensch sieht, ob er *distinguiert:* damit ist man *gentilhomme;* in jedem anderen Fall gehört man rettungslos unter den weitherzigen, ach! so gutmütigen Begriff der *canaille.*[3]

Wacław Berent was born, September 20, 1873, into a family of Warsaw merchants of German descent. His German ancestors are supposed to have arrived in Poland in the eighteenth century and settled in Pomerania, in Kościerzyna,[4] which the Teutonic Knights apparently called "Bärendt".[5] The town also officially used the name "Berent" during the period of Prussian rule in this area after the Third Polish Partition (1795). To this day the city emblem of Kościerzyna shows a bear under a plant with five offshoots, each ending in seven to nine small leaves.[6] We may assume that the Behrendt family derived its name from the name of the city in which it had settled.

Over the years this Protestant German family became completely

---

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden* (München, 1954-56), II, 1150. The English translation reads: The first upon which I "test" someone is the question of his feeling for aloofness, whether or not he notices in all matters rank, degree and order between human beings, whether or not he *distinguishes.* That's what turns a man into a *gentleman.* In any other case a human being belongs hopelessly to the generous, yes indeed, so good-natured concept of the *canaille.*

[4] The German name of this small town south-west of Gdańsk is still listed as "Berent" (s. the supplemental volume of maps to *Der Grosse Brockhaus,* Wiesbaden, 1960).

[5] A variant spelling.

[6] There might be the same connection between the plant *kościerza* (festuca rubens—a straw-like reddish weed, or a sheep weed) and the bear as there is between *żubrówka* (Hierchloë) and *żubr* (bison). Topographical designations from the name of the plant *kościerza* are not rare in Pomerania: Kościernica, Kosternica. The former German names were: Bernsdorf, Bärenwalde, Bärwalde.

Polonized, and just before his death (November 20, 1940) Wacław Berent even permitted the visit of a Roman Catholic priest for confession. Perhaps this was a deliberate move, as Władysław Studencki suggests, against his Protestant German background in view of the barbarism of the German occupation which Berent was forced to witness during the last year of his life.

Berent's paternal grandfather, whose first name "Wacław" his grandson seems to have inherited, probably made the important move from Kościerzyna to Warsaw in 1807. This was not just a move from the provinces to the capital, but also a move from an environment which for centuries had been culturally oriented towards Germany to the centre of Polish culture. Kościerzyna in the Treaty of Tilsit, 1807, remained with Prussia.) Warsaw in 1807, however, after Napoleon's institution of the Duchy of Warsaw (July 7, 1807), was beginning to regain some of its former cultural and political significance. In 1807, Berent's grandfather accepted the position of superintendent of the Protestant Hospital in Warsaw, and during the November Uprising (November 1830—October 1831) is reported to have changed the spelling of his family name from Behrendt to the Polonized form Berent.

We don't know how many children grandfather Wacław Berent had. Two sons are mentioned, Ludwik and Karol, and of their young years we only know that Ludwik (notice the Polish spelling of their first names) took part in the January Uprising (January 22, 1863) whereas Karol, who would have been old enough, too (born 1841), worked as a technical assistant in the Department of Physics of the "Szkoła Główna" (Warsaw University, founded in 1816, had been closed in 1831 and functioned under the new name of "Upper School" between 1862-1869) in Warsaw. Later, Karol Berent opened a shop for optical instruments in the centre of Warsaw on Sienkiewicz Street, and after a few more years expanded his business with a partner (Berent-Plewiński) at a still more prestigious address on one of the finest old streets of Warsaw, the Krakowskie Przedmieście.

Enough is known of this family to gather that they were well-to-do members of the Warsaw bourgeoisie. They possessed a three-story house on Mazowiecka Street, spent their summers in the countryside, and managed to support two sons (Wacław and his older brother Stanisław) whilst they studied abroad, in Munich and Zurich between 1890-1895. Perhaps grandfather Wacław laid the basis for the family's fortune, yet Karol Berent obviously put it on solid foundations. This is important since it meant that Wacław, the writer, was essentially free throughout his life to follow his inclinations without any serious financial worries.[7]

[7] He apparently encountered some financial difficulties in the twenties since his income from writing (during this period he did a considerable amount of translating) was modest at that time, and since the family property on Mazowiecka Street after its monthly income was divided among the four heirs did not yield much either. Therefore, in 1930, it became necessary to arrange an allowance for him from the Commission of the Union of Polish Writers.

A beautiful portrait has survived of the patriarch of the family, Karol Berent, in the apartment of Mme Stefania Berent, the widow of Stanisław (1872-1956). This portrait has been poorly reproduced in black and white in Studencki's book. Painted, probably in the first decade of this century, by Konrad Krzyżanowski (1872-1922)—one of the finest portrait painters of his day, who was also an illustrator for *Chimera*—this portrait reflects the assurance, wealth and high social stature of a merchant patriarch in the long period of economic stability in Central Europe before the First World War.

We know practically nothing of Wacław's mother, Paulina née Deike, like his father a descendant of a Protestant German family. She gave birth to four children, a daughter Władysława, who died as a child, Stanisław (1872-1956), Wacław Karol, the writer (1873-1940), and Halina (1878-1904). Paulina Deike died as a young woman, probably from tuberculosis, and Berent's father took Zofia Deike, his sister-in-law, for his second wife. They had one son in 1884, Jan Berent (1884-1968).

Wacław was ten years old when his mother died. His education, like that of his brother, was first in the hands of house tutors who gave them basic instruction in foreign languages (German and French). Later the boys were sent first to the Russian High School in Warsaw, then to the private school of Wojciech Górski on Nowy Świat where they were boarders. In 1890, Wacław started his university studies in Munich. Stanisław perhaps in the same year, or perhaps a year earlier, had begun his medical studies at the University of Zurich, which he gave up in 1891 to study physics in Munich. There he completed his studies with a doctorate in 1895. Wacław, who had always had an interest in botany (his herbarium must have been very fine and survived until the Warsaw Uprising in 1944), specialized in biology and in 1895 received his degree with a dissertation on the embryology of boned fish.[8] Studencki suggests that while Berent was a student in Zurich (1893-1895) he visited the Polish Museum at Rapperswil where Stefan Żeromski worked between 1892-1896.

Żeromski no doubt influenced Berent as a writer, and throughout his life Berent retained a high regard for him.

While still abroad, Berent began to write. His first work, "Nauczyciel" (The Teacher), was printed in 1894 in the periodical *Ateneum*, followed by a short sketch, "Przy niedzieli" (On a Sunday) in July 1894 in *Gazeta Polska*. His first important novel, "Fachowiec" (The Specialist), appeared in print in December 1894, also in *Gazeta Polska*, and two years later Berent's interest in nature found expression in the tale "W puszczy" (In the Wilderness), published in *Biblioteka Warszawska* in 1896.

By the middle of the eighteen nineties, Berent was a young man in his twenties with a doctorate in biology yet with no apparent inclination to continue as a biologist. Probably he may have taken his degree simply

---

[8] Zur Kenntnis des Parablattes und Keimblätterdifferenzirung im Ei der Knochenfische. Jena 1896, G. Fischer.

in order to satisfy his father—his real ambition was to be a writer. In a volume of essays, *Pierścień z Herkulanum i płaszcz pokutnicy* (A Ring from Herculaneum and the Cloak of a Penitent) (London, 1960), Maria Danilewicz has left some observations about Berent himself and his family:

> His father responded negatively to his abandonment of biology and his switch to the uncertain bread of the "littérateur." Wacław knew German just as well as Polish. He tried to write in German in the manner of Przybyszewski. After all, he had studied biology at a German university. His environment was decisive in his choice of language for his first attempts to write for the student journals. Here also one ought to look for his first printed works (he might have signed them Behrendt). Miriam [pseud. of Zenon Przesmycki] heard of him and persuaded him to write in Polish. Was this in Warsaw? We don't know. He used to recall his father with great respect and fondness; of his relatives he spoke unwillingly, of his brother almost with hostility.[9]

Between 1895 and 1901, Berent, supported financially by his father, travelled a good deal in Europe, visiting France, Germany and Italy. After 1901, he lived for some time in Cracow, and gained an intimate knowledge of the artistic milieu of this city at the turn of the century, and presents its decadent mood with consummate skill in his novel *Próchno* (Rotten Wood), 1901. These were also the years when the fame of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was spreading rapidly across Europe. Berent already between 1895-1901 worked on translations from Nietzsche's writings, the first of which ("Excerpts from 'Zarathustra' ") appeared in 1901 in *Chimera.*

By settling in Cracow in 1901, rather than in Warsaw, Berent manifested outwardly his break with the bourgeois environment in which he had grown up and which he had exchanged for artistic circles. With Przybyszewski's presence in Cracow (1898-1901) and Miriam-Przesmycki as editor of *Chimera* (1901-1907) Cracow in the first decade of this century was the centre of the Młoda Polska movement. Berent published not only his novel *Próchno* in *Chimera* (Vols. II, III, IV), but also his essays on Nietzsche: "Fryderyk Nietzsche, Z psychologii sztuki" (Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Psychology of Art) (*Chimera,* VI. No. 17, 1902); and "Źródła i ujścia Nietzscheanizmu" (Sources and Outlets of Nietzscheanism) (*Chimera,* IX, Nos. 25-26, 1905). In 1906, under the impression of the 1905 revolution in Russia, Berent published in Cracow another long essay, "Idea w ruchu rewolucyjnym" (The Idea in the Revolutionary Movement). The revolutionary events of the year 1905 are also the subject of his novel *Ozimina* (Winter Wheat) (1911).

During this period—he was now in his late twenties—Berent was on

---

[9] Władysław Studencki, *O Wacławie Berencie* (Opole, 1968), Pt. I, p. 11.

friendly terms with several mostly married women. One of these, perhaps the most important to him, was Bronisława Ostrowska (1881-1928), née Mierz-Brzezicka, a poetess and the wife of the sculptor Stanisław K. Ostrowski (1879-1947).[10] Another was Zofia Jachimecka, wife of the Cracow University professor Zdzisław Jachimecki. She was the translator of Pirandello into Polish, and at the suggestion of Berent she translated Emile Gebhart's (1839-1908) *L'Italie mystique* (1890). The tranlation of this work, unfortunately, has never been published. Berent saw the Jachimeckis over a period of roughly ten years (1911-1922), and it is thanks to Mme Jachimecki, who has lived at her original address on Grodzka Street No. 47 in Cracow for more than six decades (she still lived there in the Spring of 1970), that a few personal letters and brief notes from Wacław Berent addressed to her and to her husband have been preserved.

These notes reveal Berent as a rather shy and withdrawn person, often failing in health and probably subject to frequent changes of mood. The following excerpt from a letter sent from Munich dated April 28, 1912, illustrates how he tried to please:

> I would be glad to participate again in one of the parties at the "Grand" where we have so many times buried the melancholy of our brotherhood. I would be delighted to talk again with you, Madam, and once more "not to understand one another." You are capable, with an amazing charm, of understanding and not understanding many things. Are those young dandies really able to appreciate this? Wouldn't they prefer to go on in their accepted way to simplify, to change, to adapt you to their concepts? Do forgive them for this in your usual way. In Cracow people talk to excess about women over a glass of wine when the latter must do for lack of the former and as a consequence of which one ceases to understand them entirely. Furthermore, every peculiarity of another person provokes in "great Cracow" interference, querulousness and malice. Such is the atmosphere of our "great cities." Thus, the Franciscan flowers of malice grow most abundantly in all of Poland in the bitter hearts of the inhabitants of our most pious capital. Whatever has not turned sluggish in banality, into a dressing gown, into pettiness, into the Grand coffee house atmosphere, all this is false. Do then, Madam, forgive those among your admirers who are guilty and do not count me among them.[11]

Berent's reference to the "Grand" (he means the Grand hotel in Cracow) is a fond recollection of the regular gatherings there of a few friends from Cracow's social and intellectual élite.

---

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 13. Both belonged to the intellectual and social elite of Poland. Bronisława was one of the foremost woman poets of the Młoda Polska movement while her husband Stanisław did sculptures and portrait plaques in the Secessionist style of such Młoda Polska representatives as Miciński, Lange, Tetmajer and Oppman.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

It is interesting and perhaps suggestive of Berent's reserved nature that he preferred this meeting place to the more noisy Jama Michalikowa [12] which at that time was the gathering place of the Cracow artists and literary bohême. His motivation for staying away from the Jama Michalikowa was probably a mixture of fear and reserve. He lacked the sense of humour and the ability to laugh at himself which such places required. In this connection it is worth mentioning that he reacted very unkindly to the caricature drawn of him by Kazimierz Sichulski. When the drawing was finished Sichulski said to Berent: "You look like a chimera from Notre Dame." To this remark the writer is said to have responded with such annoyance and anger that Sichulski tore up the drawing.

Fear and reserve perhaps also help to account for the fact that Berent never married, allegedly because he thought marriage and the profession of being a writer could not be combined. Perhaps, however, he had a disappointment in his twenties. M. Danilewicz suggests that the love affair in the destroyed manuscript of *Kredowe koło* (The Chalk Circle) was based on such a disappointment.

Yet, throughout his life, Berent's refined, gentlemanly manners attracted women, and he never seems to have lacked their friendship. Zofia Nałkowska (1884-1954) was one of his admirers who left the following note in her Diary, dated Cracow, August 14, 1913:

> I have come here in order to find out, at the source, about the engagement of Mr. Berent to a certin Mlle N. This is a contradiction of all likely possibilties to their atmost degree, a crossing of the threshold of resignation. I have so long dreamt about this unattainable, wonderful gentleman.—I carry on my uneventful life in foul weather, by taking care of everyday matters, in expectation of funds from the "Książka." Irzykowski is not in Cracow, and I am polishing my short stories which I had already given to the printer here. . . .[13]

Much could be read into this statement, yet nothing precise is known of Nałkowska's relationship to Berent, nor of the supposed engagement

---

[12] The Jama Michalikowa ("Michalik's Cave"), a Cracow pastry shop and coffee house, which is still in operation, around the turn of the century was the centre of the Cracow world of artists. It also housed the cabaret "Zielony balonik" (The Green Balloon) where many already famous (Ludwik Solski, 1855-1954), or later celebrated actors (Leon Schiller, 1887-1954, Juliusz Osterwa, 1885-1947) made their debut or appeared regularly. The electrifying atmosphere of the Jama Michalikowa has been beautifully described in the feuilletons of Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, "Jan Apolinary" and "Szał" (Madness), in *O Krakowie* (Kraków, 1968), 105-112, 120.

[13] Studencki, I, p. 17.

[14] On the subject of marriage he is reported to have said repeatedly: "literatowi nie wolno się żenić: albo małżeństwo, albo twórczość" (a writer should not get married: it's a matter of either marriage or writing). Studencki, Pt. II, p. 7.

to Mlle N. Perhaps he did intend to marry; we don't know.[14] World War One seriously disturbed his peaceful Cracow life and we know very little indeed about Berent's life until 1920, when he became engaged actively in the cultural life of reborn Poland. By 1920 he had moved to Warsaw.

Before we discuss briefly the last two decades of Berent's life, the nineteen-twenties and thirties, we must emphasize again our fragmentary knowledge of his life. It is made up of bits and pieces, much of it is marginal and anecdotal.[15] We learn, e.g., that Berent had been to Switzerland and returned from there in 1916. Where he went in Switzerland, what he did there, whom he saw and how he managed to travel across various borders during these disturbed times of the First World War we don't know. We know that he changed his address in Warsaw frequently (at least six times in twenty years). His last address was Promenada str. near the Łazienki Park, from where he was evicted by the Nazis in the Autumn of 1939. Berent then moved to the Żoliborz District, to the neighbourhood of his older brother Stanisław.

What were the reasons for Berent's frequent change of residence? Why was he so restless and unable to accommodate himself to a certain environment? In general, everyone who knew him—and Studencki has carefully brought together the recollections of various contemporaries—agrees that Berent had a difficult character and apparently became more difficult with advancing years. He is described as lonesome and withdrawn, taciturn and proud. With the growth of Fascism in Europe his views about the future of Western culture grew increasingly pessimistic. Yet, this long period of his life in Warsaw (1916-1940) was very productive from the point of view of his creative output. His greatest literary achievement, *Żywe kamienie* (Living Stones), appeared first in the Poznań periodical *Zdrój* (Well) in 1917 under the title *Opowieść rybałta* (Tale of the Minstrel). In 1918, it appeared as a separate edition under its present title. Władysław Studencki's research has brought to light various circumstances surrounding the fate of this manuscript which was nearly lost in the turmoil of the First World War. It turns out that a certain Bohdan Hulewicz was instrumental in locating the manuscript and obtaining its release from the German authorities whose intelligence service had confiscated it when Berent crossed the Swiss-German frontier on his return to Warsaw. The delighted Berent then gave his approval to publish the novel in instalments in *Zdrój* as well as to produce a separate edition of three thousand copies by the associated publishing house "Ostoja".

In 1920, Berent joined the editorial board of the monthly *Nowy Przegląd Literatury i Sztuki* (New Survey of Literature and Art). Also on the editorial board was the poet Leopold Staff (1878-1957), perhaps

---

[15] I refer here to the anecdote of the umbrella which was related to Studencki by Zofia Bujalska, daughter of Berent's sister Halina.

Berent's closest friend,[16] and Stefan Żeromski the writer, whom he much admired. The founder of this periodical, whose title originally was to be *Czarnolas*,[17] was Władysław Kościelski (1886-1933), a poet (an imitator of Dante) and a translator of Goethe's *Faust* (1937). This periodical existed for only one year and was continued under a different name, *Przegląd Warszawski* (Warsaw Survey), and by a different editor (Wacław Borowy) between 1921 and 1925. In 1929, Berent accepted for one year the position of editor-in-chief of *Pamiętnik Warszawski.*

Originally a quarterly, this highly intellectual magazine, which attracted contributions from Poland's leading poets (Miriam, Staff, Tuwim, Pawlikowska) and prose writers (Dąbrowska, Nałkowska, Choynowski), became a monthly in 1930 when Ludwik Hieronim Morstin took over as editor-in-chief. Berent's work here, and particularly his collaboration with other writers, was not successful. His difficult personality made it not easy for him to work well with others. Jan Lechoń (1899-1956), the poet, seems to have been glad to leave his post as secretary with the periodical since he considered it "strenuous" to work with Berent. Morstin has observed in this connection:

---

[16] Berent was his witness when Staff married Helena Lindenbaum, September 16, 1920. Staff repeatedly refers to Berent in his correspondence with friends: "Tymczasem czyli *während*, mieszka tu ze mną Berent, Chimerent, muz adherent." (Letter to Ostap Ortwin, from Poronin, September 17, 1906; in Leopold Staff, *W kręgu literackich przyjaźni, Listy*, Warsaw, 1966, p. 101). In another place Staff writes: "Tu poza Berentem nie widuję prawie nikogo" (Warsaw, September 17, 1919, to Ostap Ortwin). In 1925, Berent spent Christmas Eve at the Staffs. That evening (December 24) all three (Berent, Staff and his wife) sent a Christmas greeting to Jan Kasprowicz: "Drogi Janku! Siedząc we trójkę łamiemy się z Tobą opłatkiem i przesyłamy serdeczne życzenia Świąt i Nowego Roku! Rączki całuję i Ciebie ściskam. L. Staff. O 'Imieninach' nie zapomnieliśmy, również o życzeniach najserdeczniejszych. W. Berent." (Warsaw, December 24, 1925; *Ibid.*, p. 420.)

The editor of Staff's letters to Kasprowicz, Irena Maciejewska, has added the following footnote to this last piece of correspondence: "Wacław Berent was a close friend both of Staff's as well as of Kasprowicz's as far back as his Lwów days. He was connected with Staff through their joint publication of the translation of Nietzsche's *Works*. During the twenty-year interval between the wars when Staff lived in Warsaw, Berent, a recluse, who in general avoided contact with people was a frequent guest in the home of the Staffs. Confirmed by the post-card above and supported by the recollections of the poet's family, he was Staff's closest friend during this period spending in his company even festivities so intimately connected with the family as the Christmas holidays." (*Ibid.*, p. 420.)

Another expression of friendship for Berent is the inscribed copy of Staff's translation of Leonardo da Vinci's *Fairy Tales* preserved in the Biblioteka Narodowa in Warsaw: "Al Vencislao Berent grande artista con cordiali saluti Leonardo da Vinci; Firenze, 24. XII. 1927." (*Ibid.*, p. 338.)

[17] The reference obviously points to Jan Kochanowski (1530-1584), called "poeta czarnolaski." His estate was located in Czarnolas, a village in the Zwoleń District of the Kielce Voivodeship. This planned title illustrates the high aspirations of the periodical which wanted to serve the renewal of Polish art and culture independent of governmental influence.

> Jan Lechoń, who for a time assisted Berent in the editorial work of the *Pamiętnik*, told me that regardless of how often he went to see him, he always felt that his legs were giving way from fear; and before he would ring the bell at Berent's apartment, he would always make the sign of the cross asking for God's help. . . . I perfectly understand his psychological state, for there was something in this man which discouraged you, gave rise to fear and removed any desire to object.[18]

Jan Parandowski (1895-), who also collaborated in Berent's *Pamiętnik Warszawski*, has called him a "small-audience man" (człowiek kameralny) who was afraid of the public. He was also unconcerned about the public reception of his works. His pride even prevented him from sending review copies to his reviewers fearing that they might take this as a hint from him to write a favourable review. Staff said of Berent that he was "an eccentric, a recluse, morbidly shy and at the same time terribly proud." [19]

Berent's favourite writers were Cyprian Norwid (1821-1883) and Joseph Conrad (Józef Konrad Korzeniowski, 1857-1924). M. Danilewicz mentions that Berent respected Norwid highly.[20] Both her reference to Berent's fondness for Norwid and her mention of his love for Conrad (*The Secret Agent, Under Western Eyes, Heart of Darkness, Nostromo*) are attested in other places by Berent's quotations of verses from Norwid [21] and the prominent place he gave the works of Conrad while editor of *Nowy Przegląd*.[22]

It has already been said that Berent was one of the three principal translators of Nietzsche into Polish. The other two were Leopold Staff and Stanisław Wyrzykowski. In the thirteen-volume Polish edition of Nietzsche's works Berent's translation of *Also sprach Zarathustra; ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (Tako rzecze Zarathustra; Książka dla wszystkich i dla nikogo) was published in Volume One, 1905. "Fragmenty z Zaratustry" (Fragments from Zarathustra) had already appeared in a translation by Berent in *Chimera*, IV, Nos. 10, 11, 12. His complete translation of Zarathustra was reprinted separately in 1908 ("examined and again compared with the original"), in both a regular and a cheap edition, and again in 1913. Thus, in addition to his favourite writers, Norwid and Conrad, Berent had his favourite philosopher, whose imprint on his writing is felt from *Próchno* (Rotten Wood, 1901) on to *Zmierzch wodzów* (Twilight of the Leaders, 1939).

Simultaneously with his first translation of Nietzsche, Berent had

---

[18] Studencki, I, p. 15.

[19] *Ibid.*, II, p. 17.

[20] *Ibid.*, II, p. 20.

[21] *Ibid.*, II, p. 9.

[22] *Ibid.*, II, p. 11.

worked on a translation of Christian D. Grabbe's (1801-1836) *Scherz, Satire und tiefere Bedeutung* (Żart, satyra, ironia i głębsze znaczenie) which appeared in *Chimera*, II and III (1901). In 1907 (*Chimera*, X, Nos. 28, 29), Berent translated parts of the *Upanishads*, a group of Hindu religious writings. His knowledge of these writings is reflected already in *Próchno*. In 1924, he translated parts of Goethe's *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* (Gawęda o duchach oraz Historia moralna. Z gawęd uchodźców niemieckich 1794-1795) and followed this up one year later (1925) with a translation of Goethe's *Märchen* (Bajka). In 1924, Berent also published his translation of Knut Hamsun's *Landstrykere* (Włóczęga) using the German translation of this work, *Landstreicher* (1928).[23] This fruitful year (1924) in his translating activity also saw the publication of Maupassant's "Boule de Suif" (Baryłeczka) as part of the collection *Wieczory Medańskie* (originally, *Les Soirées de Médan*, 1880) under the editorship of Tadeusz Kowzan.

The year of publication (1924) does not actually tell us when Berent had translated these works. He must have been preparing them over the years (probably since 1914 after he finished *Żywe kamienie*) and suddenly found it possible to have them published. It is certainly puzzling why the following four works also appeared in 1924: *Vittoria Accoramboni* and *La Duchesse de Palliano* from Stendhal's *Chroniques Italiennes* (Z kronik włoskich; Vittoria Accoramboni oraz Księżna de Paliano); Romain Rolland's *La Vie de Michel-Ange* (Żywot Michała Anioła); Lafcadia Hearn's two works, *Story of a Geisha or Nun and Wife* (Historja gejszy oraz Mniszka i żona)[24] and *In Ghostly Japan* (Opowieści niesamowite i upiorne). In 1925, Berent published his translation of Ibsen's *En folkefiende* (Wróg ludu).[25] His last translation appeared in print the following year (1926): Charles Kingsley, *Heroes or Greek Heroic Legends* (Heroje czyli klechdy greckie o bohaterach). This title is a paraphrase of the title of one of Kingsley's works and not a direct translation.

These translations illustrate Berent's growing interest in biography (see his translations from Romain Rolland, Stendhal and even Kingsley). Seized by the vogue for biographical novels (vie romancée), which was brought to such success by André Maurois (1885-1970) and Lytton Strachey (1880-1932), Berent started a tryptych of three biographical works: *Nurt* (Current), 1934, *Diogenes w kontuszu* (A Diogenes in

---

[23] There is a likelihood of error here (s. Julian Krzyżanowski, *Neo-Romantyzm Polski*, Warsaw, 1963, p. 345). The date of Berent's translation cannot have been 1924, when the publication date of this work in Norwegian was 1927.

[24] There is no work by Lafcadio Hearn which bears exactly this title, and, unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity to compare Berent's translation which reads in English *Story of a Geisha or Nun and Wife* with any of the originals.

[25] English title: "An Enemy of the People".

native garb), 1937, and *Zmierzch wodzów* (Twilight of the leaders), 1939. Berent's choice of form in these three works was no doubt determined to some extent by the popularity of this genre abroad, yet the choice of material had its basis in Poland in the continuing discussion about the country's historical fate since the three partitions at the end of the eighteenth century. Berent's contribution to this debate was to emphasize where the national leaders had placed the country's priorities during the period of Poland's subjugation to foreign powers: in the development of education and in the arts.

Evidently, Berent's contemporaries saw the timeliness of his viewpoint and in 1933 awarded him the National Literary Prize for his work "Wywłaszczenie Muz" (Dispossession of the Muses), the orginal title of the serial publication in *Pamiętnik Warszawski* (1931) and *Tygodnik Illustrowany* (Illustrated Weekly) (1932) of *Nurt* (Current). Four years earlier (1929) he had been awarded a prize by the city of Warsaw for the entirety of his literary output.

Various critics now suggested Berent for the Nobel Prize. His work, however, was too little known outside Poland to make this a realizable proposition. Only two of his works had been translated into Western languages: *Próchno* (into German *Edelfäule*, 1908) and *Żywe kamienie* (into French *Les Pierres vivantes*, 1931). An incomplete Italian translation of this last work appeared in 1927 (*Pietre viventi*), and a Czech translation (*Zhive kameny*) in 1937.

One of Berent's most important public appearances was his opening address, November 8, 1933, on the occasion of the opening of the Polish Academy of Literature (Polska Akademia Literatury). Here he read his important and long essay "Onegdaj" (The Day before Yesterday), much too long for the occasion and poorly enunciated since Berent clearly lacked the gift of public speaking. As a statement of his views, however, on contemporary Poland—the basis of his essay is the cultural situation in the country between 1800 and 1830, and particularly the role played by the Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk (Society of the Friends of Learning)—it is a noteworthy and well written essay which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The reason for the important part Berent was given in the opening of the Polish Academy of Literature was undoubtedly his initiative in bringing this organization into being. It had been he who in 1925, the year of Żeromski's death, had heeded the call of this great writer for such an institution and in the same year had become one of the active members of the Straż Piśmiennictwa Polskiego (The Guard of Polish Writing), precursor of the Polish Academy of Literature.

The biographical information we possess of Berent clearly shows that he devoted his energies to three fields: to creative writing, translations, and to writers' organizations and publications which furthered the development of Polish arts. He was not politically engaged although he certainly had his views on political matters. At one time a personal friend

of Piłsudski's, he turned away from him after the latter suspended the country's constitution in 1926. He knew Julian Marchlewski (1866-1925) and Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919), both active in the Communist movement in Poland and abroad. These acquaintances do not seem to have been very important in Berent's life. He was not the man to become involved in the hectic life of political conspiracy and agitation. In his manners, his gentlemanly bearing, excellent grooming and proud demeanour he was not particularly inclined towards friendship with politicians or political activists. Not gregarious by nature, he needed few friends. One or two friends such as the Staffs were sufficient for him. His favourite writers and philosophers were all the company he wanted.

Do we detect in Berent's character a mixture of aestheticism and egotism? Definitely, yes. He was fastidious about his appearance. He also liked to eat well and to surround himself with good antique furniture and objets d'art. Berent was a highly refined and cultured man, but he was also much more than his outward appearance of aloofness and refinement suggested. He was also a man whose inner world was touched by the profoundest questions of existence, the struggle for self-assertion in a hostile environment (*Fachowiec*), the eternal recurrence of the creative drive (*Próchno*), the continuity of culture (*Ozimina*), death and resurrection in art (*Żywe kamienie*), and the realization of national aspirations through guidance by spiritual values as is suggested in his trilogy of historical novels. The questions that occupied his mind were of a lofty nature, and "his manner depended very much upon the quality of what he frequently thought on" (Marcus Aurelius).

Berent was a writer who was steeped in the West-European cultural tradition. He was familiar with its great writers and philosophers, and he built his own artistic work after absorbing this culture. Such a man must have felt the sharpest pain when he saw the rise of a new barbarism in Europe in the form of Fascism in the twenties and thirties. The Nazi movement which drove Thomas Mann out of Germany, which led to the burning of the verse of Heine and of other great writers in public, and which soon was to lead to a world conflagration, could not fail to produce the profoundest pessimism and despair in such a man. German troops occupied Warsaw after the city's capitulation on September 27, 1939, seven days after Berent had turned sixty-six. Later he was forced out of his apartment near Łazienki Park. It is therefore not surprising that on the eve of his move he destroyed all his private papers and manuscripts. It was an act of despair since for Berent the world seemed to promise no future and there was no reason to leave anything for posterity.

Little is known of his circumstances during the last year of his life after he had moved to the Żoliborz District in the northern part of Warsaw. According to Studencki he seems to have been fairly comfortable and well looked after by his former housekeeper. It is said that he was reading but we don't know what, perhaps Norwid, his favourite

poet, or Conrad, or Stendhal. In any event, his desire to live had received such a rude shock and was probably receiving further shocks daily when he heard of the arrests and the deliberate destruction of Poland's cultural heritage, not to mention her existence as a national entity, that the new bout of tuberculosis was able to wipe out his desire for life. The unavailability of medicines was probably another factor that hastened his end. He died on November 20, 1940, and was buried in the Catholic Cemetery of Old Powązki in Warsaw.

ESSAYS

Berent had come into contact with Nietzsche at an early and impressionable age. He was seventeen when he took up his studies in biology at the University of Munich in 1890. Nietzsche at this time was already a known figure in Europe although his fame had begun not at home in Germany but in Copenhagen where George Brandes (1842-1927) in the Spring of 1888 gave a series of lectures on Friedrich Nietzsche. In the course of preparing these lectures, Brandes had written to Nietzsche in the Autumn of 1887, with a request for information about Nietzsche's friends and about his world of thought. This letter which must have given Nietzsche great delight drew the following cordial reply, dated Nice, December 2, 1887: "Dear Sir: A few readers of whom one thinks highly and no others, that indeed is one of my desires. With regard to the last part of this desire I see more and more that it remains unfulfilled. It makes me even happier though to know that in addition to the *satis sunt pauci** I am not lacking the *pauci* and never have. From among those who are still living (just to name such whom you will know) I name my excellent friend Jacob Burckhardt, Hans von Bülow, H. Taine, the Swiss poet Keller; from among the deceased, the old Hegelian Bruno Bauer and Richard Wagner. It gives me sincere pleasure that such a good European and missionary of culture as you are wish to belong among these in the future. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for this good will. . . . The expression 'aristocratic radicalism' which you use is very good. If I may be permitted to say so, that is the most intelligent word which until now I have read about myself." [26]

---

* A few is enough.

[26] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden* (München: Carl Hanser, 1956), Vol. III, 1271-1272. The German text reads: "Verehrter Herr, ein paar Leser, die man bei sich selbst in Ehren hält und sonst keine Leser — so gehört es in der Tat zu meinen Wünschen. Was den letzten Teil dieses Wunsches angeht, so sehe ich freilich immer mehr, dass er unerfüllt bleibt. Um so glücklicher bin ich, dass zum *satis sunt pauci* mir die *pauci* nicht fehlen und nie gefehlt haben. Von den Lebenden unter ihnen nenne ich (um solche zu nennen, die Sie kennen werden) meinen ausgezeichneten Freund Jacob Burckhardt, Hans von Bülow, H. Taine, den Schweizer Dichter Keller; von den Toten den alten Hegelianer Bruno Bauer und Richard Wagner. Es macht mir eine aufrichtige Freude, dass ein solcher guter Europäer und Kultur-Missionar, wie Sie es sind, fürderhin unter sie gehören will; ich danke Ihnen vom ganzen Herzen für diesen guten Willen. . . . Der Ausdruck "aristokratischer Radikalismus", dessen Sie sich bedienen, ist sehr gut. Das ist mit Verlaub gesagt, das gescheuteste Wort, das ich bisher über mich gelesen habe."

In his letters to friends during the following year (1888) Nietzsche repeatedly gives expression to the pleasure he feels over the fact that he is being discovered: "The north wind it seems brings me cheer and just imagine the north wind reaches me even from Denmark. For this is the very newest: At the University of Copenhagen a certain Dr. Brandes is giving an extensive series of lectures on the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche! These, according to the papers, have a splendid success, each time the hall being filled to bursting; more than three hundred listeners".[27]

This last spring before Nietzsche's collapse (January 3, 1889) and his eleven years of dementia seems to have been one of the most serene in his life. He expresses this once more in a letter to George Brandes (May 23, 1888): "I do not wish to leave Turin without telling you once again how much you have had a part in my first spring that has turned out well (*wohlgeraten*)."[28] Eight days later he reports to his friend Peter Gast that "the lectures of Dr. Brandes have ended in a beautiful manner —with a great ovation of which Brandes, however, says that it had not been directed to him. He assures me that my name was now known in all intelligent circles of Copenhagen and in all of Scandinavia." [29]

Our brief excursion into the relationship between Brandes and Nietzsche is not without significance for Berent. Brandes's study on Friedrich Nietzsche [30] is the first recorded translation of a discussion of Nietzsche into Polish. Furthermore, Brandes, who wrote to Nietzsche first in the autumn of 1887, but no doubt was already well read in his writings in the seventies [31] and early eighties, most likely helped to spread the fame of Nietzsche during his travels to Poland (1886) and Russia (1887). In his contacts with the intellectual élite of those countries, which

---

[27] *Ibid.*, III, 1293 (letter to Reinhart von Seydlitz, dated, Turin, May 13, 1888). The German text reads: "Die Nordwinde, scheint es, bringen mir Heiterkeit; und stelle Dir vor, es kommen Nordwinde sogar aus *Dänemark* zu mir. Das nämlich ist das Neueste: an der Kopenhagener Universität liest jetzt der Dr. Georg Brandes einen grösseren Zyklus Vorlesungen über den deutschen Philosophen Friedrich Nietzsche! Dieselben haben, nach den Zeitungen, einen glänzenden Verlauf, der Saal jedesmal zum Brechen voll; mehr als 300 Zuhörer."

[28] *Ibid.*, III, 1294. ("Verehrter Herr, ich möchte Turin nicht verlassen, ohne Ihnen nochmals auszudrücken, wie vielen Anteil Sie an meinem ersten *wohlgeratenen* Frühling haben.")

[29] *Ibid.*, III, 1296. ("Die Vorlesungen des Dr. Brandes sind auf eine schöne Weise zu Ende gegangen — mit einer grossen Ovation, von der aber Brandes behauptet, dass sie nicht ihm gegolten habe. Er ersichert mich, dass mein Name jetzt in allen intelligenten Kreisen Kopenhagens populär und in ganz Skandinavien bekannt sei.")

[30] L., "Arystokratyczny indywidualizm, rozprawa J. Brandesa o Fryderyku Nietzschem," in *Prawda*, 1890, p. 186; see Tomasz Weiss, *Fryderyk Nietzsche w piśmiennictwie polskim lat 1890-1914*, Wrocław, 1961, p. 87.

[31] *Die Geburt der Tragödie* had appeared in 1874, *Menschliches Allzumenschliches* in 1878, the four parts of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* between 1883-1885.

were designed to gain first-hand information on literary trends, he probably shared with them his impressions of outstanding literary movements and personalities in Western Europe.

The opportunity to know about Nietzsche's works reached the young Wacław Berent early in his life, probably even before he left for Munich in the summer or autumn of 1890. Also, already well in command of German by that time, he did not have to wait for Polish translations of Nietzsche's works which did not begin to appear until 1893.[32] It is important for us to establish Berent's probable acquaintance with Nietzsche before he was twenty since the German philosopher's thought left such a profound mark on Berent's outlook and seems in many ways to have influenced not only his artistic writing but the form of his life as well. There was something in Nietzsche's philosophy which corresponded to Berent's character, there was something that he needed and absorbed. This does not mean, however, that he accepted Nietzsche's thought uncritically. In fact, he must have understood early that Nietzsche himself had insisted on a critical reading of his own works as well as of any other. Berent from early youth trained his critical sense on Nietzsche who had once said in *La Gaya Scienza*:

> *Excelsior!* You will never again pray, never again adore, never again rest in endless faith; you deny yourself to stop before a definitive wisdom, a definitive goodness, a definitive power and to rein in your thoughts . . .[33]

What strikes us then in Berent's two long essays on Nietzsche is their quality of restraint, of mature and acute analysis. Both essays, in a way, are models of thoughtful and penetrating discussion which aims to be both thorough and elucidating. His first essay, written while he was not yet thirty, is entitled "Fryderyk Nietzsche: Z psychologii sztuki" (Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Psychology of Art).[34] It is a translation with commentary of various aphorisms of Nietzsche pertaining to the question of art and its relationship to human life. The publication of this essay came indeed just after Berent had published his novel *Próchno* (Rotten Wood) where these questions had already been treated creatively. Berent probably worked on both his essay and his novel simultaneously. In fact, Nietzsche's influence in this novel is so strong that Berent must have

---

[32] s. Tomasz Weiss, p. 95.

[33] Nietzsche, II, 166. ("*Excelsior!* — Du wirst niemals mehr beten, niemals mehr im endlosen Vertrauen ausruhen — du versagst es dir, vor einer letzten Weisheit, letzten Güte, letzten Macht stehen zu bleiben und deine Gedanken abzuschirren——")

[34] In *Chimera*, Vol. VI (1902), No. 17, 214-238; No. 18, 384-407.

been reading and thinking about these questions intensively during the first two years of the twentieth century.[35]

In his brief introduction to his own translation of Nietzsche's aphorisms Berent makes a statement with regard to his approach towards Nietzsche's thought, an approach which is both creative and affirmative: "From the rich treasure-house (*skarbiec*) of Nietzsche's aphorisms we present a series of observations referring to art and creativity. We present this, of course, not as a catechism of dogmas and beliefs for 'co-religionists' (*współwyznawców*), or 'colleagues' (*towarzyszy*), nor as a piece of armament set up on an entrenchment, nor as a battering ram (*taran*) designed to destroy certain opinions and superstitions, but merely and exclusively as 'notes for thought' (*nuty do myślenia*) for those who independently and for their own benefit wish to think through these matters." [36]

It is noteworthy that Berent here addresses himself not to the many but to the few "who *independently* and *for their own benefit* wish to think through these matters." There is a certain élitism in this statement, an elevated approach to the world and to its spiritual wealth so characteristic of Nietzsche. Berent had learned to read Nietzsche the way Nietzsche had learned to read Schopenhauer, Kant, Descartes and the Greek philosophers: "Even more so the philosopher from antiquity. *Nil admirari**—in this sentence he sees the essence of philosophy." [37] Berent was to be and wanted to be a writer for the few who would make the effort to understand him. He never sought publicity, and he is said to have been irritated when the news was brought to him that *Żywe kamienie* would become compulsory reading in the schools. To this he allegedly remarked: "May we be preserved" (*Niech nas zabraniają*).[38]

---

[35] *Próchno* in *Chimera*, Vol. II (1901), No. 4-5, 178-216; No. 6, 398-435; No. 7-8, 123-220; No. 9, 339-377; No. 10, 11, 12, 216-368. *Próchno* was first published as a separate volume in 1903. *Chimera* whose first volume was published in 1901 was the most prestigious publication of the Młoda Polska literary movement in Poland. It gathered the work of the most outstanding writers of this movement in its pages and tried to be a forum for artistic expression in its most elevated sense. Volume I (1901)—the periodical lasted until 1908 and appeared in ten volumes—contained among other contributions the editor Miriam-Przesmycki's essay "Los geniuszów" (The Destiny of Geniuses), Kasprowicz's translation of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (Pieśń o starym żeglarzu) and drawings by the nineteenth-century Japanese painter, Hokusai (1760-1849).

[36] "Fryderyk Nietzsche: Z psychologii sztuki," *Chimera*, Vol. VI, No. 17 (1902), 214. A part of the discussion of this essay has been reproduced from my paper, "Nietzsche's Influence in the Early Work of Wacław Berent" (*Scando-Slavica*, XVII, 93-111). Permission to quote from it is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

* Not to be excited by anything.

[37] Nietzsche, I, 1159. (Gar der antike Philosoph! *Nil admirari* — in diesem Satze sieht er die Philosophie.)

[38] Studencki, II, 16.

Berent's love for Nietzsche and his approach to Nietzsche's thought is clarified still further in the following quote from the same introductory statement to "Z psychologii sztuki": "The more will find in him those who seek in a book and in marvellous thoughts an enrichment of their own even if it be in the direction of the most violent opposition to their progenitors; who know the sweetness and the pain of those inner quiet discords with oneself; who are not frightened even by a paradox, even by contradiction, obvious or more profound, if these bring in turn a fresh seeding of new thoughts and a new extension of horizons." [39]

This being the frame of his article in which independence of judgment and adventure of thought are equally important, Berent then proceeds in six extensive commentaries to various Nietzschean aphorisms to discuss the present state of Polish art, the psychological situation of the artist, the question of the relationship between life and art, the special task of the artist who must penetrate to the deepest recesses of the human mind and to the ultimate questions of existence. His comments are designed to be both critical as well as uplifting. He is critical when he speaks of the special Polish situation ("Present-day 'nativism', which in a doctrinaire manner is made to cover each distinguished work of contemporary art, is apt to turn before long into a intolerable tyranny of thought" [40]) and inspiring when he describes the role of the artist in general. Here his comments are sometimes skillful rephrasings of Nietzsche's thoughts: "How much more beautiful are those who are still uplifted by life and grasped by love! How much more profound those others who are so full of their inner life that it permits all kinds of Aphrodites, Nymphs and Daphnes to be reflected in its surface as in a mirror—and nothing else besides! . . ." [41] Elsewhere he says: "Art only gives rise to a hunger of the soul but never satisfies it (obviously, in so far as it addresses itself to the somewhat more profound types)." [42] Let us here refer to Nietzsche who once said: "Art is the great stimulant of life, how could you conceive it as purposeless, aimless, as *l'art pour l'art*?" [43]

A beautiful restatement of a Nietzschean thought is the following observation by Berent: "One can slip through life with circumspection and wisdom like a snake and carry away as prize the cold and empty soul of a reptile. One can pass through the thorns of disappointment clumsily and painfully like an awkward child and carry away besides lacerated

---

[39] Berent, "Z psychologii sztuki," 214.

[40] *Ibid.*, 229.

[41] *Ibid.*, No. 18, 387.

[42] *Ibid.*, 396.

[43] Nietzsche, II, 1004. (Die Kunst ist das grosse Stimulans zum Leben: wie könnte man sie als zwecklos, als ziellos, als *l'art pour l'art* verstehn?)

[44] Berent, *op. cit.*, 398.

feet and hands the greatest wisdom of life, namely, its intensification (*spotęgowanie*) and one hundred souls and one hundred worlds in sometimes blood-spattered breasts." [44] (Cf. Nietzsche: "As deeply as man looks into life, just as deeply he also looks into suffering." [45])

Berent sketched his own position as artist in one of these commentaries showing that his primary thought was directed to how the artist fulfilled the great opportunity given to him in life by virtue of his talent. Berent in his own life treated this opportunity with the greatest seriousness measuring it against the highest human ideals which he thought it ought to fulfill: "This sacrificial and frequently inglorious blood shed on the altars of creativity, on the battlefields and victorious entrenchments of an idea, is handed down not in the body but in the spirit, that is, after a long and arduous journey through centuries of a national culture. At the end of this pilgrimage the tired wanderer will not necessarily find a jug of old Polish mead but perhaps a somewhat different ambrosia: at the end of this road he will not find his native kind (*swojskość*), but mankind (*ludzkość*)." [46]

In 1905, Berent published in *Chimera* his long article, "Źródła i ujścia Nietzscheanizmu" (Sources and Outlets of Nietzscheanism)).[47] He follows Nietzsche's thinking in its varying course, not taking the position of the blind adulator but of the analytical critic. Of central concern to Berent is the question of the "Ubermensch" and Nietzsche's thought about the eternal return of all things ("die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen"). He rejects that Positivist notion ("the only echo in Nietzsche of the old Positivism") that man will continually develop and improve until Nietzsche's ideal of a more perfect type of man had been fulfilled. Berent places Nietzsche's concept of the "Ubermensch" in the sphere of human ideals and changes it into a spiritual concept. The recurring theme of his work and the beacon of his entire life is beautifully stated in these lines:

> Is it not true in spite of the fact that we cannot exclude the possibility of a certain psychic evolution in man that all utopian summits will always remain in that area where the ideal is in any event most at home, namely, in the sphere of the spirit? Will not factors, today no less powerful, such as 'the struggle for an intellectual life' and the 'élite' of people with a spiritual kinship determine its rise and consolidation? Will not these men above all produce that atmosphere in which finally those most rare and most apt specimens of humanity, which today are suppressed and warped, will mature and

---

[45] Nietzsche, II, 408. (So tief der Mensch in das Leben sieht, so tief sieht er auch in das Leiden.)

[46] Berent, No. 17, 229.

[47] *Chimera*, Vol. IX (1905), No. 25, 118-139; No. 26, 217-250. Separate publication: Warsaw: Jakób Mortkowicz, 1906.

emerge into the open? For the so frequently used and almost overused word culture has both for Nietzsche as well as for all other highly refined minds of the century only this one aim and purpose. The outward uniformity and harmony, stamped by the so-called 'style' of the epoch, is only its shell, a precious box in which its spiritual treasures rest.[48]

In his discussion of Nietzsche's thought of "the eternal circle" Berent joins this concept with a reference to the Hindu *Upanishad* ("Extreme contrasts frequently incline towards each other in a way not in the least coincidental"). In the quotations he selects he seeks to illustrate an affinity between the profoundest thoughts of the *Upanishads* and the aspirations of Nietzsche. He sees this affinity particularly in the joyful affirmation of the accomplished deed at the end of life (Zarathustra: " 'Was this what you call life?' I shall say to death. 'Well then! Once more!' " [49]). To illustrate, Berent cites the prayer of a dying man from the Upanishad *Isi*: "Let light lead us by the most direct of all roads to the end of all things begun; God is aware of every road." [50] With genuine insight Berent connects the thought of this verse with Nietzsche "who wished to cut the most direct road for the cause of everything creative which would bring with it the future coming of the higher man." [51] He sees Nietzsche's "Ubermensch" as the embodiment of the highest spiritual ideals of mankind and looks upon the creator of this concept as "the preceptor, the cultivator, the master of the finest stock, who once exhorted himself not in vain: "Become what you are!" [52]

Berent's understanding of life and Nietzsche's work had further deepened and matured over the years and his summary of Nietzsche's thought and its fate in Europe is a model of appropriate statement and precise formulation. He knows and is able to appreciate Nietzsche's past, the spiritual forces that produced this outburst of rebellion against all accepted values (psychological insight is a characteristic device of the Młoda Polska writers) and his seemingly unbridgeable contradictions which produced the justification for the inflated nationalism of the German state. (At this time Berent did not know yet what Nazism would do with Nietzsche's thinking between 1933-1945.) Writing in 1921, Berent says: "The coldest and most distorted monster managed, however, to dress up in spiked helmets even the great dead of its own people—during

---

[48] W. Berent, "Źródła i ujścia Nietzscheanizmu" (Warsaw, 1906), p. 46. Again I gratefully acknowledge permission to quote from my paper in *Scando-Slavica*. See Note 36.

[49] Nietzsche, II, 552. (" 'War das das Leben?' will ich zum Tode sprechen. 'Wohlan! Noch einmal!' ")

[50] Berent, "Źródła," 55.

[51] *Ibid.*, 55.

[52] *Ibid.*, 56.

those days—seven years ago!—when it could finally call millions that had been prepared in barracks to the 'Aufmarsch!' " [53]

Nietzsche's thought was, of course, misinterpreted and misused in those days as it would again be misused in the thirties to the mid-forties in Nazi Germany. Yet, Berent sees no reason—and in this independent judgment he reveals his own wisdom and sense of balance — why Nietzsche should not again attain that position in European intellectual life which he had held before: "European intellectual life has not had another equally vigilant observer in its darkest periods of Positivism. Furthermore, one can easily foresee that this name will before long cease to be a popular watchword. Its sound will be carried away together with the hatred which has embraced it today. Then Europe's intellectual élite will even more certainly return to it, for the works of such a guardian of the spirit, which reach the point of clairvoyance into the future, this future itself will not succeed in passing over." [54]

In our discussion of Berent's first two essays (the introduction to *Zarathustra* occupies a place of its own) our main concern was directed towards his confrontation with the ideas of Nietzsche in the realm of art. We have noticed that Berent spoke of "spiritual discipline," "a tradition of the spirit" and "the arduous journey through centuries of a national culture," the reward of which might be the discovery of a "mankind" that would embrace all people instead of just one's own. In his 1905 essay on "The Sources and Outlets of Nietzscheanism" he had rejected the simplistic answers of Positivism in favour of greater spiritual development where an élite with the most developed culture and training would become the "guards and teachers" of the others. No doubt this was a sort of elitism derived from Nietzsche and essentially going back to Plato. Nothing less, however, should be expected of a man who himself accepted the call of responsibility for the spiritual treasures of his own people and in their wider application of all people. Berent was one of those European intellectuals who accepted responsibility as spiritual leaders of their epoch. In this sense he stands both in the great tradition of Polish writers and spiritual leaders of the nineteenth century, both Romantic and Positivist, as well as in the centre of great names of European intellectuals and men of creative genius of the first half of the twentieth century such as Julien Benda, André Gide, Thomas Mann and Paul Valéry.

In 1906, Berent published his third essay, "Idea w ruchu rewolucyjnym" (The Idea in the Revolutionary Movement) with the subtitle

---

[53] Wacław Berent, translation and introduction to Fryderyk Nietzsche, *Tako rzecze Zarathustra. Książka dla wszystkich i dla nikogo* (Warsaw, 1921), p. xvii. The same essay was also published separately under the title "Fatum puścizny Fryderyka Nietzschego" [The Fate of the Legacy of F.N.] in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, No. 41, 654-655; No. 42, 666-667; No. 43, 680; all in 1921.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

"Studium społeczne" (Social analysis). He brought it out in Cracow under the pseudonym S.A.M.[55] Read together the three letters stand for the Polish word "alone". It reflects his aloofness and independent viewpoint towards the slogans of the day, and serves both as a statement of his own position as well as a challenge to others.

Written under the immediate impact of the political upheaval in Poland connected with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, and the demonstrations in Warsaw in November of that year protesting against the use of Polish soldiers in that war, its basic note is *à propos.* Yet again Berent tries to go beyond the immediate issues and focuses on what seems essential to him in a broader context.

In the first half of the essay he analyzes sharply the simplistic notions of two violently antagonistic groups, those who, under the banner of socialism, want to establish an international proletarian dictatorship where the idea of Poland's national heritage would be of secondary or of no significance at all and those who view Poland only in terms of her past glory as the country of the "szlachta and the hetmans:" "Torn between the past and the future it seems that we don't have any present at all; but maybe we shall slowly gain from our own minds, from the content of history and the deep sources of our culture, that invincible idea which it is inappropriate to borrow either from our ancestors or from foreigners." [56] Berent is aghast at the outrageous demagogic slogans of the socialists who are unafraid to reject the idea of Poland outright ("Away with Poland," "We are in need not of a Polish but of a free school" [57]) and he attributes this plus the other extreme of relishing in the recollections of the past ("to make quickly a Reliquy of Memories in the National Museum at the Wawel") to "the lack of a broadly based spiritual ebullience which both in contemporary life and contemporary thought would reveal above all this simplest of secrets of the human spirit, viz., that the thousand-year past of a civilized people has sown in the minds indestructible values which languish in each heart unknown, even though the so-called social "awareness" has stifled this knowledge in doctrinal confinement." [58]

Berent then proceeds to discuss in the second half of his essay what this "Polish idea" in terms of the present (1906) should be. While again opposing the "Wavel apathy" (*Wawelska martwota*) and doctrines which sweepingly rejected all the intellectually creative thought of contemporary Europe (Spencer, Taine, Guyau, Burckhardt, Nietzsche, Ruskin), he comes out again for a spiritual elite: "In each people there are and must

---

[55] Studencki's suggestion that this cryptonym should be read together as "SAM" (Self) and interpreted as "samotnik" (recluse, solitary), in other words, "a man with an independent view," can readily be accepted.

[56] Wacław Berent, "Idea w ruchu rewolucyjnym" (Cracow, 1906), p. 26.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

be people of more fastidious thought, of less gregarious instincts who cannot be attracted by contemporary socialism with its common methods of battle, with its barrel-organ argumentation and its occasionally very questionable promises for the future." [59] No, he says, the new idea of Polish statehood must have room for individualism, independent thought and creativeness. And, he asks, why should social concern and individuality be unbridgeable opposites in a country with such a diverse social and intellectual history as Poland, with men like Krasicki, Kołłątaj, Niemcewicz, Zamoyski, Naruszewicz, Staszic, and each not just one of a kind, "people without whom after the Partitions Poland probably wouldn't have survived at all." Again, he continues, thanks to this individualism, or let's call it individual creativeness, "the Polish revolutionary movement will become what it has never been in Europe (with the possible exception of Belgium): a factor of universal renewal of our life after half a century of stagnation." [60] He closes this searching essay with a call for "a breath of independent Polish spirit into the whole revolutionary movement" (*o tchnienie niezależnego polskiego ducha w rzecz całą)* and wonders in the end whether the time indeed is ripe for action, or should it not rather be preceded by more contemplation and mature consideration? While citing some oft repeated prophetic lines from Słowacki's "Odpowiedź na 'Psalmy przyszłości' " (Answer to the "Psalms of the future") [61] he raises precisely the question about the right moment without giving an answer, except that his own thoughtful essay is in a way an answer ("therefore in answer to them we need precisely a word, an independent word" [62]):

> We are told today to repeat incessantly what Słowacki once said: "And no one has any benefit from graves except the eternally rousing movement, the spirit which rests beneath the torture of bodies . . ." Has the spirit indeed already woken up under this torture into self-awareness and independence? And does it already make use of the graves sensing the profoundest secret of their victim? Has it already touched the soul of the people and all its layers which are receptive to battle? Is it opulent enough in its means of influencing these souls, rich enough to unite them by something higher than class interest, powerful enough to subject even the recalcitrant, responsible enough not to squander light-heartedly all the treasures of the past, and deeply enough integrated with these

---

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

[61] Słowacki's poem whose purpose had been to debunk the prophetic visionary aspect of Krasiński's "Trzy psalmy" and "to plead for a feeling of spiritual reality and for the concrete obligations resulting therefrom" (J. Kleiner, *Słowacki*, 1927, Vol. IV, Pt. 2, 178) is here used by Berent with the same intent: to question and ask, and to plead for caution in the face of all doctrinaire viewpoints.

[62] Berent, "Idea," p. 77.

> both in feeling and understanding while at the same time sufficiently ebullient to look into the most distant future? In other words: Is this really the spirit of leadership? [63]

In summarizing his position with regard to the revolutionary movement in these doubting questions he nevertheless makes his own viewpoint quite clear. Yes, says Berent in this "independent word" (*słowo niezależne*), it is precisely the individualistic elements in the Polish nation which will prevent the socialist movement from becoming a petrified, inflexible, barrack-type (his reference is to the Prussians) system that would be particularly hostile to the unfolding of the free spirit. In summary, individualism and cultural vitality are indivisible.

Berent in this essay then has stated something fundamental, an idea to which we shall have occasion to return in our further discussion of his work: the importance of the free and independent spirit unencumbered by doctrines and dogmas. He has indeed assessed here those qualities of the Polish mind which he considers essential in the restoration of a new national spirit. And where did he take his Polish models of this *independent* spirit, which would he consider the right sources of inspiration for a new Poland? He has answered his own question: the Polish Humanism, Enlightenment and Romanticism in their outstanding representatives—Zamoyski, Krasicki, Kołłątaj, Naruszewicz, Niemcewicz and Staszic.

Berent in this essay has put his focus on the qualities and strengths of the Polish intellectual tradition: individuality and independence of thought. His final essays, the introduction to his series of biographical sketches and the account of the fate of the Polish Legion under Dąbrowski, originally published under the title "Wywłaszczenie* Muz" (Dispossession of the Muses), and his work "Onegdaj" (The Day before Yesterday), are attempts to come to terms with this intellectual tradition by giving an account of the work of the Society of Friends of Science (Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, 1800-1830) from the point of view of the spirit which moved it and sustained it for thirty years.

Look what was done, he says to his contemporaries, what was achieved for the cause of the Polish language, Polish letters and the natural sciences at a time which for all appearances was most inauspicious for the cultivation of the intellect. The polemical sting could not be missed by anyone who heard Berent deliver these remarks at the opening of the Polish Academy of Letters (Polska Akademia Literatury), November 8, 1933, nor could it be missed by anyone reading them forty years later. From the point of view of Berent something had clearly gone wrong in independent Poland ten years after its rebirth in the area of the

---

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

* Berent is thinking here of the lack of support for the arts in modern Poland while the state nurtured the natural sciences.

Polish national aspirations and its spiritual direction.[64] The emphatic stress on the intellectual situation in the country one hundred years earlier was designed to create an awareness of a potential which was clearly not used and insufficiently recognized.

He starts his introduction to "Wywłaszczenie Muz" with the following terse statement:

> The great effort of that generation made in the beginning of the nineteenth century in the social and national organization of scientific, literary and artistic life in Poland has slipped totally from the memory of posterity, so that after the passage of one century in the attempts to create a similar organization people succeed just in drawing a connection in the field of science with the relief fund of the Kasa Mianowskiego,[65] and in the field of literature and art with foreign academies. Each of these academies in the world has had its own reason for coming into existence, its individual features rooted in the spiritual past of foreign peoples and today has its own tradition as its basis. All this cannot possibly be transferred word for word together with the model and the statutes." [66]

He goes on to say "that we have a tradition reaching much deeper into the recent history of our civilization." [67]

After these brief introductory remarks Berent gives a survey of the organization of the Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk and of the men who were instrumental in guiding its work. Its principal promoter and leader for almost two decades was Stanisław Staszic (1755-1826), president of the Society from 1808-1826, and donor of the site and the building (1823) occupying it, to this day called "Pałac Staszica."

Worthy of admiration is above all Staszic's vision and approach to intellectual matters. Himself a geologist and pioneer of the mining industry in Poland he nevertheless gave his primary attention to the Section on Literature (Wydział Literatury) in the Society considering this aspect of its work of primary significance. But beyond that he saw to it that a Section on Art was created from which eventually the first Polish Academy of Art evolved.

The Section on Art then gave rise to the Conservatoire (School of Music), one of whose first pupils was Chopin. His teachers, Kurpiński

---

[64] See especially Andrzej Strug's political satire on Polish life in the 1930's in *W Nienadybach byczo jest* (1937), also the novels and plays of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz.

[65] The Kasa imienia Mianowskiego (The Mianowski Fund) was set up in 1881 in honour of the last president of the Higher School of Warsaw. Its task was the promotion of scholarship, the publication of scholarly studies and the support of research institutions by raising funds from private individuals. With financial support from the Polish government after 1918, the Fund was able to enlarge its range of activities.

[66] "Wywłaszczenie Muz," *Pamiętnik Warszawski*, 1931, p. 15.

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

and Elsner, both members of the Society, made an effort to create a separate Section on Music in the Society and were instrumental in having a statement placed in the rules of the Section with regard to "the dissemination in music of a taste for the individual, the national."

Staszic was aware of the fact that the literary arts and the Polish language were especially in need of cultivation and support by the Society: "The Section on Literature alone embraces those areas of wisdom which give people immortality, which may preserve a people's language, may illuminate and immortalize it and link its previous existence even with its future being." [68] With regret Berent notes that Staszic's "repository of the Muses" (*przybytek Muz*), viz., the palace which he had donated to the Society in 1823, "had become in independent Poland an arena for the natural sciences and their needs exclusively." [69]

One of the high moments in the life of the Society was the election to membership of General Henryk Dąbrowski, leader of the Polish Legion in Italy, in January 1810. Staszic proposed him for membership for his "amazing constancy of initiatives through which he became the first to start the history of the rebirth of the Polish people, a man who was not only the principal promoter in this process of rebirth but also a man of letters . . ." [70] All of Dąbrowski's manuscripts and all memorabilia connected with the life of the legions were bequeathed to the Society after Dąbrowski's death in 1818. One of the meeting rooms in the Pałac Staszica has since been called "Dąbrowski Hall."

Other events in the spiritual life of the nation in which the Society or its members had a hand were the opening of the Liceum at Krzemieniec (1805) and the rebirth of Wilno University. Branches of the Society grew up in Plock, Lublin, Wilno and Cracow. The Cracow Scientific Society was the only one to survive the destruction of all organized intellectual activity after the suppression of the 1830 revolt, and from it evolved the future Akademia Umiejętności (Academy of Science and Letters).

Honorary membership was conferred upon Chateaubriand and Goethe, and the latter answered with a cordial communication in Latin in May 1830 (two years before his death in March 1832): "Remain, however, convinced that I shall do all that is in my power not to make you think that you have tied yourself to a slothful man." [71]

The Society in a sense provided a substitute for intellectual effort and ability which under normal circumstances could have been channelled into public affairs. It set prizes on certain projects proposed by the

---

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

membership and it organized public lectures. Its Yearbooks (Roczniki) gave an account of the scholarly work of its members.

All these matters are briefly sketched by Berent who, however, does not pretend to give a full accounting of the work of the Society, nor analyze its success and failures in any detailed fashion. His purpose is to give an outline of the spirit that animated it and that produced lasting works particularly in the field of Polish poetry and prose and in the study of the Polish language. This atmosphere which inspired the poet Karpiński (a member of the Society), the philologist Kopczyński, the poet and public servant Niemcewicz, the lexicographer Linde is precious to Berent above anything else: "I am not concerned with the history of the Society after all nor with its inevitable decline in the prevailing circumstances but with the *spirit* [my italics, J.B.] of the best years and best aspects of this tradition *which after all no civilized people would let escape in order later to reach exclusively for foreign models and traditions* [Berent's italics].[72]

Berent certainly felt that something was "out of joint" in the intellectual life of independent Poland. His biographical tales in the thirties are an expression of this feeling in artistic form, and his speech at the opening of the Polish Academy of Letters is a statement of the same concern. What will happen to a country, he wonders, that reaches for foreign models instead of seeking its values in its own traditions. Once more, therefore, he draws attention to the fact that the returning officers and generals of the Polish legions brought with them from abroad a wide range of new experiences and new knowledge. Roughly ten years in foreign lands had taught many of them new skills: General Fiszer had turned his attention to mathematics and astronomy; Wybicki, author of the mazurka of the legions (now the national anthem), had studied philosophy; general Mroziński philology; Cyprian Godebski had become a poet; Sokolnicki had become a regular member of the French Academy; in short, all these men had brought back from Europe a new fervour for learning and intellectual pursuits. Even if they had not gained independence for their country, the fruits of their stay abroad were intellectual and were soon to raise Poland to a new cultural eminence widely respected throughout Europe.

The Towarzystwo Filomatów, which was founded in Wilno in 1817 (Mickiewicz was one of its members), on the model of the Société Filomatique de Paris is, of course, only one illustration of the seeds of western intellectual life transplanted to Poland. Joseph Maria Hoene-Wroński (1778-1853), the great Polish mystic philosopher, strongly influenced the Romantic poets in exile in Paris after 1831. He, too, was one of the young officers under Dąbrowski's command who received their first introduction into the world of learning while serving with the Polish legions abroad. The spirit of those days was different from what

---

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Poland was able to show one hundred years later, and Berent does not fail to remind us: "There is no room here for details nor for a litany of names that have faded into oblivion. We are interested in the spirit of this generation." [73] At one of the sessions of the Society of Friends of Science Staszic spoke these remarkable words with regard to the Polish language quoted by Berent: "Our first concern are these precious signs received as a legacy from our fathers with a blessing attached to them that as long as we preserve these native signs with respect and free of blemish, so long, regardless of the destiny in store for our country, it may fall, yet it cannot perish." [74]

Staszic was a man of vision, a man who was able to recognize what was important now with a view toward the future, and Berent made it his point to keep this vision alive among his contemporaries. When Staszic turned over the building housing the Society in 1823, which was his gift, he did it with the words: 'Not for temporal benefit but for the good and use of future generations."[75] With these words he was in a way summing up his own work, yet their appropriateness in terms of the theme of Berent's address one hundred years later must have seemed particularly striking to his audience.

Once in conversation with Ludwik Hieronim Morstin (1886-1970), his co-editor on the *Pamiętnik Warszawski* (1929-1930), Berent is reported to have said "You want to know why I turned to the period of the Polish legions? In order to show our society how in a moment of tragedy the spiritual goods of the people must be saved." [76] What is most meaningful then in Berent's essays "The Dispossession of the Muses" and "The Day Before Yesterday" is the recollection of Poland's past in terms of its relevance for the present. Adverse conditions may strengthen the spirit, and a nation as well as individual human beings are the better for it; decreasing pressure may result in enfeebling the mind and a nation's moral fibre. This was Berent's frame of reference, a world view in which the work of the spirit in its manifold aspects (education, self-improvement, justice, the promotion of the arts) was given priority above all else. The nursing of the spirit was seen as the highest purpose of any individual and nation. Such a focus on the role of the spirit in life is again in harmony with Nietzsche who spoke of it again and again in his writings: "high spirituality is the spiritualization of justice and of that benevolent severity which sees its mission in preserving the *order of ranks* in the world, among objects as well as among men." [77]

---

[73] Wacław Berent, "Onegdaj" (Warsaw, 1933), p. 19.

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 53. The Polish text reads: "Nie dla swoczesnych pożytków, lecz dla dobra i użytku pokoleń przyszłych."

[76] Ludwik Hieronim Morstin, "Spotkania z ludźmi: Wacław Berent," *Przekrój*, No. 47 (1946), pp. 5-6.

[77] Nietzsche, II, 684. (...; dass die hohe Giestigkeit eben die Vergeistigung der Gerechtigkeit und jener gütigen Strenge ist, welche sich beauftragt weiss, die *Ordnung des Ranges* in der Welt aufrechtzuerhalten, unter den Dingen selbst — und nicht nur unter Menschen.)

So far not a word has been said about the form of Berent's essays. As a form of writing the essay was brought to great perfection at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century by such masters of the essay as Paul Valéry, T. S. Eliot, Miguel de Unamuno, Thomas Mann, Walter Benjamin, and others. Making no claim at scientific exactness or exhaustive treatment of any topic it reflects on the various aspects of the topic under discussion and illuminates it from various viewpoints. It treats every topic in perfect freedom without any *a priori* assertion nor any claim for certainty or solution of a question at the end. Being itself a product of reflection its purpose is to invite reflection: "Also in the manner of presentation the essay must not proceed as if it had derived its topic from elsewhere and there remained nothing else to be said about it. Relativeness is distinctive to its form. It has to proceed as if it could always and at any moment come to an end. The essay thinks in fragments just as reality is fragmentary, and it finds its unity by way of the fragments and not by eliminating them. Unity in logical sequence is deceptive with regard to the antagonistic character of the matter upon which it is imposed. Discontinuity is proper to the essay, . . ." [78]

Discursiveness in treatment does not imply lack of coherence. Mastery in the form of the essay depends on mastery of language and expression. It is restrained in its use of language, yet aims towards polish and elegance. With its best practitioners the essay sparkles with wit and brilliant exposés (among modern writers see T. S. Eliot, Thomas Mann, Walter Benjamin). As a form of writing it is excellently designed to give the writer an unrestricted field to use his mind, to be suggestive, to risk ideas without the necessity of reaching conclusions. These various characteristics make the essay one of the intellectually most exciting and rewarding forms of writing: "Those who think they should protect the mind against lack of firmness are his enemies: mind itself, once emancipated is mobile. As soon as it desires more than merely the administrative repetition and preparation of what already is, it is unfulfilled; truth deprived of play would be only tautology. Historically, therefore, the essay is related to rhetorics, . . . The satisfactions which rhetorics wishes to afford its listener are sublimated in the essay to the idea of happiness in possession of freedom versus the object, a freedom which imparts more of its own quality to the object than the object would otherwise have if it were pitilessly made a part of the order of ideas. . . . Therefore, the most immanent law of form of the essay is heresy. By violating the orthodoxy of a thought it makes visible that aspect of a cause whose concealment had actually been the latter's objective purpose." [79]

Berent's essays reflect these thoughts on the form of the essay. His essays are provocative and searching, questioning with regard to any

---

[78] Theodor W. Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur I* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 35.

[79] *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 44, 49.

doctrinaire beliefs and formulations, sharply negative towards traditional attitudes that have lost their *raison d'être.* Negation is one of the aspects of his essays, which by its very nature contains the seeds of the positive: "The aspect of risk, anticipation, lack of total redemption of each detail in the essay produces others as negation. Untruth in whose net the essay becomes deliberately enmeshed is the element of its truth."[80]

An illustration of another form of essay is Przybyszewski's "On the Question of the Psychology of the Individual: Chopin and Nietzsche:" "There is a mood in human existence which gave birth to art and to which it must return, and this is what we call ecstasy in its various forms of expression. It appears as joy in the trembling of the flesh, in the intensive spending of power, in the intoxication and the surfeit of the Dionysiac desire for lust, for a volcanic eruption, for power and force. In its very being and in its origin art is ecstasy and ecstasy must give rise to it, otherwise we don't need it." [81] Diffuseness of style and thought is here linked with an ecstatic pathos in language, positive and assertive in argument and not restrained and questioning. Here a new myth is posited where the erotic subconscious drive and the creative act are said to coalesce. This idea differs completely from Berent who insisted on the link between imagination and reason in the creative process. His essays differed from Przybyszewski's both in content of thought and method.

Before closing this chapter a word must be said about Berent as a figure in the European intellectual context of the first four decades preceding the Second World War. We shall be better able to measure his stature if we say a word first about Thomas Mann, Paul Valéry and Miguel de Unamuno, all of them his contemporaries and men of commanding stature in the spiritual life of their individual countries. What these few remarks should show is a realization that there was and is a spiritual community among the great intellects of the Western world of whom Berent was one.

What we have said so far about Berent as essayist has shown that as a human being and as an artist he was deeply committed to the welfare of his own country and of humanity at large. He knew something of the responsibility of the intellect and he took this responsibility seriously. In this sense he resembled Thomas Mann whom, incidentally, he admired greatly and upon whose forced emigration from Germany in

---

[80] *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

[81] Stanisław Przybyszewski, "Zur Psychologie des Individuums: Chopin und Nietzsche" (Berlin, 1892), pp. 46-47. The pathos of style is particularly noticeable in the German original: Es gibt eine Stimmung im menschlichen Gemütsleben, von der die Kunst ins Leben gerufen wurde und zu der sie zurückkehren muss und das ist der Rausch in seinen mannigfachen Aeusserungen, als Freude am Erbeben des Fleisches, an der intensen Kraftverausgabung, an dem Durchtrunken- und Durchsättigtwerden von dem dionysischen Willen zur Lust, zur vulkanischen Entladung, zur Macht und Wucht. Rausch ist die Kunst ihrem Wesen, ihrer Entstehung nach und Rausch muss sie hervorrufen, sonst haben wir sie nicht nötig.—

1933 Berent looked with great sadness. Here is a statement with regard to Thomas Mann by his friend Erich von Kahler on the responsibility of the intellect ("Die Verantwortung des Geistes") in human affairs, a statement which could be equally applied to Berent: "The dangerous chasm which has formed during the last century between the avant-garde of human consciousness and the great current of national life, which has deprived the intellect of influence and human events of guidance, this distance can be reduced only when the intellectual fully takes charge and builds a bridge from truth to reality. He will have to interpret his truth himself, he will have to translate himself into a language that reaches others. If he himself does not forget, if he himself makes others feel that the apparently most obscure that he is doing is in the service of humanity and for the benefit of humanity, if he succeeds in making others understand the tenuous connection that exists between his deepest searching and the exterior existence, then he may perhaps prevail upon them to make the effort and meet him halfway, to listen to his judgment and his advice. . . . And this is the path Thomas Mann has shown us in his evolution." [82] In this discussion of the man of intellect in confrontation with his time Kahler refers particularly to Thomas Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Reflections of an Unpolitical Man), 1918, where questions of politics, civilization and the writer's role are discussed at length. This is, of course, the same role which Berent saw for himself and to which he felt called particularly with increasing age. The truth of what Kahler had said is reflected in Thomas Mann's warm reaction: "Those are new words, deeply appreciated words, which explain to us the strange twofold existence of artist and warrior, which we accept involuntarily and of necessity, words which themselves form a bridge between truth and reality, play and seriousness, risk and simplicity, between intellect and democracy." [83]

Another great intellectual of the first half of this century was Paul Valéry (1871-1945). His numerous essays on politics, history, intelligence and the mind present a wealth of culture while at the same time showing a profound concern over the future of our civilization. Again we are struck by the close similarity of individual character and intellectual stance when we look at Valéry and Berent as representatives of the intellectual élite of their respective peoples. One character feature of Valéry's is stressed by Salvador de Madariaga who had known Valéry personally and has written the excellent introduction to Volume X of Valéry's *Collected Works* in English—pride. Pride was a pronounced

---

[82] Erich von Kahler, *Die Verantwortung des Geistes* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1952), p. 130.

[83] Thomas Mann, *Gesammelte Werke in Zwölf Bänden* (Berlin: Fischer, 1960), Vol. X, 506. (Das sind neue Worte, tief dankenswerte Worte, die uns das seltsame Doppeldasein von Künstler und Kämpfer erklären, das wir unwilkürlich und notgedrungen auf uns nehmen, Worte, die selbst eine Brücke bilden zwischen Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit, Spiel und Ernst, Wagnis und Schlichtheit, zwischen Geist und Demokratie.)

personality trait of Berent's reported by all his contemporaries. Valéry considered pride indispensable for the intellectual man: "The purer the pride, the stronger and more solitary it is in the soul and the more it keeps the mind meditating on its works, respecting them, endlessly thrusting them back into the fire of undying desire, the aim of art is purified by the attack of a great soul. The artist is little by little stripped of his gross general illusions, and his powers perform for him immense invisible labours." [84]

It is of special interest to our subject to note Valéry's interest in Poland. In 1934, he wrote the preface to Edward Krakowski's *Histoire de Pologne.* In this preface he stresses those matters that appeal to him in Krakowski's book: "But Mr. Krakowski is precisely one of those historians who are not the object of my criticism. He is one of those who do not limit their curiosity and research to the study of political and social phenomena. To him there are many other events in no way inferior in importance to these. I mean the events of the intellectual world: ideas and the great men who father great ideas." [85] The following statement could have come from Berent: "May I add that the fate of mankind as a species depends profoundly on holding to our conviction of the pre-eminent value of spiritual events." How much comfort any Polish intellectual would have drawn from these thoughtful words summarizing what Valéry had to say about Krakowski's book: "The Polish epic retraced by Mr. Krakowski is a spiritual event. The order of facts, as he conceives it, serves only to illustrate and punctuate the hidden development of a vast collective idea. And that is why this historical work touching upon so many present considerations as well, is of such an urgent and potent actuality. Poland today, considered in all her heroic past and ancestral culture seems destined to continue her great civilizing and mediating role in modern Europe. Mr. Edward Krakowski is right to speak of a spiritual affinity between Poland and France: both are conscious that in serving their national cause they serve the cause of humanity." [86]

These words are spoken with sincerity and conviction. Could the importance of intellectual matters, of matters of the spirit by whose interaction men and nations are enriched have been stated more lucidly?

Berent belonged to that community of leading European minds, artists and thinkers, profoundly concerned with the spiritual fate of their respective countries. It was this concern and feeling of responsibility which gave the impetus to the writing of his essays over a period of four decades. They were intended to shake complacency and to induce

---

[84] Salvador de Madariaga, Introduction to Paul Valéry, "History and Politics," *The Collected Works in English* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962), Vol. X, xxix.

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 334.

[86] *Ibid.*, pp. 336-337.

thoughtfulness, created in the same frame of mind and with the same hope which Unamuno once expressed in a brief essay ("To a Young Writer"): "My thoughts germinate in me and bear fruit in others." [87]

EARLY PROSE

> Here they exchange the university voluntarily for the factory, build radiometers, liberate humanity . . . Dreamers! Madmen! But strangely likeable madmen! . . .[88]

> Life without aim and without hope,
> Work without a tomorrow, decline of will
> Madness or despair, one alternating with the other,
> Can there be a greater misery? [89]

Four of Berent's prose works fall within the compass of this chapter: 1. "Nauczyciel" (The Teacher), Berent's first published work; it appeared in 1894 in the periodical *Ateneum* (Vol. I, pp. 8-50) under the pseudonym Wł. Rawicz and was never reprinted; 2. "Przy niedzieli" (On a Sunday), July 1894, in *Gazeta Polska* (No. 156) under the same pseudonym with a slightly altered abbreviation of the first name, Wcł. Rawicz; this work, too, was never republished; 3. *Fachowiec* (The Specialist), Berent's first novel printed under his own name in *Gazeta Polska* in December, 1894 (Nos. 188-198) and during the first months of 1895 (Nos. 1-38); it appeared as a separate publication in 1895; 4. *"W puszczy"* (In the Wilderness), 1896, in *Biblioteka Warszawska* under Berent's own name, republished in 1912 together with *Fachowiec.*

Let us recall that at the time of writing of "Nauczyciel" Berent was twenty years old. In 1893, he had shifted his place of study from Munich to Zurich. Unfortunately, we lack any information about the place or time of writing of these early works, or about other outward circumstances. The works themselves, however, testify to an astonishing intellectual and literary maturity. Frequently called "anti-Positivist" in their ideological tendency (Hultberg speaks of *Fachowiec* as "a novel decidedly anti-Positivist," p. 34, of "Nauczyciel" as "just as anti-Positivist as *Fachowiec,*" p. 59 [90]; Krzyżanowski summarizes *Fachowiec* as

---

[87] Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, *Perplexities and Paradoxes* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), p. 165.

[88] Berent, *Fachowiec* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1956), p. 159.

[89] Jan Tuczyński, *Schopenhauer a Młoda Polska* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1969), p. 60. (From L. Sowiński, *Wybór poezji,* Kraków, 1922, p. 135.)

[90] For these details I am indebted to the study by Peer Hultberg, *Styl wczesnej prozy fabularnej Wacława Berenta* (Wrocław-Warsaw, 1969), 236 pp.; as well as to Władysław Studencki's study frequently cited above. Studencki also mentions that "Nauczyciel" might not necessarily represent Berent's first printed work but that he might have done some artistic writing in German as a student in Munich and published this work in student literary periodicals. Studencki adds that he could not verify his assumption, but it obviously will have to be looked into and discussed at some other place.

"an attack against the slogans professed by the Warsaw 'Organicists' both the older and younger ones" [91]; and Janusz Wilhelmi describes *Fachowiec* as "a book about the hypocrisy of a certain ideology" [92]), Berent's early artistic works appeared at the threshold of a new literary movement in Poland, of what is commonly called "Młoda Polska" [93] (Young Poland) or Neo-Romanticism. While still conceived under the influence of the Positivist literature of the preceding three decades (1863-1894), they in fact clearly show the characteristics of a new literary trend, of the "decadence." Indeed, it cannot be overlooked that the year 1894, the year when Berent published "Nauczyciel," "Przy niedzieli" and *Fachowiec*, also saw the appearance of three landmarks of "decadent" literature: Kazimierz Tetmajer, *Poezje Seria II* (Poetry Series II), the full translation into Polish of Baudelaire's *Kwiaty grzechu* (Les Fleurs du Mal) by Antoni Lange (1863-1929), and Zenon Miriam-Przesmycki's translation of Maeterlinck, *Wybór pism dramatycznych* (Selection of Dramatic Writings). For at least a decade, however, Positivist and Decadent writing existed side by side: Orzeszkowa's *Bene nati* (1891), *Pieśń przerwana* (The Interrupted Song), 1896, Prus's *Lalka* (The Doll) in 1890, *Emancypantki* (The Emancipated Women), 1890-1893, Sienkiewicz's *Bez dogmatu* (Without Dogma) in 1891, and *Quo Vadis* in 1896.[94]

Positivism had been an ideological movement of exceptional force in Poland due to the collapse of the January uprising in 1863. In the special historical situation which had prevailed in Poland since 1795 (the year of the Third Partition) and which had become solidified after the unsuccessful uprisings of 1831 and 1863, Positivism seemed to provide the most sensible and rational basis to restore the spirit of the nation. While its philosophical basis came from Auguste Comte (1798-1857), it

---

[91] Julian Krzyżanowski, *Neo-Romantyzm Polski (1890-1918)* (Warsaw, 1963), p. 268.

[92] Janusz Wilhelmi, Introduction to the edition of Wacław Berent, *Dzieła wybrane* (Warsaw, 1956), Vol. I (*Fachowiec*), p. 15.

[93] Artur Górski (1870-1959) was the first to use this term with reference to the new trend in Polish writing in his study, *Młoda Polska* (1898). The term came from the title of a periodical published by Polish emigrés in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century during the period of Romanticism. During approximately the same years there was a literary movement in Germany called "Junges Deutschland" (1830-1848). A detailed discussion of this term will be given in Chapter V, "Próchno" (Rotten Wood).

[94] The simultaneous writing in two different styles is best illustrated by the publication at almost the same time in the same *Gazeta polska* of Berent's *Fachowiec* and Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis*. *Fachowiec* filled the space that was left in *Gazeta polska* between the publication of Sienkiewicz's *Rodzina Połanieckich* (The Połaniecki Family) and the already announced yet belated *Quo Vadis*. Curiously, the same was to happen again when Berent sent *Próchno* to the editor of *Chimera* who used it to fill the empty space left by the delay in the submission of Przybyszewski's manuscript, *Synowie ziemi* (Sons of the Earth).

became a system of thought and Weltanschauung of wide acceptance in all European countries. A principal spokesman of this movement in the field of literary criticism was Hippolyte Taine (1828-1890) who summed up Balzac's art as a novelist in the *Journal des Débats* (1858) in the following way: "If you believe that in human nature the essential element is reason, you will take reason as your hero and you will depict generosity and virtue. If your eyes turn to the external envelope and are interested only in the body, you will choose the body as your ideal, and you will depict voluptuous flesh and vigorous muscles. If you see in sensibility the important part of man, you will see beauty only in lively emotion and you will depict falling tears and delicate sentiments. Your opinion about nature will dictate your opinion about beauty, your idea about the real man will form your idea of the ideal man, your philosophy will direct your art.—Thus it is that the philosophy of Balzac has directed the art of Balzac. He considered man as a force: he took force as his ideal. He freed it of its fetters, he has shown it complete, free, indifferent to justice which keeps it from harming others; he has made it larger, has nourished it, has spread it out and put it on view in the foreground, as hero and sovereign, in monomaniacs and scoundrels." [95]

This deterministic assessment of literary art, which was shared by others (see the literary scholarship of Gustave Lanson), could not but arouse gloom and apprehension with such a writer as Flaubert who is reported to have confessed to his friend Turgenev: "What shocks me in my friends, Sainte-Beuve and Taine, is that they do not pay sufficient attention to Art, the work in itself, composition, style, briefly what makes for Beauty." [96]

Poland's Positivist writers echoed Taine's observations. In his review of Orzeszkowa's *Pan Graba* Sienkiewicz wrote in 1872: "The novel is an intermediary genre between an artistic and social-scientific product. It is impossible not to recognize that the contemporary novel in particular, while preserving artistic form on the one hand, yet in doing service to certain goals not necessarily connected with art on the other hand, functions as a means of affecting human minds and inclines toward a more narrow social sphere. As a result the tendentious novel may be considered in some ways a pamphlet with an artistic form; it proves certain principles in a vivid manner, i.e., by examples taken from life." [97]

Verisimilitude and social interest in this context become aesthetic criteria which are used as a means of judging the literary importance of a work of art: ". . . do the figures which appear in a tale move within

---

[95] George J. Becker, ed., *Documents of Modern Literary Realism* (Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 110-111.

[96] Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn: A study of Five French Realists* (New York: Oxford, 1966), pp. 12-13.

[97] Tomasz Weiss, *Przełom antypozytywistyczny w Polsce w latach 1880-1890* (Przemiany postaw światopoglądowych i teorii artystycznych) (Cracow, 1966), pp. 12-13n.

the limits of the possible, and once there, are they carried through the entire action with psychological verisimilitude?" [98]

Eliza Orzeszkowa had formulated similar postulates versus literature as early as 1866, in an essay entitled "Kilka uwag nad powieścią" (Some Observations on the Novel), in *Gazeta Polska* (Nos. 285, 286, 288): "Woe to the writer who does not understand his period; his works will be forgotten. The novel ought to shape the mind of the reader. It is not the writer's intent to arouse 'feverish interest.' A piece of writing ought to hold an idea, to contain knowledge. This knowledge should train the reader in the conviction that it was neither accidents nor exceptions which were decisive in life. Our age has taken a fondness to learning, research, reflection and has rejected day-dreaming. Tendency in literature, therefore, ought to base itself on scientific premises, on the results of research and on the signs of reflection; likewise, it should derive from a comprehension of the main direction in which the evolutionary process of society is moving." [99]

These simplicistic observations on the function of art can all be summarized by a brief statement from Chernyshevskij's (1828-1889) "Esteticheskie otnoshenija iskusstva k dejstvitel'nosli" (Esthetic Relationships of Art to Reality), 1885: "works of art are both more petty than anything we meet in life or nature and at the same time more effective. Is it to be wondered at that the opinion prevails that art is more beautiful than life or nature in which there is so little artificiality and to which the effort to awaken interest is foreign? . . . Life and nature are superior to art, . . .[100] Reality is greater than dreams and essential significance more important than fantastic pretensions." [101]

Positivism in Poland experienced a crisis as early as the mid-seventies. Somehow society did not develop as the Positivists had hoped, and as early as 1876 one of the leading spokesmen of Positivism in Poland, Aleksander Świętochowski (1849-1938), wrote the following in *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, the militant organ of Positivism of those years: "The progress of civilization, especially of the large cities results in a rise of immorality and decay. Whether we like it or not we must admit after all that the more the titanic work of humanity increases wealth, strengthens the complexity and variety of social groups, produces constantly new ways of giving satiety to all human appetites and desires, the more we observe with regard to the general development an increase in demoralization which in its negative way is one of the features of the desire for pleasure characteristic of our epoch." [102] This is the same

---

[98] *Ibid.*, p. 13n.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 13n.

[100] Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

[101] *Ibid.*, p. 77.

[102] Weiss, *op. cit.*, p. 18 (from Przegląd Tygodniowy, 1876, No. 4).

Świętochowski who three years earlier, in 1873, had spoken of the bourgeoisie as the "healthiest class of society, above all predestined for a leading role in the social changes." [103] Now, in 1876, he became the author of a book presenting an entirely different outlook, entitled *Dumania pesymisty* (Musings of a Pessimist). Let us add that Świętochowski's viewpoint about the state of society and its development changed after he had spent three years (1874-1876) studying philosophy in Leipzig. Leipzig University, at that time one of the largest universities in Germany, the alma mater of Nietzsche who had studied there between 1865 and 1869 with the outstanding professor of classical philology Friedrich Wilhelm Ritschl (1806-1876),[104] was a foremost intellectual centre in Europe until World War Two.

Three factors affected the Positivist world view in Poland in the 1870's and led to its decline: the discovery of Schopenhauer (1788-1860), the growing influence of the French "decadent" movement and the general malaise which took hold of Europe in the wake of the increasing strength of Germany after the defeat of France in 1871. Świętochowski could not fail to make the acquaintance with Schopenhauer's philosophy during his three years at Leipzig. Schopenhauer had had to wait to be discovered until 1853 when his philosophy was discussed for the first time by the English scholar John Oxenford. Schopenhauer at this time was already sixty-five years old and would have only seven years to live and enjoy his fame which was beginning to sweep Europe and would become universal in the sixties and seventies.[105] The above quote from Świętochowski's *Przodownictwo bezwstydu* (The Hegemony of Shamelessness) already illustrates the penetration of Schopenhauer's thought into his outlook. His *Dumania pesymisty* (1877) and his subsequent writings, "Obecna doba" (The Present Day), 1885, and "Nauka ze skutków" (Lesson from the Results), 1885, all exhibit a fatalistic view with regard to the development of society: "The situation of Polish society (and not only of the Polish; the writer has observed the symptoms of an identical crisis in all of Europe) is irreversible: [. . .] it is the

---

[103] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[104] It is very likely that Świętochowski had an opportunity to hear the lectures of Ritschl whose reputation extended throughout the university. Karl Jaspers says of Ritschl: "Ritschl's seminar on classical philology was unique because of the professor's method of philosophical interpretation; even numerous medical students and other non-philologists went to his lectures in order to acquire 'method.' Nietzsche had the good fortune to meet during his studies a genuine scholar and researcher." (Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1950, p. 34.)

[105] Kazimierz Wyka: "Why, it was already too late to conceal the pessimistic foundations of determinist learning; after all, through all of Europe runs the wave of pessimism. Schopenhauer is the new discovery and fashion." (Wszak już zbyt późno by dały się ukryć pesymistyczne podstawy naukowości deterministycznej; wszak przez całą Europę idzie fala pesymizmu, odkryty i modny staje się Schopenhauer.) (Kazimierz Wyka, *Modernizm polski*, Cracow, 1968, p. 48.)

seed of that fatalism which condemns society to fruitless sufferings. And one must make peace with the fruits of these seeds." [106]

Bolesław Prus whom we quoted earlier as a representative of Positivism in 1884 added his voice to the chorus of pessimists: "Under the varnish of innumerable technical improvements we see the whirl of the same covetousness, fraud, weakness and stupidity, pain and querulousness, in a word, the old man who in thirty centuries has not changed one dot." [107]

We mentioned above the growing influence of the French decadence as a factor in the disintegration of Positivism in Poland. While its arrival in Poland was delayed by four decades, it came nevertheless with the translation of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* in 1894 and Maeterlinck's *Selected Works of Drama* in the same year, the latter furnished with an extensive preface by Zenon Miriam-Przesmycki.[108] Kazimierz Wyka makes it his point to stress the perseverance of Poland's indigenous Positivism which would not allow the penetration into the country of new literary currents. He attributes this to the languishing existence of lyrical poetry which might have absorbed the new trends: "the result was such that none of the changes taking place in France in artistic form and sensibility reached us at the right time. Parnassianism did not reach us, nor did the lyrics of Baudelaire, nor the chiselled prose of Flaubert, nor did naturalism find a place for it was stifled by the juicier emotional realism which was adapted to Polish conditions." [109]

The ballast of Positivism in Poland was heavy, and new aestheic idea gained acceptance only with difficulty. Much the same situation, incidentally, prevailed in Russia where only in 1893—at about the same time as in Poland—Dmitrij Merezhkovskij (1865-1941) published his famous essay which announced the arrival of a new literary tradition: "O prichinakh upadka i o novykh techenijakh sovremennoj russkoj literatury" (On the Reasons for the Decline and on the New Currents in Contemporary Russian Literature).

Berent's "Nauczyciel" is written in the style of a first-person narrative. Its account in the form of a confession is preceded by a brief introduction where the hero's relationship to the author-narrator is described. The German teacher, Johann Derner, had come to say farewell to the

---

[106] Weiss, *op .cit.*, p. 19.

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[108] In Poland it was particularly Zenon Miriam-Przesmycki (1861-1944) who took up Théophile Gautier's (1811-1872) call for *l'art pour l'art* (formulated as a literary doctrine in his preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 1835) in his own creative writing, his critical essays and his translations. He was instrumental in bringing the new artistic movement to Poland as editor of *Życie* (1887-1888) and later of *Chimera* (1901-1908). Approximately four decades separated Gautier' *Emaux et Camées* (1852) from Przesmycki's *Z czary młodości* (From the Cup of Youth), 1893.

[109] Wyka, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

narrator on the eve of his departure from Lwów. The narrator is well disposed to this man ("My friend Johann Derner was an upright German: my wife even says that he was the only decent German in the world"), and this attitude is central to the theme of the story which raises the question of how our lives should relate to society and still bring personal fulfillment. Johann Derner has decided to leave Lwów and return to Germany. At first evasive in stating his reasons the narrator inclines him to frankness, and as a result we have his confession. This confession is as much an analysis of social mores as of his own behaviour, and the success of this tale rests precisely on the tension between these two.

Johann Derner is the offspring of a patriarchal German family. His father had been a teacher in a German high school, had fought in the Franco-Russian war of 1870-71, had received the iron cross for valour in action and had always been held up as an ideal to his son. In such a milieu the son did not develop his own personality, but simply imitated what was considered to be good. With the constant refrain of "Look at your father" in his ears he, too, became a teacher; he, too, hated the French; he, too, went to the same tavern for his beer, and after his father's death drank from the same mug and even played the same game of skittles which his father had liked. This entire account is full of irony and bitterness: "patriarchal family"; "although this mammoth has also been preserved with us, its best specimens live in Germany"; "I took my beginning from this social conservatism" (*konserwa* in Polish instead of *konserwatyzm*, which is an ironic play on words); "he had the iron cross from the French war, and I, too, will be valorous and will beat the French"; "Father drank beer, and I, too, will drink beer"; "Father played skittles, and I will play skittles." [110]

This unfortunate start of the hero's life explains much of what follows. The first independent decision in his life is to move to Lwów with his widowed mother. Lwów in the late eighties and early nineties was developing into an industrial as well as a cultural centre. German was an obligatory subject in high school in this area of Poland under Austrian administration. Derner, who has no gift as a teacher and who is completely unfamiliar with the Polish language and with Polish traditions, and above all with the mentality of children, now is faced with sixty boys eager to pounce on any weakness they can find in their mentor. The situation, of course, was cruel and could have brought a better man to fall. Derner is unable to establish discipline and consequently to teach the children anything. His constant shouts of "Quiet" (*Cii . . . szej!*) result in more uproar ("My first intervention was very awkward. I drawled out the *Cii* in an impossible fashion which produced general laughter"). His teaching method is boring not only to the children but to himself also ("While writing on the blackboard the ABC or while translating sen-

---

[110] "Nauczyciel," *Ateneum* (1894), I, 9.

tences like 'Mother sleeps,' 'Father reads,' I sank into a kind of numbness which usually results from a boring and monotonous occupation").

Faced with constant disorder in his class, he receives a reprimand from the principal. Instead of trying to become more effective, he now tries to arouse pity with the children by telling them that he will be dismissed if they don't behave better. He is counting on their natural goodheartedness, which turns out to be a mistaken hope. The answer to his implorations is laughter. Derner more and more loses control over the children. His attempts at severity misfire. He is weak and lacks the gift of acting with self-assurance and firmness. The children call him "szwab," the contemptuous expression for "German" ("Prusak" = "Prussian" is also the colloquial Polish word for black-beetle) and he replies contemptuously: *"Tak, ja jestem szwabem* (Yes, I am a 'kraut')."

These unfortunate developments in the hero's professional life are somewhat ameliorated by his romance and marriage to a Polish woman —Zosia. This romance, however, plays a very subordinate role in the development of the story. It is not needed in terms of the psychological revelation of the hero except to provide emotional relief by showing Derner as a normal human being in need of love and understanding. His love declaration is awkward, and his manner as a suitor is shy and helpless, but this is all accidental to the developing drama of his relationship with the children.

The incident with the word "szwab" is followed by others: the glue on his desk chair, the pejorative word "szwaja" (derived from "szwaczka"—seamstress, with lewd overtones) with reference to Zosia, "komarowe sadło" (mosquito suet) as abusive acclamation for Derner, the incident with the boy who is beaten and kicked by the hero, the attack by several adolescents at the doorsteps to Derner's flat, the stones tossed through his window. These events are followed by a prolonged illness. Finally, the examination period gives him an opportunity to settle accounts with the children in a cruel fashion. As a result he receives an anonymous letter from the children threatening further vindictive action. This series of events plus the attempted punishment of the boy who wrote the letter increase the hero's dementia. He is now dismissed from his duties, yet he sees the evil of this world in the eyes and red cheeks of children and tries to take his revenge on them by painfully pinching these little red cheeks. The climax of his thirst for revenge is the attempted strangling of his own baby son. Zosia prevents this crime at the last moment and is in complete despair when she realizes her husband's psychological condition. Both husband and wife decide to follow medical advice and seek a change in environment by returning to Germany where "there is hope that the children will be different and where the hero will forget his nightmare of persecution." [111]

It was said earlier that the success of this tale rested on the tension

---

[111] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

between the demands of the social milieu and the individual's inability to meet them in terms of socially meaningful and psychologically satisfying activity. The social milieu was ruthless from what we learn from the tale. Sixty children in a classroom is not an assignment for a teacher but for a sergeant, and that's precisely what most teachers were. Cruel corporeal punishment, above all birch-rod whipping, solitary confinement in a dark room, and general intimidation were used in order to maintain discipline. It was a dehumanizing system to which the hero fell victim. His inability to adapt to it broke him. This, however, is only one aspect of the drama of his life. The other is strictly personal and is connected with his upbringing and his psychological development. Raised in an authoritative framework, he tried to work through authority and failed. He tried to produce sympathy and failed, and when he finally struck back cruelly and viciously, he was destroyed. A wasted life, in other words? If we stopped our analysis here, the work would have to be placed in the tradition of psychological realism, a tradition that has produced excellent models both in Poland (Orzeszkowa, *Meir Ezofowicz, Cham*—The Boor) and Russia (particularly Chekhov's "My Life," "A Dreary Story," "Anonymous Story" and others). But the story goes beyond psychological realism and penerates those regions of the subconscious (dream and madness) which are associated with Romanticism and Symbolism.

The form of the work is dramatic. Nature descriptions are lacking except for one brief stop to give us the atmosphere of the park where Derner had gone with Zosia after a morning of harrowing experiences at school: "All about there was quiet, but not the oppressive quiet of lifelessness. . . . Before us spread the smooth-surface of the pond and glistened in all the colours of the rainbow. The plants along the shore were reflected in it and coloured its waters with a green hue. Further on, the setting sun cast rays of red light on it, and on the opposite shore the shadow of the spreading chestnuts was colouring the water blue." This description is impressionistic and reminds one of Chekhov. But it is only momentary. The big eyes and the alert expression which originally had drawn the hero to the Polish children turn into a nightmare and the mischief which they do to him increases his revulsion ("For the first time I experienced that feeling"; ". . . A snake does not look the way a child manages to look"; "his blue eyes are laughing"). This revulsion and his increasing difficulties reach their climax in the hero's nightmare where he sees himself on a battlefield surrounded by wounded men dying and by dead men all thrown together in the wildest shapes, a chaos of lifeless bodies, horse cadavers and the remains of broken weapons. While the battle moves elsewhere, from the holes in the ground and from among the dead and dying enormous vermin begin to creep out. These vermin take on human shapes, the shape of children. They attack the hero who tries to fight them off, they suck his blood like werewolves, hundreds of them hang on his body till the remaining drops of his life are gone and the hero passes away.

This nightmare in the hero's subconscious world assumes the form

of reality in his wakeful moments. He develops a raving fear of children and shouts to Zosia, "Do not let them kill me," when stones are thrown through his window. He experiences a feeling of pathological satisfaction in punishing children: "It was more than clear; I was looking for children. For this purpose I am spending a few hours every day intently enjoying this entertainment. . . . I would look at these small bodies, these curly heads, big eyes, would listen to their shrill shouts, and every time my lips would broaden into an evil smile" [112]; "I miss no opportunity to pluck, to pinch or to pull someone's ear, or to find some way and inflict some meanness on them." In the evenings when the hero would stop and think about his behaviour black thoughts would come to his mind and he would realise that he was on the verge of insanity. What he does becomes completely irrational such as the pretence to kiss Zosia's hand which he then bites until blood spurts out. If we can speak of any literary influence here in these pages it may be both Chekhov and Dostoevskij as well as Nietzsche, Chekhov in terms of the small-town atmosphere, the lack of fulfillment of the hero, his crushed ambitions, Dostoevskij in his nightmare, irrational outbursts and Nietzsche in his perseverance and faith in his own destiny: "I believed so strongly in my *fatum* that I did not even try to resist" [113] (Nietzsche: "You *must* believe in fatum," . . .).[114]

Berent's work during the nineties stands on the borderline between the old psychological realism and symbolism. The symbolism is suggested by the oppressive atmosphere which the author creates: the world of the children which is on the border of wickedness and relentless torture (the hero's repeatedly uttered phrase, "What have I done to you," seems to be addressed to the wind), and the world of the hero whose revulsion towards his environment results in insanity. This world is mad and God is silent, such is the final comment of Derner: "And God, this last resort of Zosia's, he was silent." [115] In this mad world of meanness between human beings the picture of Christ above the altar saying of the children "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven" seems to be an expression of immense irony. Malice and evil, the story seems to say, are too firmly rooted in life to be overcome by ideals and beautiful intentions. Something else is needed to defeat them, but what this is we do not learn from "Nauczyciel."

Let us not forget to mention that the language of this work is as clear and transparent as the language of a much greater work on a similar topic written at the same time: Fedor Sologub's *Melkij bes* (The Petty Demon), 1892-1902. We mention this novel only in order to suggest a similarity of atmosphere in Berent's and Sologub's work. Berent was

---

[112] *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

[113] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

[114] Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, I, 861.

[115] "Nauczyciel", p. 49.

moving in the same direction as the Russian symbolist, a direction which was suggested by Sologub's first novel, *Tjazhelye sny* (Heavy Dreams), 1896.

Berent's next work was the short story "Przy niedzieli" (On a Sunday) which appeared in *Gazeta Polska* in July 1894. It is a dramatized milieu description of a young couple's life in Warsaw which ends in the same hopeles fashion as the preceding work. Franek and Józka Franciszek, who were married three months ago, go for a Sunday outing to the suburbs of Warsaw. They take a rowing-boat out on a lake where Franek almost gets into a fight when his boat collides with someone else's. They stop at a restaurant for refreshments. After sunset they return home.

In this first third of the story there has been no description of the setting, nor of nature. We have not felt a single moment of happiness in this outing of a young couple on a summer Sunday. Some cautious but subdued hints of their love for each other have been made ("the attention which people accorded Józia only increased his affection for her. From time to time he put his hand on her hand. 'Józia,' he said. She lifted her eyes and gave him a telling glance"). Essentially, however, the atmosphere is again oppressive. When they return home with the prospect of another week of work ahead "his soul became gloomy." He leaves his wife as he says for a short while to see a fellow worker, Andrzej, who had not been at work on Saturday. Instead of returning soon he stays away for several hours, past midnight, leaving Józia to her own worries about her husband. When he returns very late he is drunk.

This second part of the story while Józia waits and reflects on her relationship with Franek gives us an insight into the hopeless situation of the working class milieu. Franek is a ruffian, a man of short temper who always itches for a fight. He is a frustrated man, unhappy with his bleak existence. Józia's extreme worries which she finally decides to share with a neighbouring woman find no comfort in the assertion that "she would get used to it," or that this first time would be followed by a second. The neighbour, in other words, considers this a typical situation which is horrible only to the young married woman.

The third part of the story shows us Franek's return and the encounter of the young couple in their bedroom. In his inebriated state he is extremely crude and threatening; she reproaches him for his behaviour. Finally, her complete silence and weeping soften his manners. He gives in to self-accusations ("I am a pig; so help me God, I am a pig"), again becomes affectionate, kisses her hands and ends this emotional scene by threatening to smash Andrzej's brains with a stone the next morning.

As in the preceding work the milieu is in the background and the focus is on the characters. The presentation is not naturalistic but impressionistic. No attempt is made to achieve clinical accuracy in description, but there are various suggestive moments which tell enough about the characters and their environment. We can tell that they are poor.

Their refreshments at the restaurant consist of soured milk (*kwaśne mleko*). They have little to say to each other since their relationship is based on physical attraction only and not on any spiritual bond (" 'Wouldn't you eat a little more?' he asked, having nothing else to say"). Franek is a young rake but of limited intelligence ("He stood with arms akimbo and from time to time twisted his moustache"). The typicality of the situation is underscored by the words of the neighbour: "You thought he was made of different stuff? They are all the same."

The suggestive aspect of this work in delineating a hopeless existence marked by poverty, cruelty, gloominess and drink is shown above all in the absence of real love. We know that Franek is weak, that he will go away again to drink, that he will probably become coarser, will beat his wife, who will probably bear children and will raise them in poverty and a cheerless atmosphere. In terms of this suggestive aspect of the work it is a delineation of a situation unredeemed by faith, hope, or genuine love.

While the basic tenor of the work is impressionistic and suggestive, in his use of language, primarily in dialogue, the author underlines the vulgarity and coarseness of the milieu. Short, abrupt sentences, vulgarisms and slang expressions mark the language of these characters. On the whole, Berent's narrative prose in these early works is marked by laconism and concentration. Simplicity is the hallmark of his early style: "The narration in 'Przy niedzieli' is distinguished by conciseness. Berent uses few adjectives and the entire work is presented in a decidedly paratactic prose." [116]

Bolesław Prus (1847-1912), one of the great Positivists of the second half of the nineteenth century, wrote in 1891: "Such is a poet who sees clearly and clearly describes each movement and each wave in this whirlpool which is called the life of society, (. . .) who succeeds with the aid of concise and harmonious phrases and beautiful expressions to present human desires and fears hidden from the ordinary eye (. . .). Finally, such is a poet who even in nature, which is called lifeless, sees not only life but some sort of will which desires, some sort of invisible heart which feels." [117]

Positivism was not a homogeneous movement in Poland, and it was already in the process of disintegration in the eighties and certainly in the early nineties. Yet, its slogans of "organic work" had taken a powerful influence in Poland, and it was such spokesmen of Positivism as Prus and Świętochowski—irrespective of the fact that they polemicized with each other as journalists—who proclaimed its programme: "What after all do we want? Is it violent upheavals? . . . No! . . . But perhaps we want to renounce all ideals and like a lifeless lump drown in the puddle

---

[116] Hultberg, p. 69.

[117] J. Z. Jakubowski, ed., *Europejskie związki literatury polskiej* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1969), pp. 365-366.

of inactivity? . . . No! And again no! So what do we have left? To develop along lawful paths—spiritually, materially and socially." [118] In the realm of day-to-day life it would be the "small ideas" that would lead to concrete results. With the focus on the pragmatic application of knowledge, the study of the natural sciences, collaboration among people for socially purposeful work and the dignity of manual labour the fruits of these years of self-imposed discipline would show in the future: "Just as a tree before it gives fruit must grow and become hardened, thus a whole people has strengthened its muscles, developed its spirit, filled its pocket. And only when the hour of destiny has struck, has it emerged with hitherto unseen and unexpected strength." [119]

Socially productive work was the call of the Positivists, work not necessarily in the narrow sense of manual labour but also the enterprising "activity of the capitalist who organizes production, the 'floating' (*grynderstwo*) of new business establishments, the cultivation of the soil, and the work of the merchant and the salesman." [120] In this context the intellectuals had a special role to fulfill as propagators, as models representing new values: "They ought to teach the masses who are refractory towards the new idea; they ought to convince them of the correctness of the new views that have not yet attained general acceptance and to propagate them in the face of any difficulty." [121]

A model of such a young intellectual, eager to apply Świętochowski's programme of "organic work" is Kazimierz Zaliwski, the nineteen-year-old hero of Berent's novel *Fachowiec*. He has absorbed the ideas of his time, ideas that emphasized the need to act rather than to dream, and as a corollary the need to identify with the working masses in deed and not just in word. The link with the leading Positivist periodical *Przegląd Tygodniowy* (Weekly Survey) is indicated on the first two pages where the hero recites the works of X.Y. from this journal, here concealed under the title *Postęp* (Progress): "How many energies, how many competent people fall victim to refined aims, petty and false ambitions, to pitiful, impotent dreams." From here he goes on to paraphrase the "Pessimist" who had said in *Prorok* (The Prophet) "that a future existed only for productive societies."

It was not difficult for the readers of the original (1895) nor for the editors of the 1956 edition to *Fachowiec* to identify the cryptonym X.Y., the actual title of the journal which figures here as *Postęp*, nor the two words "Pessimist" and *Prorok*. The most likely assumption is that X. Y. stood for Adam Wiślicki (1836-1913), publisher and editor of the

---

[118] Janina Kulczycka-Saloni, *Bolesław Prus* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1967), p. 137.

[119] *Ibid.*, p. 140.

[120] Jerzy Rudzki, "Świętochowski i pozytywizm warszawski," *Filozofia polska* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1967), p. 470.

[121] *Ibid.*, p. 471.

Positivist *Przegląd Tygodniowy* during the nearly forty years of its existence (1866-1905). There could be no doubt that it was precisely this periodical the narrator had in mind if one only compared the illustration on the front cover of *Przegląd Tygodniowy* and *Postęp* as here described: "And again I recalled the beautiful vignette of *Postęp* showing a magnificent wreath of factory chimneys, hammers, saws, pickaxes, steam engines, telegraph poles, etc. The wreath was closed at the bottom by the winged god Mercury who holds a band with the inscription: Let each one do in his own circle what the Holy Spirit tells him to do, and unity will come by itself." [122] In addition to the objects mentioned as part of the vignette the *Przegląd Tygodniowy* showed a locomotive in the centre with the inscription "Postęp" (Progress).

The words "Pessimist" and "Prophet" could be directly associated with Alexander Świętochowski (1849-1938) who was editor and publisher of *Prawda* (Truth) after 1881, and signed his weekly column entitled "Liberum Veto" Poseł Prawdy (The Messenger of Truth). The title *Prorok*, of course, had ironic and contradictory overtones especially in association with "Pesymista" (The Pessimist of *The Prophet*) which the knowledgeable reader of those times would connect with Świętochowski's *Dumania pesymisty* (Thoughts of a Pessimist), 1877. The irony on these first pages in reference to the leading Positivist spokesmen in subtle and veiled. It would turn into bitter invective only towards the end of the novel. These references then serve as the indispensable background in the first-person narration of the fable.

A young man, who had lost his parents early in life (motive of loneliness!) and now saddled with the responsibility to provide for himself as well as for his younger brother of high school age, has decided "to stake out an aim in life." He has made up his mind to work for "the general good" taking his clue from the slogans of the Positivists. His hero is a certain Mr. Kwaśniewski (ironic name in view of the meaning of *kwaśny* in Polish: "sour," "acid"), owner of a factory and a successful businessman, also the father of an extremely incompetent son who requires extra help with his school work from the narrator and from a professional teacher, Helena Walicka. These two young people meet frequently at the Kwaśniewskis and discuss the fashionable ideas of useful work (Zaliwski: "I want to be useful"). Their idealism is soon confronted and put to the test in conversation with Kwaśniewski who personifies the successful entrepreneur and claims an identity between private egotism and social good ("He demonstrated among other matters that egotism was the greatest human virtue"). Here the basic question of the novel is already asked: What is the motivation of human action and what should it be? What is the relationship between theory and practical application? Here the question hangs in the balance: What is it that has caused Kazimierz Zaliwski to choose a manual profession for a career?

---

[122] Berent, *Fachowiec, op. cit.*, p. 52.

His answer ("with rigid seriousness") that it was "sober reason" is convincing, but at the same time it was somehow stillborn. It smelled too much of "theory," of those theories which Dostoevskij's Underground man (*Notes from the Underground*, 1864) had taken delight in holding up to ridicule. In Poland these "theories" were still a live issue in 1894, and Zaliwski's exchanges with Kwaśniewski and Helena are an illustration of the hero's idealism built on theory, an idealism that is bound to lead to bitter disillusionment and alienation: "After a while she asks me again: Do you know the people?—A little.—But you must have heard about its notorious shortcomings: alcoholism, filth, sloth. . . . Do you believe in example? . . . That is, I would like to ask if this has played a role in your decision?—I realize this also and consider it my duty—I answer gravely.—That's again 'theoretical.'—You, Miss, are cruel! I would desire this with all my heart.—After a short silence she says as if to herself:—I am very curious.—About what?—About the future!" [123]

Here ends Chapter One. In the following seven chapters of Part One the reader is told how Kazimierz received a job at the Metal Works of Borwicz, Szwineiger, Lafère, Inc., how he is humiliated by the owners of this company, and how Helena tries to keep his idealism alive: "No, no. . . . I believe in it. I only wanted to tell you that if you ever doubt, if there will ever come bitter moments for you (there are many in life), then turn to those who wish you well." [124] It soon shows that the hero has very little talent as a lathe operator, and it takes all the good will of his foreman, Mr. Walicki, Helena's father, to help and instruct the young man.

In spite of his rigorous day at the factory from six in the morning to seven in the evening with an hour and a half off for lunch, the hero reads voraciously in the evenings. Here he shows where his real inclination lies: "Often I would sit over a book until midnight and without undressing I would fall on my bed in order to get up again five hours later and to rush to the factory. Others at that hour would leave their warm bed cursing, yet I even succeeded to feel rapture at the early morning." [125] These pages reflect the enthusiasm of youth, of dreams, of idealism and of the exhilarating joy of life. The hero never seems to tire, but his work at the factory obviously leaves him unfulfilled: "Time runs quickly for me till evening. Hardly can you hear the whistle and the shouts calling 'Day's over' when I'm already out in the yard on my way home. . . . When I sit at night by the lamp, bent over, with ears stopped up and reading passionately Buckle's *History of Civilization* [could there be a better illustration of the power of Positivism over the hero's mind!]. I feel so well that I wish for nothing else. Sometimes I even think that it is better than . . . Well, better or not, it's the same as at the factory.

---

[123] *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

[124] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Sometimes only when I go to bed, I think that I shall have to wait a whole day before I can go on reading. Then I reproach myself:—Oh, Kaziu, Kaziu! Things are not well with you! You were not born to be a book worm. You stand higher than others precisely because you are a man of manual labour." [126]

Scenes at the factory alternate with scenes at Helena's where the hero meets young intellectuals, above all Helena's friend, Zanicz. The topics of discussion are always the fashionable theories gleaned from *Prorok* (read Świętochowski's *Prawda*): "The *Prorok* had an interesting article entitled: 'Evolution, Revolution or War.'—So which of these three monsters will it be?—asks Walicki.—The first without any doubt, the first.—My dear Helen, don't be ashamed of your old father and explain to me what is meant by evo . . . What was that you said?—E-vo-lu-tion —Zanicz emphasizes and tries to explain it himself:—This is, you see . . . Well, how should I put it? A steady, steady development.—Oh, yes . . . Steady, steady . . . I understand. Let's go then and have supper." [127] The irony is too obvious to be overlooked.

After these encounters the hero turns to reflection, and it is these reflections as well as the psychological analysis of the minds of others which enhance the reader's interest in *Fachowiec*. From this aspect Chapter Four is outstanding where in the end the hero finds the words to give expression in artistic form to the wealth of his experiences and observations. He creates a fable of an old philosopher who in old age had begun to teach people how to live. Fifty years later he came back and instead of finding thousands of believers, he found only teachers. His love for humanity then turned into rage, and he addresses all these new prophets with the words: "If I could only tear my words from your mouths, I would do it immediately. Knowledge without deed . . .—is only theory!" [128]

In Chapter Five the hero confronts the labour milieu in an off-work situation—an inn. He decides to join them since "after all he had wanted to influence them." It turns out, however, that it was up to the men of this class whether they want to accept or reject this young intellectual. The evening ends in a drunken brawl, and the hero barely succeeds in dragging home his intoxicated friend, Andrzej.

In Chapter Six—we are only one-third through the novel—the original mood of optimism takes a definite turn for the worse: "something came up which I find hard to define, the beginning of a new epoch. Doubts, pessimism, questions of the aim and significance of human life and many other 'isms' which I feel like grouping under the general term of idiotisms." [129] Zaliwski has already worked at the factory for one

---

[126] *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

[127] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

[128] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

[129] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

year, and his foreman, Walicki, has built a new machine, but the hero's interest is elsewhere. His fable is printed in *Postęp* (read *Przegląd Tygodniowy*) under the title "Z krainy pięknych słówek" (From the Land of Beautiful Words), and he is given to understand that his work will be welcome. Soon, however, a cataclysmic event takes place from which the hero barely escapes alive. One of the wings of the factory where flammable liquids had been kept burns down. People lose their lives, and among the losses is Walicki's invention, a new machine which had produced such a sensation when first unveiled. The charred remains of the factory are symbolical for the destruction of hopes and expectations of the hero: "Ashes, only ashes. Smoke and steam still were coming forth although it had happened already yesterday. Firemen were seeking out the embers. Futile labour. Here nothing could burn any longer . . ." [130]

In Part Two the situation of disillusionment which had set in earlier intensifies. As a result of the fire and the loss of his invention—its cause had been traced to his dynamo—Walicki takes his life. An expert brought in from a technical university in Germany describes his invention as the product of a madman. Zaliwski is dismissed by the company. Helena goes to the country exchanging occasional correspondence with the hero. She continues to be enchanted with Positivist philosophy referring particularly to her reading of Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920). Exposed to a series of humiliations in his search for work Kazimierz Zaliwski turns again to his old friend, the capitalist and entrepreneur Kwaśniewski. He and his German colleague Sturm consider it a "nice joke" (*ciekawy kawał*) that a young man like Kazimierz should start working in a factory after having finished high school. The hero is not yet ready to accept the cynicism and hypocrisy of a society which proclaims the slogan of "productive labour," yet rejects a man socially who wears a labourer's blouse. He steps into a coffee shop demanding service and finds himself physically ejected. He exposes himself to an even worse humiliation when he rejects the three-rouble note the director of his factory had offered him condescendingly as a token of generosity rather than as an advance on his pay. While throwing the note into the director's face he immediately feels the stinging cut of the coachman's whip on his neck and face.

Now the denouement approaches rapidly. The hero's genuine love for Helena is rejected. As an emancipated woman she wanted only "friendship." Next, he settles accounts with Helena's friend Zanicz not only by exposing the hypocrisy of his ideas but by giving his rival for the favours of Helena a thrashing in her presence. Nothing can now help the hero's total and unrelieved disillusionment and all that seems left for him is to accept his loneliness, to suffer continuous humiliations and to try to prevent the same from happening to his younger brother who shows inclinations for practical labour, yet wishes to study the social sciences:

---

[130] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

"I tried to talk to him that he should make attempts to understand himself better and then I decided that he should not permit himself to be carried by the wind which was blowing at the moment." [131]

When we look at the novel closely we notice that it has two *foci*: analysis of the hero's physical and spiritual environment and self-analysis where the hero tries to come to terms with his own situation and the moral justification of whatever choice he makes. These two foci are brought to a synthesis in a general assessment of life through the hero's consciousness. This last is the existential undercurrent of the novel, the other two are the obvious and most directly recognizable themes of the novel. The debunking of the ideas of Positivism is explicit from the very beginning. These ideas are called "theories" whose link with practical life has not yet been demonstrated. Zaliwski sets out to demonstrate them and finds stumbling blocks at every turn. The first is the treatment he receives at the factory from one of the partners, the German Szwineiger, who demands a deposit of 50 rubles to cover possible damage from the unskilled hands of this novice. Furthermore, Zaliwski has to work without pay for the time being. The next shock to his idealism is his inability to establish meaningful relationships with the other workers. An unbridgeable distance exists between the hero and the other workers in terms of upbringing and education. The only one with whom he has some sort of friendship is Andrzej, but this is based primarily on the one-sided admiration of Andrzej for this young intellectual and not on an identity of interests or outlook on life. The hero's relationship to his foreman, Walicki, is equally unsatisfactory. Walicki tries to help his young apprentice but is very sceptical of his talent as a machinist: "You are bungling again—the decent Walicki was nagging me.—Is this bad? —I ask with surprise.—Of course, it's bad. And is this the way one holds a file? If someone doesn't have the right hand for things there is no help.—I somehow had no luck that day and he drove me to anger. A decent fellow, only a nagger, a terrible nagger." [132]

A central moment in the debunking of theories and dreams is the fire at the factory and the opinion of the foreign expert who conducts a sort of post-mortem examination of the mishap. His observations are a sharp indictment of the entire Polish system built on idealism on the one hand and professional ineptness on the other. This ineptness, of course, includes everybody, young Zaliwski, Walicki with his dynamo and the entrepreneurs: "My young friend; do you think that we are unable to dream? It's only more difficult for us, much more difficult than for you. When we fly up to the skies, the law of Newton pulls us back to earth, the law of friction and sensation reminds us that we are human; if we step in the wrong direction, we immediately draw back our leg knowing that according to the law of balance we shall invariably fall. Oh, it's

---

[131] *Ibid.*, p. 238.

[132] *Ibid.*, p. 126.

more difficult for us to dream, especially for me. Look how I have turned grey. I can imagine that you are tied to his house by close bonds, and I have a feeling that you will start to dig in these ashes looking for the remains in order to show his magnificent object to the world. Let it go, nothing will come of it. And, furthermore, why talk about it? In order to understand how far it is from being possible one has to know much, very much . . .—So he was a madman?—Almost."[133] He closes these sober observations with these last, very cordial and even admiring words: "—I am returning to Berlin with a very strange impression. I did not think that fourteen hours away from my laboratory such people existed. Do you know how with us people look at a factory, at an ironwork shop and such things? As upon a bad curse of fate. But here people voluntarily leave the university for the factory, build radiometers, liberate humanity . . . Dreamers! Madmen! But strangely likeable madmen!" [134]

These observations have made it clear that Walicki was as much an impractical dreamer with the construction of his dynamo as Zaliwski with his choice of career as a machinist. But accounts have not yet been settled with Zanicz, Helena's friend, the representative of the young university-educated generation who echo the thoughts of others: "Yes, my dear sir. Only the unification of the productive forces according to a certain plan can lead to progress. The individual means nothing (*zero*). —Means nothing? I asked in amazement.—Unfortunately, yes, Mr. Zaliwski.—Zanicz smiles, smiles, happy to have shocked me with such news.—But what does individual freedom mean then, 'the noble reserves for first place,' this egotism in the additional meaning?" [135] In the course of this debate Zanicz adds: "Dull and monotonous work caused by the sharing of manual labour with the machine deadens the mental faculties of man.—This is not true, I scream. Manual labour is ennobling." [136]

The questioning of theories cannot take place, of course, outside the context of the individual lives and their significance in each individual case. Their rejection is, therefore, a profoundly personal matter and not an abstract refutation of one set of beliefs to be replaced by another. The self-analysis of the hero in terms of the correctness of his choice had been going on throughout the novel ("Thanks to my habit I ask myself daily, what shall I read? And I end up with the second question: Where shall I go?")[137]; now it is brought to a climactic confrontation with the editor of *Postęp* (read Wiślicki, editor of *Przegląd Tygodniowy*): "—We have changed our viewpoint.—Oh, so that's it. That's just what I had wanted to hear from you. And do you know why you did it? Because

---

[133] *Ibid.* p. 158.

[134] *Ibid.*, p. 159.

[135] *Ibid.*, p. 218.

[136] *Ibid.*, p. 219.

[137] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

you saw that the other was rotting away, that no one would allow himself to be caught by those fungi. But you, of course, have to be in front, hold up the banner, bring up the troops. . . . I took your slogans, which are worn out today, at face value and wanted to apply them in actual life. That's why I've been promoted today to a private in your army. But, of course, this no longer is your army. Since the last hour you have become different and you just tell the private who in your war has lost his mind: 'We've changed our opinion.' I can no longer change anything now in my life. Do you understand this well, you, the leaders of all sorts of armies? Do you understand what it means not to be able to change life and to suffer because the general yesterday was of a different opinion!? . . . Life is not an opinion, not a judgment, it is not a theoretical twaddle of itching tongues. It does not allow itself to be changed, to be corrected, or to be wiped out." [138] Here we have the explicit refutation of theories and opinions as a guide to life, but the implicit refutation is much more serious: it is a refutation of the strong weight of rationalism as a guide to life, a refutation of the seriousness of life, of seeing the meaning of life in the fulfillment of one's social obligation. Rationalism and too much seriousness destroy life, they destroy natural human instincts such as the feeling of love between Kazimierz and Helena. She withdraws at the last moment out of rationalism and fear. The hero enters the factory with "solemness" out of a feeling of duty and obligation. His as well as Helena's idealism—she had wanted to go to Switzerland to become a midwife—is tinged "with pride that they have succeeded in subduing their own ego." This produces artificiality (the thought of addressing each other with the more intimate "*wy*" as friends instead of by *pan* or *pani*) and coldness from which the genuine human instincts have been expelled. Only once does the hero break the pattern of what he considers his duty by simply not going to work one day: "It happened that one day I did not go to the factory, out of common, mean laziness as I told myself the following day. And yet, how marvellously I spent that day! If I had wanted to justify myself, I might have said perhaps: 'It's not I who am guilty but the sun is guilty'."

The purpose of life seen as the fulfillment of a social obligation soon leads to monotony, uniformity, greyness: "Life dragged on in its grey, uniform way"; "I woke up the following morning with a headache and with a certain unpleasant feeling at the bottom of my heart"; "Have you, Miss, never had such moments when all thoughts, aims, it seems, drown in the large, grey sea of life and when ordinary reality shows itself naked like a skeleton? Work in the morning, lunch, work in the afternoon, the four walls of my room, sleep and again work. This is how life seems to me sometimes." The hero's assessment of life is negative. His experience has taught him that ideals are meaningless since the world treats them

---

[138] *Ibid.*, pp. 234-235.

[139] *Ibid.*, p. 239.

with cynicism and hypocrisy. Having once believed in ideals and now disillusioned, he is condemned to a life of drudgery and humiliation. Without faith in the meaningfulness of life his days are marked by boredom and torpor (*odrętwienie*). The novel ends on a note of despair: "An animal closed up in a cage dies from longing. I, too, will die like that. . . . At the factory I work like an ox, like a wretched, stupid ox. They give me the hardest jobs for which no 'initiative' is required." [139] The factory whistle seems to suggest to the hero the entrance to the inferno, and he recalls Dante's inscription "Lasciate ogni speranza" which expresses the epitomy of hopelessness.

Is there no redemption for the hero, not a single ray of hope to justify his existence? Will his despair be turned into affirmation of life? There is hope in his affirmation of art and in his strong desire to learn: "Starting today I shall begin, I thought, with this moment. I must learn . . . I must for I have vowed it to myself." The single strongly positive element in this work is Kazimierz's decision to write. He gives his work the form of a fairy tale: "Z krainy pięknych słówek" (From the Land of Beautiful Words).[140] While the old philosopher despairs of the result of his teaching which has led to a proliferation of men of the word (teachers) instead of men of action (doers), the realization of this situation and the expression in artistic form suggest that mere cynicism will not prevail. While Kazimierz failed in one area he won in another, with the implication that his life was not and will not be a failure.

The novel ends ambiguously, but for Berent it was no doubt a statement of his own life and of his own convictions. As a young man of twenty-two, who had just received his doctorate in biology at the University of Munich, he must have felt at the crossroads of his life when he wrote this work: either to follow the social command and engage in a career that seemed to be needed and useful, or to follow his inner voice and write. He chose the latter and became a master in what at first may have been an avocation.

Structurally, the novel falls almost into two equal halves: from the moment of Zaliwski's decision to do "useful" work to the burning of the factory, and from the moment of his realization that his dreams were futile to his acquiescence in a life of drudgery. The chapters are of approximately equal length, eight in the first part, ten in the second. The narration is presented in the form of a confession but Hultberg is right when he says that Berent does not adhere consistently to any definite type of narration: "It is not a diary, nor a memoir work, nor an observation simultaneous with the events. We have here a special combination of all three types." [141] The same critic also points out the weightiness of narration as an element of stylization. In the course of our interpretation it

---

[140] This work is intended as an indictment of the proliferation of slogans and theories of Positivism.

[141] Hultberg, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

has been shown that Kazimierz sees life seriously and takes himself seriously, too seriously. This is reflected in the manner of narration: "Conquered by her sincerity I unknowingly fell upon new paths. I started to think about my past, not too rich in pleasant memories. Infected by her openness I felt the need to complain about more than one failure during the past years."[142] Hultberg, furthermore, has correctly noticed the rare use of epithets, adjectives and adverbs which give the style a certain matter-of-factness. The first impression of the factory is negative, particularly in terms of the enormous noise produced by the machines. To describe the various levels of noise Berent uses synonyms, all of them with unplansant association: din, clangor, hiss, clang, sigh, crash, a hellish confusion of clatter.

Descriptions of nature which would suggest fusion with the universe and conquest of loneliness are rare, yet we find them occasionally and it is precisely one of these moments which suggest hope and redemption for the hero. Such a description we find in Chapter Four, Part One, on the day when the hero followed his inner voice and did not report for work. This is also the day when he wrote his fairy tale about the old philosopher, "From the Land of Beautiful Words": "I lay there for a long time. The sun went down over the horizon and showed me the birch forest in a red brilliance. It was reflected in the stream like a twisting band and after turning into a purple disc it went down behind the forest. Dusk approached. The crows were drawing in murders [143] across the fields for their evening chat. They passed quietly and peacefully as if they had an important matter to discuss today. I was trying to catch the thread of a dream and I fell on one word:—Helen." [144]

The style of this work is unobtrusive and sober, "concentrated and transparent." [145] It is the only fitting style for the treatment of a theme of existential inquiry: "Why . . . Why have you . . . Why have you made a eunuch of me? . . . Why!?" [146]

One year later, in 1896, Berent published in *Biblioteka Warszawska* (Warsaw Library) his highly lyrical and symbolical work, "W puszczy" (In the Wilderness) with the subtitle "Krajobraz" (Landscape). In this highly impressionistic description of the wilderness north-east of Warsaw, now on the border of the USSR (Puszcza Białowieska), home of the Polish bison and the elk, the narrator draws an allegory of life. The wilderness is a large metonymy for life.

---

[142] *Fachowiec*, p. 76.

[143] James Lipton, *An Exaltation of Larks or, The Venereal Game* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1968), p. 31.

[144] *Fachowiec*, p. 104.

[145] Hultberg, p. 34.

[146] *Fachowiec*, p. 233.

The narrator has just woken up in the forester's barn from the first crowing of the rooster. He steps out but cannot yet distinguish his surroundings very clearly in the twilight. The wilderness seems to him a strange chaos that neither his eyes nor his mind can penetrate: "A group of trees appeared on the right side, but one could see only two trunks and again a black smudge. It came out of the forest and directly towards me as often as my heavy lids closed. When I opened them it would disappear quickly and when I looked there intently, it seemed to me that those two trunks shone like rotten wood.[147] I feel a penetrating moisture, fear something and would like to free myself from some kind of pressure. Against my will I sigh, my eyes seize some small stars in the sky and concentrate so much on them that they keep seeing new lights in the vicinity. I want to return to the hut but cannot get up. Something is holding me down and won't let me move especially that darkness which roars in my ears . . ." [148] This scene of the very early morning is followed by the dawn, the awakening of the birds, and finally the sound of the sweeps raising buckets from wells and indicating that people, too, have risen.

A few hours later, the narrator accompanies the forester into the wilderness: "Everything stood in disorder, mixed together, bundled up in thickets and immensely tall." [149] In his walk through the forest the narrator is constantly reminded of gloom and death: "Some trees express great sadness—here, e.g., our Mazowsze pine . . . in the grey clusters of moss death has already set in." [150] The sun and the blue sky penetrate fitfully through the foliage. The narrator and the forester follow the track of a bison and soon see one lying in an opening on a slight elevation only thirty feet away: "its appearance suggested a vicious, bristling, terribly fierce animal." [151] But it is his enormous size and his unfriendly demeanour which suggest something demonic: "One has to see this big brownish-rusty clod in order to understand what a fearful piece of life sits in this beast." [152] Soon the bison disappears representing the untamed natural world. The narrator and the forester continue on their way, the narrator constantly reflecting on destruction and death ("everything here bears the stigma of death"; "trunks covered with such a dense shroud of moss that they seem like cemetery graves"; "so here, too, death has passed long ago").

---

147 Here we encounter for the first time the word Berent would use as the title to one of his best known novels: *Próchno.*

148 Wacław Berent, "W puszczy," *Pisma,* I (Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff, 1912), pp. 260-261.

149 *Ibid.,* p. 264.

150 *Ibid.,* pp. 264-265.

151 *Ibid.,* p. 271.

152 *Ibid.,* p. 270.

Untamed nature is seen as an allegory of life where the stronger constantly subdues the weaker: "each grain, grass, hemp plant, bush and tree begins to live only by destroying something else and lives the longer, the longer it manages to subdue others. Then the seeds die, the grass decays but above it all reigns the torpid, gloomy and impenetrable foliage of the trees." [153] The natural world is the scene of a constant struggle for life, hence, the enormous extent of its corpses and graveyards: "the silence in this enoromus tomb was awe-inspiring"; "the breath of the graveyard surrounded me"; "from time to time a dull hammering sound penetrated this abyss of silence full with its own echo as if someone were beating nails into a coffin lid." Even the birch tree, symbol of life, youth and freshness "wafted only sadly with its pale leaves." The gloom of the forest is broken only rarely by the penetration of sunlight through the dense cover of trees and by the appearance of the occasional animal. The seemingly endless expanse of the forest produces a sense of despair and boredom. The narrator longs for open spaces ("space grew in my imagination and kept drawing bigger and bigger circles"). He lies down on his back in the midst of the forest and looking upward he receives a completely different impression of the forest from the one he had had hithertoo. He no longer sees the decay underfoot but the beautiful shapes of trees that have grown up striving towards the light: "These are two different worlds, two mirrors of life." There is a constant cycle of life and death symbolized by the mighty pine forest. Now striving upward the pine trees will eventually be covered by the sand from which they have sprung: "the sea of uniformity will cover them, will drown them in the depths." After the final soft murmur in the tree tops, which subsides in the distance, perfect silence returns suggesting once again death.

This almost unknown work of Berent's (last printed in 1912) is particularly effective in its use of nature as allegory. If we look around us there is chaos, destruction, death; below us there is nothing but death; only above we see light and beauty, balance and harmony; two mirrors of life which we observe in a forest. The impressionistic and suggestive character of this work is produced by the use of comparisons introduced by the conjunction "like" (*jak*), the use of "as if" (*jakby*), "some sort of," "something," the use of impersonal phrases and the subjunctive. Impressions are subdued. Colours are used widely (the white lips of the bison; the black swamp) suggesting ominousness, or nouns carrying the overtones of colours and tactile sensations (the velvet moss). Feeling and indefinite sensation overwhelm reason, and here we are at the borderline of a new prose style and a new vision of art—symbolism: "The breath of the cemetery seized me. In great masses painful recollections pressed down on me, yet they were somehow dim and elusive: something pressed on my soul, and my mind worked intensely to give this mood material nourishment." [154]

---

[153] *Ibid.*, p. 274.

[154] *Ibid.*, p. 275.

Berent's early writings convey a deeply pessimistic outlook. His heroes are all failures of some sort (Johann Derner, Franciszek and Kazimierz Zaliwski). They lack faith, and they have no roots. As a result they either develop a pathological condition, seek escape in drink, or submit helplessly to a situation they cannot change. They experience no real joy or spontaneity and their lives are marked by drudgery, humiliation and despair. They never experience genuine love, at least not in the sense that this would become a palliative for their uprootedness. Lack of roots in a physical and in a spiritual sense is the source of their despair. How different then is the vision of life in these works from a genuine Positivist statement of a human situation as in Józef Ślimak, the hero of Prus's *Placówka* (The Outpost), 1885! Berent's *Fachowiec* bears a strong similarity to Chekhov's *Moja zhizn'* (My Life), 1896. The question of influence is specious although the subjects and their themes are very similar. Chekhov's hero, too, had followed the Positivist slogans, been misunderstood, ostracized by society and condemned to a life of drudgery.

Pessimism and a fascination with the theme of death were not untypical of the period and owed their inspiration to the philosophy of Schopenhauer and also to other factors connected with the rise of the decadence movement at the end of the nineteenth century. Existential despair is not yet a theme in these early works of Berent's, but the seeds for it are there. It is this same existential despair whose origin can be traced to Romanticism and its revival seen in Neo-Romanticism fifty years later. Uprootedness and lack of faith are its characteristics, connected with the rise of urban civilization and the rationalization of God in terms of progress and science. No one had seen and analyzed the nature of this disease, which was to grip western civilization, with the same force as had Kierkegaard in the first half of the nineteenth century. His words have since become prophetic, but their echo could already be heard in Poland in 1872 in the poetry of Adam Asnyk (1838-1897) published in the same *Przegląd Tygodniowy* with which Berent had polemicized through his narrator in *Fachowiec*:

> Wieku bez jutra, wieku bez przyszłości
> Co nad przepaścią stanąłeś ponury.
> Nauczycielu zgrozy i nicości,
> Coś wziął ludzkiego ducha na tortury!
> Wieku zwątpienia, o wieku niewiary! [155]
>
> (Oh age, without a tomorrow, oh age, without a future,
> which has come to stand mournfully over the abyss.
> Oh teacher of horror and nothingness,
> who took the human spirit to be tortured,
> Oh age of doubt, oh age of faithlessness!)

---

[155] Tuczyński, *op. cit.*, p. 59. (From Adam Asnyk, "XIX wiekowi," *Przegląd Tygodniowy* (1872), No. 40.)

Tout passe. — L'art robuste
Seul a l'éternité;
Le buste
Survit à la cité;

Et la médaille austère
Que trouve un laboureur
Sous terre
Révèle un empereur.[156]

In the Polish tradition Neo-Romanticism was a revolt against the Realistic tendencies in Polish literature, above all against the utilitarianism which had been so influential for about thirty years (1863-1893). The highest ideals of life were now seen in terms of the deeper instincts of man, less in description of reality. Przybyszewski's "O 'nową' sztukę" (On the 'New' Art), published in *Życie* early in 1899, is one of the manifestos of Neo-Romanticism and sums up its aesthetic position:

> The representative of new art turns away entirely from this "outwardness" [zewnątrz] as from an incidental and changeable matter. He delves into his own self, grasps things in his soul that words could not enclose. He searches beyond the deceitful image of so-called reality the entire fine net of impulses, influences, dim pictures, of things unformulated by logic. He tries to enter into the complexity of influences and mutual interaction which take place between all of nature and man, in other words, he does not allow himself to be beguiled by conscious awareness but seeks all causes outside its compass.[157]

The deeper realities of spiritual life once more became the area of artistic concern. Romantic poetry was revived and the novel, while still an important artistic genre, was no longer as dominant as during the thirty years of Realism. Poetry and drama were restored, and poetic ability above all meant prestige and recognition in the new movement. *Chimera* and *Życie* were the two most prestigious publications of Neo-Romanticism, *Chimera* under the editorship of Miriam-Przesmycki, *Życie* in the hands of Ludwik Szczepański [158] (1897-1898) and for a time of Przybyszewski [159] 1898-1900). In 1905, Berent published a cycle of seven poems in *Chimera* after he had already written *Próchno.* The poems appeared in No. 27 of Volume IX of *Chimera,* the issue that followed Nos. 25 and 26 where Berent's essay "On the Sources and Outlets of Nietzscheanism"

---

[156] Fritz Hoffmann, ed., *La Civilization française* (Frankfurt/Main: Hirschgraben Verlag, 1950), p. 175.

[157] Stanisław Przybyszewski, "O 'Nową' sztukę," *Wybór Pism* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1966), 152.

[158] Ludwik Szczepański (1872-1954); Zenon Miriam-Przesmycki (1861-1944).

[159] Stanisław Przybyszewski (1868-1927).

had been published. His familiarity with Nietzsche's thought and work has left its traces in this group of poems.

By analyzing these seven poems now instead of after the discussion of *Próchno* we are once again departing from the chronological presentation of Berent's writing. Such a departure from the pattern seemed justified in the case of the essays by their distinctive genre; in the case of the poetry we have again a separate genre, unrelated to the major artistic work of this period in terms of form, yet related to it in terms of theme and meaning. A discussion of the poetry is attempted at this juncture in order to preserve the three major Neo-Romantic novels, *Próchno* (Rotten Wood), *Ozimina* (Winter Wheat) and *Żywe kamienie* (Living Stones) for later consideration. It is also a fact that Berent's works, falling roughly into the dozen years between 1894 and 1906, are marked by a distinct internal development. There is an increasing resort to symbolism. His vocabulary also grows progressively more difficult. There is a recurrent use of archaisms, and the creation of characteristic neologisms for poetic effect.

When Berent wrote his cycle of seven poems he was thirty-two years old and at the height of his intellectual and artistic development. These poems, therefore, are amongst his most significant achievements. They are here discussed in the same sequence in which they were printed in *Chimera* (Vol. IX, No. 27, pp. 448-453). The general title of this septet is "Róże" (Roses). It occurs above the title to the first poem as a kind of symbol of beauty for this bouquet of seven poems.[160] Perhaps by using this title Berent was aware of Nietzsche's "Meine Rosen" which is used in the prelude to his *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (La gaya scienza).[161] Berent's familiarity with all of Nietzsche's work suggests this as a distinct possibility.

Berent has divided his cycle of seven poems into two groups: the first of three and the second of four poems. The first group is entitled *Ars Ephemera,* the second *Ars Aeterna*; the title to each individual poem follows at the top of the poem in parentheses:

---

[160] A bouquet of roses under twelve never comes in even numbers. Furthermore, the number seven has a mystical significance all of its own.

[161] Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, II, 19:

Meine Rosen

Ja! Mein Glück — es will beglücken —
Alles Glück will ja beglücken!
Wollt ihr meine Rosen pflücken?

Müsst euch bücken und verstecken
Zwischen Fels und Dornenhecken,
Oft die Fingerchen euch lecken!

Denn mein Glück — es liebt das Necken!
Denn mein Glück — es liebt die Tücken! —
Wollt ihr meine Rosen pflücken?

ARS EPHEMERA (MIŁOŚNICA)

Jako ofiarna będziesz czara
Purpurą młodej krwi dymiąca,
Jak żywa lampa gorejąca
W nawyku głuchych katakumbach!

U miłosnego źródła mocy
Szukając lampie swej oliwy,
Wyrzeźbisz życie w posąg żywy,
W młodości nagość i posągu!

Zwierciedląc słońce w grobowisku,
Jak słońca wolą — sobą mowna,
Twym życiem — życiu orędowna,
Jak kwiat wytryśniesz na pustyni!

I padniesz, młody pąk zerwany,
Dyszący śmiercią kwiat weselny,
Ty symbol życia nieśmiertelny,
Na uczt życiowych gnuśne stoły.

I będziesz — „szczęścia obietnica,"
Jak róża w pąku zadrzemana,
Cudzymi wargi potargana
I cudzym jadem zwiędła w pąku.

ARS EPHEMERA (THE BELOVED) [162]

Like a votive cup you will
steam in the scarlet of young blood,
Like a living lamp that burns in
the deaf catacombs of habit.

From the power of the well of love
Looking for oil for its lamp,
You will sculpture life into a
living statue,
Into the nakedness of youth and
figure!
Reflecting the sun in the graveyard
As by the will of the sun—you have
words of your own,
By means of your life—a spokesman
for life
You burst forth like a flower in
the desert!

And you will fall, a young bud
torn off,
A wedding flower breathing through
death,
You immortal symbol of life,
For the languid tables of life's
banquets.

And you will be "the promise of
happiness,"
Asleep like the rose in the bud,
Pulled by someone else's lips
And caused to wilt in the bud by
someone else's poison.

---

[162] These poems, of course, have never been translated into English. I would, however, try to make my own translation in any event convinced of the correctness of Karl Vossier who in his fundamental study of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Die Göttliche Komödie*, Band I, II, Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925) insisted on making his own translations so that they might "stand in the service of explication of the text" ("Meine Ubersetzungen stehen im Dienste der Erklärung," p. v).

(MARZENIA)

O, cieplarniane blade róże,
Wy próżnej troski puste wiana,
Ta śmierć leniwa, cnotą zwana,
To płonnych kwiatów życie płonne.

Bo tym jest kwiatu czar śmiertelny,
Tem jest pąk ducha grzechem żywy:
Dla ziarna — zguby własnej chciwy,
On życiem, śmiercią siemię stwarza!

Więc nie płacz, śmiej się, miłośnico,
W śmiech wszystkich piekieł
potępieńczy
Tak w łachman życia — życie
wieńczy
Marzenia kształt niepokalany...

(DREAMS)

Oh, ye pale roses of hothouses,
You empty dowries of vain care,
This lazy death called virtue,
This useless life of useless flowers.

For here is the flower's deadly magic,
The spirit's bud alive through sin:
For the grain wishing its own
destruction
By means of life, by means of death
magic creates its own seed.

So, do not weep, laugh, my beloved,
Into the unearthly laughter of all
infernoes:
Thus, into the rags of life wreathes
The immaculate shape of the
dream...

(FALE)

Słoneczną my rodzone wolą,
W otchlaniach czasu wciąż tonące,
Tęczowych rzeczy tęcze lśniące:
My kwiat i czerw i siemię razem.

Hen od wieczności idąc proga,
My fale bytu wiecznie wrotne,
Miłości moce wszystkokrotne:
My życie, grzech i śmierć pospołu.

Słonecznej woli na obiatę
Twą czarę życia grzechem pienną,
Tę tęczę rzeczy wiecznie zmienną,
W otchłaniach czasu zatopimy.

Zaś z tęczy onej duchem snute
Miłości moce wszystkokrotne
My fale bytu wiecznie wrotne
Hen do wieczności zniesiem proga.

(WAVES)

We were born by the will of the sun,
Always drowning in the abysses of
time,
Glistening rainbows of rainbow-
coloured objects:
We are flower and worm and seed
at the same time.

Coming from the threshold of
eternity,
We are eternally the portal waves
of existence,
The all-embracing powers of love,
We are life, sin and death in one.

In sacrifice to the will of the sun
We shall drown in the abysses of
time.
Your cup foaming with the sin of life,
This eternally changing rainbow
of things.

Thus we, eternally the portal waves
of existence
Shall carry away to the threshold
of eternity
The all-embracing powers of love
Drawn by the spirit from this
rainbow.

These three poems are all composed in four-foot iambic quatrains. The first poem has five, the second three, the third four quatrains, altogether twelve. The rhyme (they are feminine rhymes throughout) is irregular except in the second and third line of each quatrain. Each quatrain is an independent statement on the theme of the individual poem, the first line always presenting a new thought, the second and third amplifying and the fourth summarizing it.

The first poem, "The Beloved," has a pronounced rhetorical quality. Of the approximately sixty accented syllables, forty-one are "a's," "ą's," "o's," and "u's. Consonant clusters are few which lends additional prominence to the back vowels. If we add ten more stresses on the high front vowel "y,' we notice that there are only very few soft consonants in this poem. It presents short syntactic units sometimes grouping them in opposites: "As by the will of the sun—you have words of your own"; "By means of your life—a spokesman for life." It derives its effect from hyperbole, exclamation and antithesis on the one hand, and from symbolic imagery on the other. Hyperbolic and at the same time symbolical are such phrases as "the scarlet of young blood," "the deaf catacombs of habit," "someone else's poison." Antitheses are in the opposition between "you will fall" and "a young bud," "a wedding flower" and and "breathing through death," "languid tables" and "life's banquets."

What meaning do we perceive in this poem? It is a statement full of pathos about "the beloved." The beloved is art, art offered as a sacrifice, art which transforms life into a statue of beauty, art which bursts out like a flower in the desert, art an eternal source of joy and art destroyed in the bud like a rose. Art is ephemeral, as the heading suggests. It sheds light into darkness; it is like the sunshine in the cemetery; it is "the promise of happiness" (Nietzsche: "Ja! Mein Glück — es will beglücken — Alles Glück will ja beglücken"), but it remains a promise that figuratively "dies in the bud."

The pathos of this poem resembles the high seriousness of a Baroque poem. Death is victorious, it destroys "the young bud" of the rose which never opens but remains "the immortal symbol" of life. The rose bud here is the symbol of art and life used since the Middle Ages as an image of artistic beauty and of Christian mysticism.

The second poem "Dreams" makes use of the same rhetorical devices: exclamations, oxymorons ("empty dowries"), antitheses ("lazy death called virtue," "the spirit's bud alive through sin"). Extraordinary is the image "into the rags of life wreathes the immaculate shape of the dream." In other words, life adorns this pitiable existence with the beauty of man's imagination and dreams. Art is personified in the beloved and addressed: "So, do not weep, laugh, my beloved." But art is nothing without its companion, the dream. Dreams, as we know, were the very stuff of Symbolist poetry (s. Staff's "Sny o potędze"—Dreams of Power; Mallarmé's "L'Après-midi d'un Faune"), yet again they are an expression of the ephemeral nature of art. Art linked to the dream, the poet says implicitly in his three dots ending the poem, runs into nowhere.

In rhythmical quality this poem is lighter than the first. There is less sonorousness, less pathos. Only about half of the stressed syllables are the back vowels "a," "o," and "u." The lighter sound structure is, of course, in harmony with the theme of the poem.

The third poem "Waves" is interesting for its neologisms (*wszystko-krotny*), and antitheses ("We are flower, worm and seed at the same time"; "We are life, sin and death at the same time"). The antithesis was a favourite device of Baroque poetry (s. Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński, "Epitafium Rzymowi"—An Epitaph to Rome; G. R. Derzhavin's: "I am a tsar —I am a slave, I am a worm—I am God").[163] Alliterations (*ot*chłaniach, *to*nące, *tę*czowych, *tę*cze, by*tu*, wr*ot*ne.... kr*ot*ne) and repetitions suggest motion and lightness. The distribution of stresses is again about even between back and low and front and high vowels. There is not only an abundance of motion but also a richness of light and colour: "the glistening rainbows of rainbow-coloured objects, this eternally changing rainbow of things." Again, however, art is ephemeral. Associated with the symbol of waves which glisten and shine for a while, it will go down with them in "the abysses of time" (cf. the Baroque image of "the river of time"). Art is "beautiful deception" (der schöne Schein) as Nietzsche had so often called it.

There is also an art which is not ephemeral but eternal. This suggestion is brought out in the second group of four poems under the title *Ars Aeterna*. The first and the third are presented in the form of a dialogue between two saints (St. Francis and St. Clare) and the fourth is a summing up of that highest purpose of art—to be a giver of joy, or implicitly, to be a giver of life:

ARS AETERNA	ARS AETERNA
(S-ta Clara ad S-tum Franciscum)	*(Saint Claire to Saint Francis)*
O Krynico ty wieczysta,	Oh eternal wellspring,
Krwi odkupnej święte wino,	Holy wine of expiated blood,
Duszo winem tym pijana,	Soul which art drunk with the wine.
Sztuki matko i przyczyno,	Mother and origin of art,
Ducha siło promienista,	Radiant force of spirit,
Studnio moja niezmącona,	Unclouded well of mine,
O RADOŚCI! . . O RADOŚCI! . .	OH JOY! . . . OH JOY! . . .
Najjałowszej smutnej roli	Fertile holy dew
Urodzajna roso święta,	Of the most barren grieving soil,
Kwiecie z ciernia w czole Pana:	Oh flower from the thorn at the Lord's brow:
Lilio woli niedraśnięta	Oh lily of freedom not scratched
Cierniem krzyża i niedoli,	With the thorn of the cross and adversity,
Gdy mi radość życiu kona,	When joy ceases for me in life,
Radość w skonie niech zagości!	May it be replaced by joy in death.

Serce dziecka się rozpęka
Jak skarbnica ofiar krwawa;
Ta obiatna, słodka męka
Tobie, siewco, plon oddawa.

Twego siewu — nasze dary,
Jako hostya w wardze dzieci,
Słowo proste, słowo wiary
Wskroś niech serca nam prześwieci!

Serce nieme w piersiach boli.
Sięgnij, Siewco, po to serce!
Rzuć radości Twej niewody,
A nam wszystkim w poniewierce
Na Odrodzin ześlij gody
Róże ducha, lilie woli!

A child's heart bursts open
Like a bloody treasure house of
sacrifices;
This consecrated, sweet pain
Is turning over its harvest to you,
oh Sower.

Our gifts have been sown by you
Like the host between the lips of
children,
A simple word, a word of faith
May it pierce our hearts for us!

The silent heart aches in the breast.
Reach, oh Sower, for this heart!
Cast out the nets of Your joy,
And to all of us in our adversity
Send down the festive hours of
Renewal,
The roses of the spirit, the
lilies of freedom!

(S-tus Franciscus ad S-tam Claram)

Tu róża twa dogasa już,
W popiele serc na pylną murz
Wnet wytli się płomienny pąk:
Czerwony kwiat z marzenia łąk
Życiowy wnet zasypie kurz.

Golgoty sen kto duszą śnił,
Z Chrystusa ran pragnienie pił,
Na krzyż się swój oddawszy rad,
Pożogi skrę ten nieci w ślad.
. . . Kto zna swą moc? swych źródło
sił?!

Tajemnic pąk! z Golgoty kwiat!
W płomieni siew zapłodni świat,
W odnowin dusz czyscowy wir
Dziecięca skra w próchnicy czyr!
. . . Kto przyszłość wie? Kto
jutrznię zgadł?!

(Saint Francis to Saint Clare)

Here your rose is already burning out,
The fiery bud before long will burn
out in the ashes of the hearts into a
dusty sediment.
The dust of life will soon cover up
The red flower from the fields of
dreams.

He who has dreamt the dream of
Golgotha in his soul,
Who has enflamed his thirst in Christ,
Who has yielded with gladness to
his own cross,
He in turn will kindle the spark
of the conflagration.
. . . Who knows his own power, the
source of his strength?!

Oh bud of mysteries! Flower from
Golgotha!
In flame the sowing will fertilize
the world,
Into the purgatory whirl of the
souls' renewals,
Into the frozen bog of decay—the
spark of innocence!
. . . Who knows the future? Who
has divined the morning?

(Geniusz żebraczy)

O gaya saber! [164] — Kunszt radości!
Weselnej sztuki gędźbo cicha,
W pogrzebnym dzwonie ton twój
czyha,
W kostnicy duch twój dzisiaj gości.

Roztęsknień nutę w dzwonów granie
I surmy głuche w psalm rozpaczy
Powplatał geniusz ten żebraczy,
Co — życiu wieścić
zmartwychwstanie —

Na wszystkie wlecze się cmentarze,
By przy stypowej smutku czarze
Pijanym śmiechem być w pogrzebie,

Potargać szydem kir żałobny,
Podeptać w tańcu świeże groby:
„To ziarna! —— ziarna! legły w
glebie!..“

(The Mendicant Genius)

Oh gaya saber!—Art of joy!
Oh quiet music of joyous art,
Your sound lurks in the funeral bell,
Your spirit today is the guest of
the mortuary.

This mendicant genius has weaved
a note of longing into the
Ringing of bells, and the sound of
muffled trumpets into the psalm of
despair;
In order to proclaim resurrection to
life

He drags himself to all the cemeteries
So that while drinking from the
Funeral cup of sadness he might be
at the funeral with drunken laughter.

To tear the funeral pall with derision
And in dance to trample on fresh
graves!
These are the seeds!——the seeds!
That have lain down in the soil!...

The first of these two poems (S-ta Clara ad S-tum Franciscum) consists of fourteen lines of four-foot trochees with a rhyme scheme of *ababccd* and *abcbacd*. This rhyme scheme strikes the reader as unusual, but it emphasizes those lines which are most significant and are meant to stand out. Thus, in the first half of the poem, the final line O RADOŚCI!.. O RADOŚCI!.. which is the source of address of the poem, stands out not only in terms of print, but also in terms of the even distribution of stresses (four times on the "o" with the first and the third "o" long, the second and fourth short) and the *caesura* in the middle of the line which lends an additional element of emphasis to the line. The six preceding lines of this paean to Joy build up towards the seventh where the climax is reached. The stresses in the first six lines are evenly distributed over the back and low (the "o's," "u's," "a's") as well as the front/high and mid vowels (the "i's," "y's," and "e/ę's"). It is their regular alternation, coupled with the trochaic meter, which gives this poem its quality of lightness and cheerfulness.

The second half of the poem focuses on line three (Kwiecie z ciernia

---

[163] cf. Vsevolod Setschkareff, *Die Dichtungen Gundulićs und ihr poetischer Stil* (Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung des literarischen Barock) (Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1952).

[164] *Gaya saber* (Provençale)—"joyous art".

w czole Pana—Oh flower from the thorn at the Lord's brow) which breaks the pattern of rhymed endings *abba* (the distinctness of both halves of the poem is indicated also in this variation in the rhyme scheme) and inserts a different rhyme which is taken up again in line six. The rhyme in line seven links the theme of joy to line seven of the first half; however, in a subdued tone without exultation and with a sense of finality expressed in the final exclamation mark which is not followed by dots as in line seven of the first half.

The imagery of this poem is associated with the Christian faith, with the idea of joy in Christ. Joy is "the eternal wellspring, the holy wine of expiated blood," "a radiant force of the spirit." When the poet speaks in this context of joy as "mother and origin of art" he must be thinking of Christian art. All existence is transfused with joy, a joy which never ends and reaches even beyond death.

Joy and love of all existing things are associated with St. Francis (1182-1226) and with one of his first disciples, a young woman from Assisi who later became St. Clare (1194-1253). How did Berent happen to think of St. Francis at this juncture of his life when he was so strongly imbued with the philosophy of Nietzsche? Most likely it was his friend Leopold Staff (1878-1957) who inspired this cycle of two poems with St. Francis and St. Clare in discourse with each other. After his youthful infatuation with the thought of Nietzsche (see his *Sny o potędze*—Dreams of Power, 1901, *Mistrz Twardowski*, 1902) Staff, in 1903, gave expression to a different spiritual outlook with his collection, *Dzień duszy* (The Day of the Soul) where life is seen as a pilgrimage, a quiet striving towards an ideal which may never be realized. A number of poems, for example, stress the theme of fulfillment and happiness in doing one's daily work ("Dzień pracy"—A Day of Work). The spiritual outlook of this cycle is serene and unified. The same spiritual attitude pervades his collection, *Ptakom niebieskim* (To the Birds of the Sky, 1905), which was published in the same year as the cycle of poetry by Berent. This collection, whose title is an allusion to the famous Sermon to the Birds by Saint Francis, is also pervaded by serenity and harmony. It owes its exultant joy in some of its specimens (the last section of this collection is entitled "Pył z szat pielgrzyma"—Dust from the Pilgrim's Robes) to Staff's interest in Saint Francis and the collection *Fioretti di San Francesco* which he translated over the years and published in 1910 (*Kwiatki św. Franciszka z Asyżu*). There is a special emphasis in the teaching of St. Francis on joyousness and love of nature (see his "Canticle of Creatures" where he speaks of "brother Sun," "sister Moon" and even "sister Death"). Berent must have known Staff's poems in this cycle, especially "O radosnej ojczyźnie" (On the Joyous Fatherland), and "O wielkiej radości" (On Great Joy).

The poem that starts with the line "Serce dziecka się rozpęka" (A child's heart bursts open) is written in the classical form of the sonnet with two quatrains and two tercets. It is made up of regular four-foot

trocheic feet. The imagery in this poem is linked to Christian mythology: the symbolism of the child's heart associated with the innocence of a flower; the image of blood as an identification with the suffering of Jesus; the "harvest" of human sin which is being turned over to Christ.

Christ is at the centre of this poem as the sower of all "gifts" and the source of "Renewal." The poem is couched in the form of a prayer. Its spiritual note has a ring of despair. The speaker seeks reassurance, hope and joy. His words beg for the gift of grace. A sonnet in form, with a strong melodic line and a prayer in content, this poem serves as a link between the two messages which St. Francis and St. Clare send to each other.

The answer of St. Francis to St. Clare is not so much a paean to joy as a poem of quiet resignation with the assurance that the spark of inspiration—here connected with Christian humility—will serve as an eternal force of renovation and rejuvenation. In a series of rhetorical exclamations and questions the promise of the cross of Christ is pitted against the decay of all things. The poem closes in an open-ended fashion on a note of hope and quiet reassurance. In Staff's cycle we find the same resignation coupled with hope in "O życiu i śmierci" (On Life and Death) and "O spokojnej śmierci (On a Tranquil Death).

The form of this poem is more difficult than that of the preceding one. Its sombre mood is indicated in Berent's switch from the lighter trochee to the four-foot iamb and the exclusive use of masculine rhymes, which in Polish prosody necessitates a monosyllabic word. A constant masculine rhyme in a poem in Polish will produce a special sound effect, and the final stressed word in each line will be particularly noticed. The same prominence applies to the first stressed word in a poetic line. Here then we have a definite link both in terms of stress and meaning between the first stressed word of the line and the last word with the rest of the stresses distributed unevenly in the middle of the line.

Another interesting feature of this poem is the five-line stanza with a rhyme pattern of *aabba* with the fifth line linked to the first two and yet singled out in terms of rhetorical emphasis. In the first stanza, due to the inverted syntax of lines four and five, we have an inverted enjambement. Lines five of the second and third stanzas are rhetorical statements of special forcefulness set off by a caesura.

This poem exhibits a certain harshness both in form and meaning. It contains a strong note of pathos and seriousness. Whereas the first part of this conversation between St. Clare and St. Francis is suffused by the triumphant note of joy and victory associated with the New Testament, the second looks into the mysteries of this world; of life and death and of the meaning of Christ. It does so in a less optimistic way: "the flaming bud," "the bud of mysteries," "the flower from Golgotha." Does the rose here stand as a symbol of Christ as the *rosa mystica* of the Church? In connection with St. Francis it is possible to suggest such an interpretation. He sought the imitation of Christ as his highest ideal and his love of nature and love of Christ were mystically united. But is there joyous-

ness in this manly suffering, or is it a foreshadowing of the "acedia," the profound pessimism of medieval man in the thirteenth and fourteenth century in expectation of Christ's return and the Final Judgment? The ideas of man's suffering and spiritual dejection are somehow united in the mystic tenor of the poem where "the rose is burning out" and where no one has been able to divine the future. This mystical attitude towards the universe where suffering, despondency and hope are all united and strive towards artistic expression finally produced the greatest masterpiece of the Middle Ages, Dante's *Divine Comedy* ("The mystics have shown Dante the path to art").[165]

It should be borne in mind that Berent had been familiar with Medieval Italian mysticism for several years before he wrote *Żywe kamienie*, and he may have already known Emile Gébhart's *L'Italie mystique — Histoire de la Renaissance religieuse au moyen age* (1890), when he wrote his poetry. The artistic stimuli in that case went beyond his familiarity with Staff's "To the Birds of the Sky" and derived from that mystical foundation on which he would build his greatest novel, *Żywe kamienie*.

The last of these seven poems (The Mendicant Genius) was selected to represent Berent the poet in the recent Biblioteka Narodowa edition of *Poezja Młodej Polski* (Wrocław, 1967). It was a fortunate choice, and the fact of the inclusion of Berent in this volume of first-rate poetry is a tribute to the discriminating taste of its original editor, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński (1874-1941). Its form is the classical sonnet of two quatrains and two tercets, its metre the four-foot iamb with a rhyme scheme of *abba cddc eef ggf*. The canonical rhyming of the third line of the first tercet with the second line of the second tercet was not observed here. Instead the third lines of both tercets rhyme, which is necessary for the distribution of emphasis in the poem. The alternation between stressed front vowels and stressed back or low vowels is especially skilfully done here (*el*, *uk*; *ędz*, *ich*; *eb*, *on*; *on*, *ych*; *ic*, *uch*; *iś*, *oś*). The perfect balance in the distribution of sounds produces the musical quality of the sonnet. Its very form with its octave and sestet is designed to evoke a sense of harmony and perfection. For his final statement on Ars Aeternas the choice of this form was highly felicitous.

In his choice of vocabulary the poet is true to the tradition of Młoda Polska which sought to revitalize the original, primordial meanings. He not only uses the foreign expression *gaya saber*, which he may have first seen in Nietzsche, but he also uses the expression *weselny* (mystical) in its archaic meaning of "joyous," the archaism *gędźba* (music) and the simple root *szyd* of *szyderstwo* (derision, mockery).

The poem is a song of praise to the undaunted spirit of the "Mendicant Genius" who drags himself from one funeral feast to the other not in order to share the sorrow of the bereft but in order to deride death

---

[165] Vossler, *op. cit.*, I, 347.

and "to dance on the freshly built grave mounds." The focus of the poem falls on the first two words (*O gaya saber*) and on the last (*To ziarna, ziarna — legły w glebie*) emphasized by the author through spacing [in our text italics] and in terms of the rhetorical build-up of the poem to some climactic statement. These last words seem to be shouted defiantly into the universe as a challenge to the power of death. They suggest the Nietzschean thought of the transience of man to a higher form of humanity. They form a direct link with the idea of Berent's *Próchno,* the humus that serves as the foundation of new life, and furthermore, with Berent's later novel, *Żywe kamienie,* where art is shown to triumph over sadness and despondency irrespective of the fact that human beings pass on. The "geniusz żebraczy" of this poem is the Goliard of *Żywe kamienie.* Someone will always be there to revive and restore the hearts of men. Art is inseparable from and indispensable to life, and in this sense it is eternal.

The affirmative statement of this last poem is again marked by a certain manliness and fortitude, Nietzschean in character, and not identical with the fortitude of St. Francis, which willingly accepted the marks of sufferings. It is not inward-looking but looks defiantly outward. It is not a statement of withdrawal but of conquest. It views life as a challenge and feels certain of eventual triumph. "Joyous art" is its watchword:

> Almost everywhere in Europe there exists nowadays a sickly sensibility and sensitivity towards pain and at the same time a loathsome incontinence in complaint, an overrefinement with pretensions to something higher by means of religion and philosophical tomfoolery. There exists even a cult of suffering. The *unmanliness* of that which in such groups is called "pity" always strikes the eye first, it seems to me. It is necessary to do away resolutely and decisively with this newest form of bad taste. I only wish that people instead would wear the amulet 'gai saber'—'joyous science', if I must be explicit for Germans.[166]

These seven "roses" are a minor part of Berent's *oeuvre,* yet they form a good statement of his aesthetic values as well as his skill as a poet. They are characterized by a certain mysticism. Indeed, the poems under the heading "Ars Aeterna" suggest that genuine art can exist only as part of a mystical vision of the universe. This mystical vision may have the aspect of Christian humility or Nietzschean defiance, but it is always

---

[166] Nietzsche, II, 753: "Es gibt heute fast überall in Europa eine krankhafte Empfindlichkeit und Reizbarkeit für Schmerz, insgleichen eine widrige Unenthaltsamkeit in der Klage, eine Verzärtlichung, welche sich mit Religion und philosophischem Krimskrams zu etwas Höherem aufputzen möchte — es gibt einen förmlichen Kultus des Leidens. Die *Unmännlichkeit* dessen, was in solchen Schwärmerkreisen "Mitleid" getauft wird, springt, wie ich meine, immer zuerst in die Augen. — Man muss diese neueste Art des schlechten Geschmacks kräftig und gründlich in den Bann tun; und ich wünsche endlich, dass man das gute Amulett *"gai saber"* sich dagegen um Herz und Hals lege — "fröhliche Wissenschaft", um es den Deutschen zu verdeutlichen."

irrational. Mystical vision is identical with a unified view of the universe, and it is this towards which all great artists strive. Berent's viison is made up of various elements but it is mystical in each of his works starting with *"W puszczy."*

This group of seven poems were not the only poems published in Berent's lifetime. Studencki has made available, in the Annex to Volume One of his study, three additional poems which were originally meant to be included in *Ozimina* but were left in the proof stage. They were printed in *Miesięcznik Literacki i Artystyczny* (Literary and Artistic Monthly), 1911, No. 3, pp. 247-249.

The basic rhetorical device of these three poems [167] is again an antithesis: the deception of autumn which by means of flowers and wine gives the illusion of spring ("Na wtórne kwiaty jesieni naszych"). The author sees life here in terms of a large metaphor. The fruits of life whose seeds were sown in the spring are identified with the late flowers of autumn, only to be wiped out by the "East Wind." They are like the flowers "clothed in the colours of wilting leaves" and "sometimes like blood-red grape-gatherings" creating the illusion of spring. It is the last surge of life before the end. Is not all of life, and are not all of its fruits finally an illusion, the poet asks; an idea we should not be surprised to find with a Neo-Romantic poet.

---

[167] *Na wtórne kwiaty jesieni naszych*

Pytasz, złudą jesieni ku wiośnie ocknięty:
"Czemu wino ochoty w krwawe idzie męty
W wina młodego zatrutej tu czarze?..."

Z wielkich tęsknic jesieni, w barwy zwiędłych liści
Zawód rodny macierzy wtórne kwiaty iści,
Czasem krwawych winobrań wiosnę rodzić każe.

Wicher Wschodu zawodzi słoneczną godziną:
"Jak kwiat złudny jesieni, tak złudą przeminą
Płone wiosen nadzieje nie w moim zegarze.

Zwarzą kwiaty tęsknicy mgieł moich powicia
I siać, siać będą tylko odrazę do życia
W serca te smutne do dna sobie wraże!..."

(*To the Secondary Flowers of Our Autumns*

You ask while you were aroused into spring by the deception
of autumn: "Why does the wine of desire turn into blood-red sediments,
in this poisoned cup of young wine?..."
The basic disilllsionment of the earth seeks secondary flowers
as compensation from the great nostalgia of fall—in the colours of
wilted leaves;
Sometimes it orders a spring of blood-red grape-gatherings.

The storm from the East brings disillusionment during an hour of
sunshine: "Like the deceptive flower of autumn the harvest hopes
of our springs will thus pass in deception not on my clock.
The flowers of longing will make wilt the covers of my darknessses
And will sow and sow only revulsion for life into these
Sad hearts hostile to each other to the end!...")

Młodości...

Feniksie nasz! skowronku niw,
Polatuj, leć z cmentarnych cisz,
Nieścigle chyń w słoneczną wyż
i rozdzwoń się, zawrotnie żyw.

Zwiastunie żniw! ten lot na schwał,
Spod mogił rzut w błękitu dzwon:
Pogrobnych serc wysoki ton,
Od wieka w wiek nadzieją grał.

Dziś szatan siał kamieni plon,
Lemiesze nam zasypał w piarg,
I krzyk rozpaczy dobył z warg:
O bożych serc odkupny skon.

Z tych ziemi łon w pogrobny cud
Przebujnych ziarn wykwitnie kłos,
A siejbę tę w nadziei głos
Rozdzwoni nam skowronków trud.

Feniksie złud! w przedżniwny ruch
Polatuj, leć z pognębień cisz,
Boś ty jest znak, jak z grobu wzwyż
Dosięga słońc cmentarny duch.

(Oh Youth ...

Oh our Phoenix! Skylark of the fields,
Fly, fly from the sepulchral silences
Drown in the sunlit heights
And let your voice be heard, alive in giddiness.

Oh herald of harvests! This marvellous flight,
A thrust from below the graves into the sound of the blue:
The high sound of hearts that have outlived the grave
Has played the note of hope from age to age.

Today satan has sown a harvest of stones,
Our plough shares he has filled with scree,
And he drew a scream of despair from the lips:
For a redemptive end of godly hearts.

The ear of exuberant grains will
Grow from the womb of this earth into a
Miracle that will outlive the grave,
And this sowing will be proclaimed for us
Through the effort of the nightingale in a voice of hope.

Oh Phoenix of deception! Take off on the pre-harvest flight,
Fly away from the silences of ruins,
For you are a sign of the sepulchral spirit flying upward from the grave
And reaching the suns.)

Wiosna mówi

Duszę mam jako harfa rozśpiewaną,
Melodią życia nad mogiły graną,
Duszę mam jak kwiat w cmentarne rano —
Pijaną własnych narodzin rozkoszą!...

Tchnienia mogił tajemne, gdy siew nowy zroszą,
Z rojeń ziemi cmentarnych na słońce wykłoszą,
Groby wstrząsa bunt wiosny i łaknienie życia:
Upicia się tym winem nieśmiertelnej czary.

W ciała nowe rozkwitły trupie grobów mary,
W tętno i krew nową... twoje, słońce, dary!
Z wiary w ciebie, słoneczne, rodzi grobów wnętrze.
Życie wokół zwycięskie nad śmierć każdą świętsze!

Gdzie czyny, najprawdziwsze, czucie najgorętsze,
Tam się grób każdy w kwiat życia odmienia...
Z tchnienia ziemi cmentarnej, że życie pić muszę,
Że barwy wiosny hojne na wiatr śmierci proszę,

Dusze mam jako harfa rozśpiewaną,
Melodią życia nad mogiły graną,
Duszę mam jak kwiat w cmentarne rano —
Pijaną wiecznej odnowy rozkoszą!

(Spring Speaks

I have a soul that sings like a harp
On the tune of life played on top of the graves.
I have a soul like a flower on a sepulchral morning—
Drunk with the opulence of its own birth! . . .

The mysterious pangs of breath of the graves when a new
Sowing is being watered
Break out to the sun from the dreams of the soil,
The graves are convulsed by the rebellion of spring and the appetite for life:
By the intoxication on the wine of this immortal cup.

The deadly ghosts of the graves have blossomed out into new bodies,
Into pulsations and a new blood . . . your gifts, oh sun!
The sunshine interior of the graves comes to life through faith in thee.
Victorious life all about is more saintly than any death!

Where the most truthful acts, the warmest feeling can be found,
There each grave turns into the flower of life . . .
Since I must drink life from the breath of the graveyard soil,
Beg for the generous colours of spring against the wind of death,

I have a soul that sings like a harp
On the tune of life played on top of the graves;
I have a soul like a flower on a sepulchral morning—
Drunk with the opulence of eternal renewal!)

The imagery and the use of colours are striking in this poem. The dark red colour of the autumn is particularly prominent: "blood-red sediment," "blood-red grape-gatherings." Very effective are the symbols of the "hour of sunshine" and of the "East Wind." Joy and happiness are illusions, treasured by man as long as he can, but destined to be transcient.

In the poem "Młodości. . ." (To Youth . . .) the poet uses the phoenix as a symbol of rejuvenation and rebirth. Again his basic rhetorical figure is antithesis: "the sepulchral silences" vs. "the sunlit heights," "the silence of the graves" vs. "the jubilating sounds of the blue sky." The phoenix is the bird of eternal illusion, rising from the ashes and soaring to the sun, a symbol of the irresistible drive to life and a symbol of the relentless victory of spirit over matter, a thought beautifully expressed in the final metaphor: "For you are a sign of the sepulchral spirit flying upward from the grave and reaching the suns."

The third poem, "Wiosna mówi" (Spring speaks), is a hymn to life. Again the same imagery: the grave vs. the sun, the jubilant sounds of life vs. the silence of death. The inspiration to this poem probably came from Nietzsche:

> I am being transported, my soul dances. The day's work! The day's work! Who shall be the master of the earth? The moon is cool, the wind is silent. Oh! Oh! Did you fly high enough? You were dancing, but a leg is not yet a wing. You fine dancers, now all joy is gone.
>
> Mine was the yeast, each cup became brittle, the graves mumble. You did not fly high enough. Now the graves mumble: But deliver the dead! Why is the night so long? Doesn't the moon make us drunk? You higher men, redeem the graves, wake up the corpses! Oh, why does the worm still dig? The hour, the hour is approaching,—the bell roars, the heart rattles; the wood-worm keeps digging, the worm of the heart. Oh! Oh! The world is deep! [168]

The ecstasy of these lines has been recaptured in the five quatrains of Berent's poem.

---

[168] Nietzsche, II, 554 (*Also sprach Zarathustra*):
Es trägt mich dahin, meine Seele tanzt. Tagewerk! Tagewerk!
Wer soll der Erde Herr sein?
Der Mond ist kühl, der Wind schweigt. Ach! Ach! Flogt
ihr schon hoch genug? Ihr tanztet: aber ein Bein ist
doch kein Flügel.
Ihr guten Tänzer, nun ist alle Lust vorbei: Wein ward Hefe,
jeder Becher ward mürbe, die Gräber stammeln.
Ihr flogt nicht hoch genug: nun stammeln die Gräber "erlöst
doch die Toten! Warum ist so lange Nacht? Macht uns nicht
der Mond trunken?"
Ihr höheren Menschen, erlöst doch die Gräber, weckt die
Leichname auf! Ach, was gräbt noch der Wurm? Es naht,
es naht die Stunde, — es brummt die Glocke, es schnarrt noch
das Herz, es gräbt noch der Holzwurm, der Herzenswurm.
Ach! Ach! *Die Welt ist tief!*

The mood in these three poems runs a full circle: from despondency and denial of life to joyful assertion in "the drunken delight of eternal renewal." Berent's work was conceived and executed in the context of these two spiritual conditions: denial and affirmation. Its conception is antithetical, its basis an aesthetic vision of the world, yet with a profound longing for an ethical vision, for a faith in transcendence and redemption. It seems doubtful whether Nietzsche could satisfy this longing entirely and if not the vision of Kierkegaard was closer to Berent on this level. Whether or not Berent knew Kierkegaard and was artistically stimulated by the Danish philosopher's profound thoughts, Berent's work and his position as a writer and thinker carried him along the road from an aesthetical to an ethical vision of life, which we shall have an opportunity to observe in our discussion of the following works.

ROTTEN WOOD

> My soul is an abyss whose longing nothing can ever satisfy and which has not yet found tranquillity in the extirpation of desires . . . This infinite and indefinite fervour is a thirst that does not go away.[169]
>
> On the other hand, among those who search there are many whom the hunger for sensations tosses into the evil whirlpool of big cities and the hunger of the spirit leads on to hopeless dead-end paths. One and the other grafts on them the impotence of the heart, the poison of exclusive thoughts about "themselves only", and causes the crumbling of all values in their hands. Today more than ever. And that's where *rotten wood* begins.[170]

I

Próchno (Rotten Wood), published in 1901 serially in *Chimera* and in 1903 as a separate edition, is a symbolical work about the world of the artist at the turn of the century, about the world of an intellectual élite which has lost faith in itself. In his presentation of the despair experienced by a group of artists, Berent brilliantly depicts the Decadent movement of the period. Highly developed aestheticism and estrangement from life are its characteristics. There is a relentless posing of fundamental questions: "What, after all, is truth?" one of the four heroes in this novel asks. "It does not depend on your 'this is it,' or 'this is not it.' It is neither certainty nor doubt; it is revelation. Prophets see the truth eye to eye." [171]

---

[169] Henri Amiel, *Journal II* (p. 211), from Eckart von Sydow, *Die Kultur der Dekadenz* (Dresden, 1922), p. 57.

[170] Wacław Berent, *Próchno* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1956), p. 326.

[171] *Ibid.*, p. 311.

Highly developed aestheticism and individual isolation coupled with an egocentric dandyism are the features one associates with the Decadent movement. These features mark Jens Peter Jacobsen's Nils (*Nils Lyhne*, 1880), Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1891), Maurice Barrès's Sturel (*Les Déracinés*, 1897) and Thomas Mann's Detlev Spinell ("Tristan," 1903). This was the sickness of the fin de siècle, not a new sickness, but a return and an intensification in the world of the intellectuals of that spiritual depression which Gregory the Great (Pope Gregory I, 590-604) in the Middle Ages had described as "acedia . . . est animi remissio, mentis enervatio, neglectus religiosae exercitationis, odium professionis, laudatrix rerum secularium." [172] It was Soeren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) who gave one of the profoundest analyses of spiritual dejection and melancholy in *Either/Or* (2 volumes, 1843), a theme taken up forty years later by Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "The Song of Melancholy" (Das Lied der Schwermut): "To all of you who suffer the *great nausea* as I do, for whom the old God has died and a new one has not yet been put into the crib and in diapers, all of you share the fondness of my evil spirit and devil-magician." [173]

Walter Rehm (1901-1963) has analysed this disease of the spirit, which has run in world literature through the centuries but has appeared with special force and in infinite variety since Romanticism in the nineteenth century, in a series of brilliant studies of the writers of this period.[174] In a work that was published posthumously he seems to have found the key to the spiritual malady of the *fin de siècle*:

> Here the decisive word has been said. It is the final, necessary result of that new loneliness and its aestheticism carried to the extreme which then finds its expression in Oscar Wilde in a theoretically paradox and yet absolutely consequential fashion: the first duty of life is to be as artistic as possible. In art you can use only such things which you have stopped using in life. In Wilde's discussion of art and life (in the "Disintegration of the Lie") the following conclusion is drawn: nature and life have to orient themselves by art, by this artificial art; the path leads from art to nature, and not the reverse. In the metaphorical sense this is death, death through art, the final conclusion of the new experience of loneliness of modern artistic man who now seeks to justify and to defend in a senseless frenzy the horribly ghostlike artificiality of his stillborn art and the morbidity of his desires, and who seeks to prove them as that which is true and right. The new loneliness has here led to

---

[172] Walther Rehm, *Gontscharow und Jacobsen oder Langeweile und Schwermut* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), p. 95.

[173] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1955), Vol. II, 532.

[174] See Walther Rehm, *Kierkegaard und der Verführer*, 1959; *Jean Paul — Dostojewski* (Zur dichterischen Gastaltung des Unglaubens), 1962; and others.

> torpidity, to death. Death is reflected in this artificially animated art —yawning emptiness. Art has turned into death and encounters life in this fashion, a result of that belief that life is to be lived and becomes real only in appearance, in play, in dream, in art. Where art does not long to be reunited with life from which it has become separated through original force and weakness and later through will, where it wants to be artificial, breaking off all bridges and deciding to remain in the aristocratically leisurely and personally desired loneliness, in this new loneliness, here life finally will withdraw altogether, and all that is left is the empty shell, the nothing, death. And the question arises if under these circumstances a resurrection is at all possible.[175]

These words on the relationship between art and life are fundamental and touch the basic concern of *Próchno.* We shall discuss the work in five stages: the material of the novel and its context, its ideology, its place in the Romantic tradition (Berent and Słowacki), critical voices (Matuszewski, Troczyński and Wyka) and a summary in terms of the synthesis of style and meaning.

"You must drink from those waters which give rise either to strength and activity, or to the spirit exclusively, or to lack of will only: they give birth to life, art or dreams." [176] These reflections of Kunicki, a young physician and one of the secondary characters of the novel, are indicative of the mood which pervades this work. Kunicki and Borowski, the actor, meet in a cemetery, "in a German cemetery where even a crow does not deign to sit down." [177] The novel opens with the motif of death—and it will close with this motif as Borowski starts with the confession of his life. This confession is not just an account of the chronological events of his youth, but an attempt to come to terms with his upbringing, with the milieu in which he was raised, where his father, an actor, played a domineering role, a milieu which lacked a centre of love, motherly love ("But how will you die some day, Narcissus, if you do not have a mother? Without a mother one cannot love. Without a mother one cannot die."[178]). In his father's profligate world the feminine principle played a very subordinate role. Father and son lived in different worlds, the father in the world of sensuousness and the son in the world of dreams. The son, Władysław Borowski, longs for love, understanding, a feminine presence. Since he does not find it, he takes refuge in dreams. His mother's portrait suggests her imaginary presence with which he communicates in his moments of loneliness—he does not communicate with his father—but the object of his communication is also a symbol of that

---

[175] Walther Rehm, *Der Dichter und die neue Einsamkeit; Aufsätze zur Literatur um 1900* (Göttingen, 1969), pp. 32-33.

[176] *Próchno*, p. 76.

[177] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[178] Herman Hesse, *Narziss und Goldmund* (Fischer Bücherei, 1970), p. 330.

indefinite longing of the soul which is looking for an anchor, for an understanding of its path in life, a longing for faith: "And this face of hers on the photograph absorbed everything that I held in my breast. All my desires fused, coalesced and concentrated in her features. This face became their curious, visible forms, the enigmatic symbol of mother, life, woman and art . . ." [179]

From the very first we encounter here the emptiness of heart, this longing for life, for activity. "I want to live, live, live (*Ja żyć, żyć, żyć, chcę!*). Again and again the word "deed," "action," is used: "So that they might become deed"; "for humility is needed for action." The tragedy of a life centred in dreams is made apparent in these early pages, of a life which has no other focus but its own self. Somehow a way had to be found out of this dead-end situation, and the only way seemed to lead to the theatre—to art. But how could any step, any endeavour lead to success and fulfillment if it always overreached itself, if its expectations were too high: ". . . for everything that's limited congeals only. But if on the other hand you would take me over to the side and whisper into my ear: 'My son, somewhere something great is waiting for you . . . , something which . . .' " [180] In these words we have the Romantic and Neo-Romantic maximalism which would necessarily produce its own destruction. It has been well observed of a great Russian poet (Alexander Blok, 1880-1921) of this period that "this 'spiritual maximalism' of the Romantic individualist grows out of a sense of the limitlessness of the human soul, its inability to be satisfied with anything finite and limited. This soul, poisoned by grandiose desires, seeks unending experiences which alone are capable of satisfying its mystical hunger. Unlimited demands on life, the search for the exotic and the marvellous render simple, ordinary reality tasteless. The emptiness of everyday existence, heavy hangovers, 'wordless longing without reason and the constant intoxication by fantasies', inevitably follow such agonizing flights of passionate feeling." [181]

Władysław Borowski becomes an actor but in "his heart emptiness remains." He has his first love affair but his beloved dies. These love affairs, first for his deceased mother, then for a young woman, who also dies, are desperate attempts to break the cycle of his dreams and to live. These love affairs are stillborn, and artificial; they are the enigma of life while the hero is yearning for real life. As a result of his failure to break the magic circle of his dreams, he is overcome by pain and sadness and seeks consolation in art: "I did not play, I pretended to play on the stage. When I took someone else's sadness into my own heart then it was my

---

[179] *Próchno*, p. 12.

[180] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[181] V. M. Zhirmunskij, "Poèzija Aleksandra Bloka," *Voprosy teorii literatury: stat'i 1916-1926* (Reprint of Leningrad 1928 ed.; The Hague: Mouton, 1962), 209-210.

own blood, the blood of my heart which I let flow before people's eyes; when I filled my soul with someone else's despair, I tossed pieces of my own heart, head, soul—away! forever! knowing that this will never return to me, that tomorrow I'll give less than today and that in a year's time I won't have anything left in myself." [182]

A decisive step to a new way of life is the hero's marriage to Zosia (she is either called Zosia or Zochna, both affectionate diminutive forms of Zofia—Sophy). But marriage does not cure the spiritual malaise of the hero. Zosia, through the remainder of the novel, plays a completely subordinate role. She is almost mute, quietly suffering what others do to her, yet never a person in her own right. She is not able to hold back her husband from his final spiritual disintegration, indeed her presence intensifies his suffering. "Already I had nothing else in my mind but women, women! . . ." These words of the confession are spoken with revulsion after the hero's disappointment in one area of life after another. His own sarcastic words find their echo when he recalls the remarks of his father: "I did not want to spoil you, Władek, but this one thing I know, and may God be my witness that I speak sincerely: 'You would have been new, fresh, brilliant, had it not been for women.' " We observe in some of Berent's writings an almost misogynist tendency. In general, women play a subordinate role in his work.

Love fails and art fails. The hero plays nightly and plays with great success; but it is not art which transfuses his life, but artificiality ("podobieństwo" sztuki). Such a pretence of art is marked by death: "And again death sat on my back. This will surely happen: I shall lose everything to the dust, to nothingness, to the cold body of a reptile." The hero plays, knowing that "all the strings of his life are bursting, one after another, all the strings on which he had played sadness, pity and despair."

When Borowski has finished with his confession, he has revealed everything essential about himself. Now we know that he is a man without faith; without faith in himself or in others, a man without any grounding in life, without any firm attachments, a man without God. In his portrayal of the father, an actor whose career had ended before its time due to alcoholism and eventually suicide, and of the son, whose life is characterized by lack of faith and a dark pessimism, Berent depicts a situation in which there is a profound malaise in human relationships.

After his father's death Borowski symbolically represents the last actor in life, longing for death like Stanisław Korab-Brzozowski whose poem he quotes:

O przyjdź, jesienią —
W chwilę zmierzchu senną, niepewną —
i dłonie

---

[182] *Próchno*, p. 18.

Swe przejrzyste, miękkie, woniejące
na cierpiące
Połóż mi skronie
o Śmierci! . . .
(Oh come in the autumn,

At the drowsy and uncertain moment of dusk—
And place your transparent, soft and perfumed
Hands on my suffering temples
Oh, Death! . . .[183]

Throughout the remaining hundred pages of Part One of the novel, Borowski goes through the motions of life but he does not really live. Furthermore, the black melancholy of his soul is symbolically extended to all of life in the midnight conflagration in the city and the reappearing echo of "the terrible, hopeless scream." Kunicki and Borowski return to the city at night. There is no moon and no stars to light their path (Borowski three times falls over a grave, which he takes for a bad omen). The thoughts of Nietzsche are with the two men ("Someone has said that only the gods have a right to show themselves naked. Today we have every reason to cover up our nakedness." [184]). The two of them finally reach the edge of the city and continue their conversation in the dimly lit setting of a cheap restaurant. Kunicki, the physician, makes a weak attempt to counter Borowski's arguments. He speaks of the need to seek healing, but when Borowski asks him, "And have you never been frightened by the nightmare of reality?" he is silent. Indeed, Kunicki has already become infected by the sickness of the soul which he had only just diagnosed in his friend. A little later, alone by himself in his apartment, he recalls the last three stanzas of Miriam's famous sonnet with the German title "Stimmung":

Samotnyś. Błądzisz. W wyobraźni chorej
Rój dziwnych widem myśli twoje niańczą,
Zdasz się sam sobie duszą wywołańczą,
Od której pierzcha tłum w ucieczce skory.

I mroki zwolna w duszę twą się sączą,
Gaszą w niej wszystko, tłumią swą opończą,
I pustka wielka zalewa ci łono.
Nawet marzenia, które życie złocą,
Pierzchły jak ptaki. Z głową opuszczoną
Szepczesz bez myśli: "Po co wszystko? po co!"

(You are alone again. Your mind wanders.
In the sick imagination your thoughts nurse

---

[183] Mieczysław Jastrun, ed., *Poezja Młodej Polski* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1967), p. 297. Poem by Stanisław Korab Brzozowski (1876-1901).

[184] *Próchno*, p. 47.

a swarm of curious spectres.
You seem to yourself like a soul that has been called out,
From whom the quick crowd runs away in escape.

And the shadows slowly permeate your soul,
Extinguish everything in it and cover it with their cloak;
And a great emptiness fills your heart.
Even your dreams which put the golden trim on your life
Have taken flight like birds. With a bowed head you whisper
without a thought: "What is it all for? What for?" [185]

This last, unanswered question weighs on Kunicki as it does on all the characters of the novel.

Gradually, the other figures of this artistic milieu are introduced. After Borowski and Kunicki we meet the journalist Jelsky, "not quite a Pole," a man who spends his days in the shallow atmosphere of the coffeehouse, where he would also end his days: " 'to drop in at a coffee-shop,' Kunicki laughed nervously, 'that's where the riddle of life has ended for you.' " [186] Jelsky provides Borowski with books which gives the author an opportunity to make use of literary motives in order to intensify his theme of spiritual desolation and loneliness. Borowski paraphrases a monologue from Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" (translated into German in 1883 and published in a revised translation in 1901), a play which Berent later translated himself. There are also references to Wyspiański's "Wesele" (The Wedding). Borowski as "enemy of the people" directs his harangue not only against society like Ibsen's Thomas Stockman but against the stupidity of life: "Oh man, I wanted truth, only truth in life." As a reply he hears the word "madman" and all around he sees "only eyes, eyes, eyes." The silence and the lack of response symbolize the unfeeling crowd with which such people as Borowski and Stockman have lost contact. But Borowski makes reference in his monologue to still another spokesman of literary culture, this time to the famous Stańczyk, the awareness of whose role in Polish history and culture had just been revived by Wyspiański when "Wesele" was first produced on the Cracow stage on March 16, 1901. It is very likely that Berent had just seen the play, and decided to introduce this motif while working on the novel. Borowski addresses "the prophet from the Polish province" who is also a bit of an actor. Why, he asks, has the general populace pressed a cap with bells on the head of "your man who has something to say which goes beyond the established context. Why is his mind called chaotic, and why as soon as he opens his lips is he ridiculed in people's eyes, and when he has closed them he has become a madman for them? And right away they press a cap with bells on his

---

[185] *Ibid.*, p. 60. Miriam had dedicated this poem to the famous Polish medievalist and translator of Dante's *Divine Comedy* into Polish, Edward Porębowicz (1862-1937).

[186] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

forehead. You see, it's this cap with the bells about which the Ibsens have forgotten."

These literary references make Borowski an even more complex and profound personality. He is not so much a Thomas Stockman as a descendant of Stańczyk (1470-1556), the famous court jester of King Sigismund I (1467-1548). The prototype Stańczyk appears as a ghost in Wyspiański's play, but the Journalist who encounters the ghost is a real person and another sort of Stańczyk.[187] He is looking for advice and guidance: "I stand above the abyss and don't know where my path leads." Here the ghost of Stańczyk answers: "Since you have cut my heart, you find nothing else in it but these anxieties; disgrace, disgrace, shame, burning shame: some sort of fate is driving us into the precipice——" [188] The historical Stańczyk had understood the world with the wisdom of the buffoon. His life had been grounded in faith and irony; but his descendants, like Wyspiański's Journalist (Dziennikarz), and Berent's actor (Borowski) have lost their bearings and are in despair.

After Jelsky, we meet Müller, a young man, a consumptive, but a genuine poet who, like Borowski, feels estranged from life. He is known for his aphorisms which are a façade for his inward emptiness: "Women are like dung-beetles. They put the most fertile seeds into those places which are rotting and disintegrating." Next, the secondary characters are introduced: Turkuł, the author of the play *Przeznaczenie* (Predestination), whom Borowski asks: "And where have you just come from, if I may ask?"—"I? . . . From Paris."—"Have you written anything?"—The author covered his face with his hands as if protecting himself from a personal fit.-—"Nothing, nothing, sir! I have only lived on my artistic nerves." [189]

While the novel is not a *roman à clef* we can't help noticing certain features of Przybyszewski in this character. Paris, in this instance, most likely stands for Cracow where Przybyszewski lived from 1898 to 1901, and *Przeznaczenie* probably stands for his drama *Dla szczęścia* (For Happiness), 1900. As one of the most prominent spokesmen for the ideas of Nietzsche among the Młoda Polska writers ("Chopin and Nietzsche," 1892), he is appropriately given the same role in this novel. The coffeehouse celebration at which all of the characters of the novel are brought together is reminiscent of the "Eselsfest" (The Donkey's Feast) in *Zarathustra.* It is presided over by von Hertenstein, a musician, the only aristocrat in the novel and a Maecenas to his artistic confrères. The two scenes at the coffeehouse and at the cabaret, to which the entire company

---

[187] See the illuminating remarks by Julian Krzyżanowski, "Dwaj Stańczycy w 'Weselu' Wyspiańskiego," *W wieku Reja i Stańczyka* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1958), pp. 393-399.

[188] Stanisław Wyspiański, *Dramaty (*Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1955), pp. 229-230.

[189] *Próchno,* p. 100.

repairs in order to see and hear the famous French singer, Yvette Guilbert, are the epitome of an aesthetic pretence from which genuine art has escaped. All the characters pretend, but in their inebriated state not a single word is to be taken seriously. Under the influence of alcohol they dip into the treasures of Romantic and Neo-Romantic literature: Słowacki, Baudelaire, Nietzsche. Yet, can they overcome the "spirit of heaviness" which had spoken so eloquently in the first part of this chapter through Borowski? The answer is no, and it is precisely because genuine art cannot thrive in a coffeehouse milieu. In Berent's novel it is Jelsky, a man who is neither a German nor a Pole, who proposes a toast *not* to art but to the pasquil!

The level of art is symbolically indicated in the cabaret performance of Yvette Guilbert who suggests, through the medium of mime and sound, the love of a young boy. When this young lover has to part from his beloved, he tears out his heart and places it at her feet. This young heart, symbolizing beauty, youth and purity of feeling, is destroyed through passion and in revenge turns into a snake at the feet of the beloved, winds around her body and comes to rest on her breast. The impression of this scene is further intensified by the sounds of funeral cortèges outside the building.

The symbolism of the performance by Yvette Guilbert is not difficult to decipher. The artist has overtaxed his gift in flights of imagination and untamed dreams until his art was shattered. Unable to hold it, the artist now becomes the object of revenge of art, which destroys him. The first to be destroyed is Borowski who follows Turkuł in order to take the main role in Turkul's play "Predestination." This symbolic title suggests the fulfillment of Borowski's life. Yet, this fulfillment is to come not on the stage but in existential terms as Borowski undergoes the transformation spoken of by Zarathustra and recited by Turkul. He undergoes what he had been "predestined" for when he tosses himself off a bridge so that "rotten wood" may turn into a higher humanity and into a higher art.

The first part of the novel comprises half of its total length. Parts Two and Three, which are short and make up only a quarter of the whole, are a transition to Part Four, where the spiritual drama of the four main characters is brought to a synthesis. Each of the four main characters—Borowski, Jelsky, Müller and von Hertenstein—who face the existential question of how to continue living, does so in his own way. Jelsky, who stands at the centre of Part Two, is a journalist, which means that he is neither a genuine artist nor a complete stranger in the realm of art. He writes about art and through his work has close contact with artists. However, his knowledge and understanding of the artistic process remain superficial. He is a stranger to mysticism, to any deeper perception of the unseen recesses of life. Dreams and inspiration are foreign to him. "Wein, Weib und Gesang" is his slogan, and he drinks in full measure from the superficial pleasures of life until he realizes that "the world is a dreadfully boring cabaret." He is a buffoon at the court of genuine artists such as Borowski, Müller and von Hertenstein. In the structure of the

novel, which is built on dialogue and confession, he serves the others as a sounding board. Having no serious ideas of his own, he can only quip and make sarcastic rejoinders. In the dramatic confrontation with Müller and Kunicki in Part Two his superficiality is exposed without pity: "This your laughter on the débris of any faith, this open cynicism in life and journalism, you know, Jelsky, that this is a strangely noble feature in you; it is the sincere voice of spiritual bankruptcy." [190]

As a close friend of artists he has had first access to their manuscripts, and here in Chapter Two Müller leaves a manuscript at Jelsky's apartment. It is a confession of the young poet about life, his art, his love for a young woman, his dream-like state of inspiration, interspersed with observations about his colleagues. On Borowski he says: "There is something in him of mighty oaks with their deep rustling of an old legend. In spite of the fact that the trunk is decaying, there is in this oak much good blood: there is in it the unspent inner power of a young race. One can feel the firmness and strength of great passions. I love the Poles!" [191]

The spiritual disintegration of Jelsky is indicated by his inability to concentrate. His thoughts keep turning on the one subject on which he is an expert—women; but he is incapable of real love and uses women only for his own purposes. He is strangely bewitched by Goethe's lines: "Habe die Sonne nicht zu lieb. . . Komm, folge mir in das dunkle Reich hinab." Having been rejected by Müller as his hanger-on, he makes a last attempt to fill the same role with Kunicki and suggests that he become his promoter and agent. But Kunicki destroys his own manuscript before Jelsky's eyes, a sufficient sign that he rejects his own artistic talent as well as Jelsky's help. The last of Jelsky's visitors is Pawluk, an impoverished, half-crazed painter. When he is left alone, he steps out into the street, into "the revoltingly slithery and warm fog. He hears the horrible whine which had been heard many times during this night and again recalls Goethe's "Komm, folge mir in das dunkle Reich hinab." His steps are directed to a familiar coffeehouse where he makes preparations to die. In a separate room of the establishment he shoots himself. His death note is a testimony to his sense of humour, his sarcastic and irreverent view of art and life: "The only defence against the destiny of our life is good playing, this ability of which we are only half aware, to deceive others and ourselves up to the last breath. One doesn't need to teach you this, brother artists. In this, art never deceives: it robs you of your soul and gives you a 'rôle.' So then rascals: *evviva l'arte!*" [192]

Parts Three and Four of the novel focus on two characters, Müller and von Hertenstein. Incidentally, the choice of names indicates that the author is not concerned only with a specific geographical area, nor with

---

[190] *Ibid.*, p. 174.

[191] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

[192] *Ibid.*, p. 217.

a specific nationality. Identification of nationality, or geographical area has been deliberately avoided in this novel. The setting of Parts One and Two is a big city somewhere in Central Europe, the nationality of the artists is either Polish or German, only Jelsky is a part of both. The setting of Parts Three and Four is von Hertenstein's villa in the mountains. The elevation of place is symbolical for the high aesthetic platform from which Müller and von Hertenstein survey the world. No ordinary concern of life can reach this height: " 'Predestination!'—'Liberation!' Too much one hears of this nowadays. Aphrodite is laughing at us.—Your comparisons concern me very little today, but if you really want to know, then besides Aphrodite there is also Astarte. Once Maitrei asked her husband what will come after death. 'You ask for too much—he answered her—even the gods don't know the answer to that'—Who was Maitrei?—A great woman, the only one in the history of the world whose spirit reached the absolute depths. The holy books of the East sometimes speak through the lips of Maitrei. A prophetess. The only One!" [193] A moment later von Hertenstein, who introduces the theme of mysticism in the novel, refers to the great seventeenth-century German mystic Angelus Silesius (1624-1677): "When I die, my God also dies with me." [194] Müller is largely silent until von Hertenstein goes up to the piano to play the largetto from Chopin's E-minor piano concerto. This recalls to Müller's memory his poem "Łabędź" (The Swan) brought to fame through the music of Chopin and through the voice of von Hertenstein's sister, Hilda. This sonnet is an expression of the existential longing of Müller and reappears as a recurring theme throughout Parts Two and Three of the novel:

Obłoczną górą ciągnie ptak
W bezgwiezdną ciszę przyszłych burz,
Ponurą grozą krwawych zórz,
W daleki, chmurny zwątpień szlak.

Łabędziu mój, z tęsknoty mórz
Polotem twym daj boży znak,
Ty, białych marzeń błędny ptak,
O dolę, dolę moją wróż!

Łabędziu mój, z marzenia wód,
We snach się iści bytu cud
I snuje piękno rojem mar!

Łabędziu mój, z nadziei stron,
Ty życia złudy wieścisz skon
I przedmogilnej pieśni czar!

---

[193] *Ibid.*, p. 225.

[194] *Ibid.*, p. 225.

(A bird draws its circles around a mountain wrapped in clouds
Into the star-less quiet of future storms.
Through the gloomy dread of bloody sunrises,
Along the distant, cloudy path of doubt.

My swan, through your flight give a
Sign of God from the oceans of longing,
You roving bird of white dreams,
Make a prophecy of my fate!

My swan, from the waters of dreams,
The miracle of life descends in our dreams
And weaves for us beauty in a swarm of visions!

My swan, from the realms of hope,
You proclaim the end of life's deceptions,
And the enchantment of a song this side of death.) [195]

Beauty of form in this sonnet (see the stanzaic anaphora in the second, third and fourth stanza, the repetition of the theme: z tęsknoty mórz, z marzenia wód, z nadziei stron) is combined with the exquisiteness of the image of the bird circling in the sky. He is a symbol of the poet's longing, of his imagination, which wants to take to flight and catch a glimpse of that eternal beauty suggested in his dreams. The author himself has provided some elucidation to the symbolism of "the pale bird of dreams" in his translation of "the *Upanishad* Kena" (*Chimera*, 1907, Vol. X) where the Indian swan is a symbol of the "migrations in space of the individual soul towards unknown destinations." [196]

Müller will be remembered in this novel as the author of this poem just as Borowski will be remembered as a descendant of the sixteenth-century Stańczyk. As a character in this novel Müller may very well be an artistic recreation of Stanisław Korab Brzozowski (1876-1901) of whom it has been said that "he was an excellent interpreter of the French symbolists, a man who succeeded in transforming the ideas of others into poetic images of unusual suggestiveness, charming in their simplicity and melody." [197] His poem "O przyjdź" (Oh, Come!) is an invitation to death, to come in a gentle way (i dłonie swe przejrzyste, miękkie, woniejące, na cierpiące połóż mi skronie—place your transparent, soft and fragrant hands on my agonizing temples). Brzozowski commits suicide as does Müller. The Symbolists had a predilection for birds as symbols of their imagination reaching to the invisible. One thinks of Poe's "Raven", Baudelaire's "L'Albatros" from Book One (Spleen et Idéal) of *Les Fleurs du mal*, "Le Cygne," and Tetmajer's "Albatros" (*Seria Poezyj* II, 1894).

---

[195] *Ibid.*, p. 228.

[196] *Ibid.*, p. 338.

[197] Julian Krzyżanowski, *Neo-Romantyzm polski 1890-1918* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1963), p. 75.

In contrast to Müller, who is weak, who knows that he must die, but rebels against the meaninglessness of both life and death and trembles with fear, von Hertenstein shows resignation and self-composure. He has prepared a slow-working poison drawn from a Malayan tree, Upas Antiar, from which they will both die. But this final scene is drawn out and allows the author to present von Hertenstein in every psychological detail by means of his confession. Müller fulfills the same function versus von Hertenstein as Kunicki had earlier in the novel versus Borowski. Hertenstein reveals the content of the last will he had received from his father whose central admonition had been "to love, to live, to act and to fight, but to beware of art (*A więc sztuki się bój!*)." After his father's death, von Hertenstein withdraws to the highest floor of the castle into a corner room to be by himself and to be able to meditate. His meditation follows Nietzsche's thought of walking along the high mountain ridges as well as through the deep valleys to the black palaces, the symbol of death. These meditations are accompanied by the citation of inscriptions ("Teach me! Cast the dew of certainty on the parched ground of my spirit.") and the refrain of a line from an unidentified poem: "The earth played, the mountains played, this entire world played for me! . . . (Grała ziemia, grały góry, grał mi świat ten cały! . . .)" As he recollects the moments of his father's death, his elder sister's arrival for the funeral, the funeral itself and the meeting of brother and sister afterward all these events become strangely unreal and dreamlike. From the moment of its inception, this confession has the mark of approaching death. He and Müller are both under the influence of the slow-working poison.

In his father's library, Hertenstein finds a hand-written scroll with a legend recorded in the year 1201. It is a parable on the spiritual direction of art. The highest art has to be saintly art, it is pure and comes from God. It does not sing the praises of man but of God. The young knight Witeź Niezamyśl, a troubadour, had created many songs for his beloved, Princess Bratumila. But Saint Jacław, at that time abbot of a monastery, suggested that Witeź should compose a song for the Holy Virgin. After fasting and penitence he composes a glorious song which finds a divine echo from all the organs of the empty church. Now, however, he can no longer love an earthly woman. He separates from Bratumila and enters a monastery. His song to the Virgin Mary, "Oblubienico moja" (Oh, my Bride!) has given him eternal fame and "even St. Francis praised it later."

Von Hertenstein reads this old legend as a parable of his own life, and of his relationship to his sister Hilda, who in a way has fufilled the role of Bratumila in his life. Three times he exclaims, "Oh, Satan, take your mirror from me! . . ." He has no God, no Virgin Mary to whom he could present his art. He directs his sonnet to "the mountain peaks, the flaming sunrise, the fiery ocean!" His vision is a non-Christian pantheistic mysticism which closes with this tercet:

O zorze! zorze! ciche, gorejące zorze!
W sto tęcz wokół świat spłonął: krwawi! dymi! gorze!
— Nieskalanych to szczytów złowieszcza pożoga.

(Oh daybreak, daybreak, quiet, burning daybreak!
In a hundred rainbows the world has burned: blood-red,
Smoking, flaming!
—The ominous conflagration of the untouched peaks.) [198]

Hilda's appearance represents a moment in von Hertenstein's life when he might still have created something. She might have delivered him from his powerlessness, but she is only a Bratumila and not the Mother of God. Since he has no faith in God, Hertenstein cannot have faith in himself. Hilda's bitter words, "You are unable to give happiness either to yourself or to anyone else, you can be an artist only," hit the mark. But he cannot, of course, be an artist either as long as he identifies art with woman. It was a delusion. Hilda leaves, and as he recalls his last meeting with her he says: "It all passed. Today I don't even know if that moment was a dream, or a revelation, a delusion or an obvious miracle." Instead of a feeling of salvation, he associates the final moments of her presence with the scream of despair for "life." This is the Nietzschean scream from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* heard throughout the night and running as a *leitmotif* through this novel.

With the confession ended, von Hertenstein and Müller return to the present moment. Their thoughts continue to circle around the same set of ideas as before: "But perhaps great passions give birth to great deeds?" Here von Hertenstein approaches Müller:—"Listen now, this after all is an extremely weighty matter.—What's that?—He placed his hands heavily on his shoulders, looked firmly into his eyes and said:—Death." Nothing remains now but to take the final step, to make the transition from life to death, which they had already begun. Hertenstein tells Müller to forget about his own ego. They continue to talk about what is eternal and what is passing: "And thus the measure of all values crumbled in my hands." Hertenstein has recognized and understood the Schopenhauerian idea of the hunger for life, the blind will of life, which is at the bottom of all creativeness: "Art is a plaything of the passions. But when the hunger of life has been conquered by the hunger of the spirit, man will be driven ever deeper into the abysses of still more powerful passions." Salvation will come when the spirit has freed itself of all passions and sufferings and has fused with the All. Salvation is Nirwana.

In these final pages of *Próchno*, Schopenhauerian pessimism fuses with Hindu thought on the various stages of pain and suffering which all life must pass through before it reaches eternal peace in the Nirwana. In his "Theory on the Negation of the Will to Life" (Zur Lehre von der Verneinung des Willens zum Leben, Ergänzungen zum vierten Buch,

---

[198] *Próchno*, p. 259.

Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung) Schopenhauer says: "In terms of this spiritual attitude the mysticism of the *Sufi* shows itself primarily as a revelling in the knowledge that man himself is the centre of the world and the source of all existence to which everything returns. In this connection, the call to give up all desires, which alone makes the liberation from individual existence and its sufferings possible, also happens quite often; however, it is subordinate and it is asked as something that is easy. In the mysticism of the Hindu, however, the latter aspect shows itself more strongly, in Christian mysticism it is predominant so that this pantheistic consciousness, which is characteristic of all mysticism, takes place here secondarily as a result of the renunciation of the will to life and the unification with God. On the basis of this difference in understanding Mohammedan mysticism has a cheerful nature, Christian mysticism a gloomy and painful one and that of the Hindu standing higher than both in this aspect, too, tends to keep to the middle." [199]

The Młoda Polska writers accepted Schopenhauer's philosophy and Hindu symbolism into their poetic canon. This is attested by Antoni Lange's (1863-1929) cycle "Wyzwolenie czyli księga Buddy" (Liberation or the Book of Buddah), Kasprowicz's (1860-1926) reference in Song XV of his *Księga ubogich* (Book of the Poor, 1916) to "the summit, the icy summit" ("O Wierchu, ty Wierchu Lodowy!") This summit stands for a symbolic vision of the Nirwana:

O, Wierchu, ty Wierchu Lodowy!
I znowu się zwracam do ciebie,
Olbrzymie rozbłękitniony
Na tym błękitnym niebie.

Stoisz naprzeciw mych okien,
Codziennie widzieć cię muszę,
Zaglądasz z twej dali w mą izbę.
A nieraz, zda mi się, w duszę.

(Oh Summit, you icy Summit!
Again I turn to you,
Who are all transfused in blue
In the azure sky.

You stand across from my windows,
Daily I must see you,
You look from your distance into my hut
And sometimes, it seems to me, into my soul.) [200]

In *Próchno* this symbol is associated with von Hertenstein: "While at the mountain above my head, those two snowy summits on the sides of

---

[199] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (Stuttgart: Cotta-Verlag, Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1960), Vol. II, 785.

[200] Jan Kasprowicz, *Hymny, Księga ubogich, Mój świat* (Warsaw: Pax, 1956), p. 182.

the glacier, with their white down strangely appearing like silver, in the bright sunlight and breathing like the virgin breast of the yearning earth. . . Those summits, that glacier . . . represent, after all, some sort of permanent, unchanging values?" [201]

Just as Symbolist poetry had a predilection for the soaring flight of birds it possessed a stock of symbols reflecting the Nirwana: "the sun, the ocean, lakes and the glacial summits of mountains, those very old images of eternal time taken primarily from the reading of Indian models: the *Upanishads,* the *Bhagavad-Gita,* the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana,* and somewhat later from the *Gitanjali* of Tagore (1861-1941)." [202]

The final pages of *Próchno* are reflections on the works of man, here, of course, artistic works. What is the relationship between art and life? Is life its own self-justification and what is the relationship of the spirit to life? Are there any eternal values? Once more art pays a call on von Hertenstein in the person of his sister Hilda who has just given a concert and who is now being escorted home by the enthusiastic crowd. Flowers are brought ("an enormous dark wreath"), baskets, bouquets, lyres, which fill the room with "fragrance, brightness" as well as "the giddy waft of power and triumph." If Hilda is a symbol of art, then art is connected with life, noise, colour and fragrance. Hilda despises quietude, she needs commotion and further triumphs. From the point of view of von Hertenstein she is a temptation and he rejects her. He reads from one of the holy books of the Hindus: "The mouth of a wild tiger, the sharp axe of the executioner are a lesser evil for a man than the intercourse of his spirit with a woman." His message to Müller has come from Hindu religious philosophy: "Destroy your own ego. *Forget about your own self and about any cause that has led to it.*" Müller resists; he does not want to accept resignation, separate from the will to life, surrender of the idea of love ond the relinquishing of art. No, he does not want to yield to the nothingness of Nirwana, he still craves for love and human warmth, and above all he will not yield his faith in art. But death is irreversible. As his consciousness fades, Müller makes a final plea for beauty. Even death cannot do without it: "Listen, Henry, you know that this your victory over me is also only a triumph of the great poetry in your faith, of the poetry in these summits reaching into the sky above the castle—and of the infinitely gentle death. Through the gates of art you lead me to the grave, and for this I thank you." [203] Nothing remains in these final moments except for von Hertenstein to recall and reflect on

---

[201] *Próchno,* p. 284.

[202] Jan Tuczyński, *Schopenhauer a Młoda Polska* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1969), pp. 208-209.

[203] *Próchno,* p. 317.

the concepts of eastern mysticism, the Samskara, the Bijnana, the Agni and the great, creative and *destructive* Om! [204]

II

The discussion so far has shown that the focus in the novel is on the presentation of characters, and through them on the creation of a high-strung aesthetic atmosphere in which ideas and feelings predominate. A mood is created, a mood of despondency, resignation and despair. The individual characters are no more important than the ideas that speak through them. They are not seen as individuals of flesh and bone but in terms of their relation to their feelings and ideas. It is not their appearance or their manners which matter but the interaction of their minds. Here, a variety of philosophical viewpoints are presented, not directly but through allusions, and the most prominent among these, next to Hindu philosophy, is the thinking of Nietzsche.

The influence of Nietzsche's thinking is so pervasive in this novel that it is difficult to say where it begins and where it ends. It presents itself on two levels: the direct use of certain lines from Nietzsche's works and of certain elements of his thought, and the use of his view of the world as an antidote to despair. *Próchno* does not lead to faith in God, but it sees the state of this world in Nietzschean terms as a transition, as a phase leading towards a renewal and towards something higher. The symbolic title already suggests a transition from one stage of life to another. Nietzsche speaks of this in "Zarathustra's Vorrede" (Zarathustra's Preface): "Man is a rope tied between an animal and the superman, a rope above an abyss. . . . What is great in man is the fact that he is a bridge and not an end in himself. What we may love in man is the fact that he is a *transition* and a *decline.*"

There is almost no light in the various scenes of this novel. The setting is night and darkness, neither the bright light of the sun nor the mellow glow of the moon ever shine on the heroes. It is in this context of outward darkness, which is reflected in the desolate waste of the human spirit, that a whistle is heard in the night accompanied by screams. The apparent cause is a fire, but the deeper meaning of this scream is existential despair: "No, it is not the aesthetic definition of

---

[204] *Ibid.*, pp. 318-322. (A rationalist like Tolstoj would say: "Hindu philosophy is a combination of the highest wisdom with unheard of ridiculousness. For instance, that passage where it is said in which ways a man can reach ecstasy: He must sit down, straighten up, concentrate his eyes on the end of his nose and repeat without letup the word: 'Om' . . .;" see Aleksander Goldenweiser, *Tolstoj wśród bliskich* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1961), p. 212.

spiritlessness which furnishes the scale for judging what is despair and what is not; the definition which must be used is religious: either spirit/or the negative lack of spirit, spiritlessness. Every human existence which is not conscious of itself as spirit, or conscious of itself before God as spirit, every human existence which is not thus grounded transparently in God but obscurely reposes or terminates in some abstract universality (state, nation, etc.) or in obscurity about itself, takes its faculties merely as active powers, without in a deeper sense being conscious whence it has them, which regards itself as an inexplicable something which is to be understood from without—every such existence, whatever it accomplishes, though it be the most amazing exploit, whatever it explains, though it were the whole of existence, however intensely it enjoys life aesthetically—every such existence is after all despair." [205]

Not only have the heroes of *Próchno* lost their relationship with God, they have also ceased to enjoy life aesthetically. Their despair, therefore, is unrelieved even by superficialities and is beyond redemption. The despair in their soul is echoed by the scream in the night, the same scream which is heard by Zarathustra in the fourth and last part of this prophetic work: "Zarathustra was again silent and listened. Then he heard a long, long scream, re-echoed and sent on from one abyss to another, for none wanted to keep it to itself since it sounded so deadly." [206] In *Próchno* we read: "Suddenly there burst forth the abrupt and sharp gurgling (*rechotanie*) of a whistle, then the subdued sound of hoof beats, shouts and screams . . ." A little later (for the third time): "From afar, one could hear again the impatient sharp signals of a whistle calling, no one knew from where and no one knew from whom to look for help."

Kunicki's reply to Borowski, "today we have reason," draws the following anguished retort: "Crawl with it as quickly as you can into the deep and bring your passions to the light of day so that they might not eat you up!—You do have reason. But nevertheless . . . do you hear? This scream covers the earth, the terrible, hopeless scream in the night! Your subterranean realms have opened and smell nasty. Did you understand who opened them? Who is the scream of your pain in the night? Did you understand for what people give away their tears, the sacred and pure tears of human longing? . . ." [207] The implied answer reads: for nothing, for death.

One of the important scenes in *Zarathustra* is entitled "Das Eselsfest" and "Das trunkene Lied" (Part IV). The reader of *Próchno* will recall these scenes when he reads about the jubilant celebration of the

---

[205] Soeren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and the Sickness unto Death* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 179.

[206] Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 481.

[207] *Próchno*, p. 47.

artists in their own circle trying "to destroy the spirit of heaviness." [208] This scene of drunken revelry ends with the description of the cabaret performance by Yvette Guilbert. Art is powerless, love is dead (see Borowski's cooling relationship to Zosia, as well as Yvette Guilbert's presentation); now is the time that man should be overcome and a new man, the "Ubermensch" (Superman) take his place. In the preface to *Zarathustra,* there is a scene where Zarathustra watches a tightrope dancer walking along a rope tied between two towers above the market place of the town named "The Blind Cow." As the dancer moves along he is suddenly overtaken from behind by a clown who taunts him with derisive shouts and suddenly in one big jump passes over him. The tightrope walker when he sees his competitor win, loses his balance and falls to his death on the pavement. Borowski is this tightrope walker in *Próchno* and Turkul the minor playright, author of *Przeznaczenie* (Predestination), the town. This scene from *Zarathustra* is recalled in the final conversation where Borowski is present. After leaving his wife, Borowski has a vision in the street: "and then hisses: 'Pst . . . Enough, Borowski! May the clowns come now!'—Here enters the triumvirate in pointed caps with chalk-covered faces and big carmine lips. They shriek, beg, bark and jump across him with a laugh: 'Hop!' Applause, bravoes and the language of the clowns: 'Hehehe! . . .' " [209] Borowski, as we know, is himself a sad buffoon, who goes to his death like the tightrope dancer. He dies by suicide at a moment which is not described but is reported in Part Two. He chooses to die by jumping off a bridge into a river and drowning, a close analogy with the death of Nietzsche's tightrope dancer.

Yet, before this happens, Borowski follows Turkuł who had engaged him for the principal role in his play "Predestination" and who at the same time is a spokesman for the ideas of Nietzsche. Borowski is not saved, however, as we learn later. These final pages of Part One are simply an indication that we should not take the defeat of life for granted. There is an affirmation of life, and "the sickness unto death" can be overcome. Borowski's decision to leave Zosia behind and follow Turkuł is an indication that his negative longing can be turned into a positive deed. To illustrate this transformation Turkuł quotes from *Zarathustra's* "Von den drei Verwandlungen" ("Of the Three Transformations"): "I mentioned to you three transformations of the spirit: how the spirit was transformed into a camel, the camel into a lion and the lion finally into a child." [210] Borowski must become like a child, innocent and forgetful of everything. The real affirmation of life includes the possibility of saying "no" even towards one's responsibilities (here Borowski's wife Zosia). In the following quote cited by Turkuł we en-

---

[208] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

[209] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

[210] Nietzsche, Vol. II, 294.

counter Nietzsche's philosophy at its core: "For a child is innocence and forgetfulness. FORGETFULNESS, Borowski! It is a new beginning, it is play, it is a connecting ring [this suggests Nietzsche's ring of the eternal return of all things], the first impulse, the statement of the holy 'yes.' Oh, for the game of creation, my brothers, one has to learn to say the holy 'yes.' " [211]

These quotations from Berent's own translation of *Zarathustra* are the reply to the words of profound despair, to the scream in the night which had been heard earlier. Turkuł is a secondary character, yet through him Berent allows Nietzsche to speak. *Próchno* would not have been an important work of art had it presented only one viewpoint. Through Borowski Berent challenges Nietzsche and the postulates of his thinking, through Turkuł he reaffirms them. Turkuł is the mouthpiece of certain ideas, yet Berent's great achievement lies in the creation of Borowski. Not Turkuł but Borowski' is the Nietzschean man, the man of whom Zarathustra had said in the introduction: "I love those whose soul is deep even when injured and who may perish from a small experience: Thus, they willingly cross the bridge." These Nietzschean words addressed by Turkuł to Borowski express the author's conception of his hero. Borowski is a man of whom Nietzsche had said: "The greatness in man lies in the fact that he is a bridge and not an end in himself. What one may love in man is the fact that he is both a *transition* and a *decline*.[212]

The conversation between Turkuł and Borowski at the end of Part One had brought one point into focus which is one of Nietzsche's basic thoughts: Be what you are destined to be. Borowski is what Nietzsche had called "half-and-half," "modern": "It does honour to an artist to be incapable of self-criticism, otherwise, he is neither this nor that, he is modern." Borowski had allowed his talent as artist to disintegrate when he became too self-critical. His love for his wife had diminished when he began to see in her an impediment to the development of his art. Tragically, there is no possibility of restoring or reconciling these broken situations. In Turkuł's play, *Przeznaczenie*, the artist's wife yields. Her death allows him to pursue his calling as an artist. With raised hand Turkuł shouts the Latin words: "Ars triumphans." But the matter is not that simple, and Borowski asks with a wry smile: "Mr. Turkuł, does one stand so firm in life on a corpse?" [213] At the end of Part One there is no reconciliation between art and life, nor will there be any in the entire novel. Before leaving with Turkuł Borowski laughs, but his laughter is

---

[211] *Próchno*, p. 151.

[212] Nietzsche, Vol. II, 281.

[213] *Próchno*, p. 149. Ibsen suggests the same idea in *Rosmersholm* (1886). It is possible that Berent was indebted to Ibsen for certain artistic stimuli, a question that deserves to be studied.

the laughter of despair: "This laughter will be the triumph of our sincere art over our deceitful life." [214]

Part Four, which analyzes the personal drama of Hertenstein and Müller, is transfused with the thought of Schopenhauer and Hindu philosophy. We don't know how Berent came upon eastern philosophy; whether it was through Schopenhauer or independently. Art is consolation, but not salvation, the artist is captivated by the spectacle of the objectivation of the will, which is also his own will. Since the contemplation of the objectified will does not lead to resignation, however, the solace he receives is only momentary "until with his strength increased by this solace he finally grows tired of playing and reaches for what is serious. We may view as a symbol of this transition the portrait of Saint Cecilia by Raphael." [215] Hertenstein has abandoned art as a possibility of life. He has chosen resignation and denial of life. This Schopenhauerian question is linked to the problem of Kierkegaard's "aesthetic man" and to Unamuno's discussion of despair in *The Tragic Sense of Life.* Again and again we are brought back to our central problem in this novel—existential despair. Before drawing any conclusions from this, however, an important link with Romanticism should be briefly examined, which serves to emphasize the theme of the novel.

III

In the beginning of the novel two verses are recited by the actor Borowski in the course of his long confession to the physician Kunicki. They are from Słowacki's *Lambro, powstańca grecki* (Lambro, the Greek Insurrectionist), 1832:

> Oto mój żywioł, ta ciemność ponura,
> Już do otchłani myśl moja należy
> I nieskończoność jako ciemna chmura
> Świat opłynęła. Myśl gdy w nią pobieży,
> Wraca zbłąkana i znów się zamyka
> W sennych marzeniach.
>
> (This is my element, that gloomy darkness,
> My thought already belongs to the abyss.
> And infinity has encircled the world like a dark cloud.
> When my thought runs there, it comes back adrift and
> Again withdraws into sleepy dreams.)

This quotation from Song Two, Chapter 12, Lines 620-625, is immediately followed by a second one from *Lambro,* Song One, Chapter 8, Lines 267-272:

---

[214] *Próchno,* p. 154.

[215] Schopenhauer, *op. cit.,* Vol. I, 372.

Dzisiaj ja nie chcę zabijać słowami,
Bo każde słowo do serca utonie
I jako sztylet dreszczem je oziębi.
A potem długim rozpamiętywaniem,
Jak żar piekielny rozpali się w łonie
I potem, potem... cała przyszłość moja
Stanie się długim i ciężkim konaniem.

(Today I do not wish to destroy with words
for each word goes to the bottom of the heart
and chills it with tremors as if it were a dagger.
And later, as a result of long reflection it bursts
into flame again in the breast
like the glowing embers of hell.
And after that, after that... my entire future
turns into one long and weary process of agony.) [216]

Both quotations complement each other and underline the theme of existential despair which accompanies Borowski. Why does Borowski, whose literary knowledge is quite extensive (in another place he quotes at length from Ibsen's *The Enemy of the People*), recall these lines from *Lambro*? Where is the relationship between his life and that of Lambro?

Lambro is a verse tale whose theme is insurrection against oppression. In this case the oppressor is Turkey, and the insurrectionists are Greeks. Written during the first months of 1832, the question of the liberation of Greece was just a camouflage, however, for Greece by then had already gained her independence. Słowacki is really concerned with his own country's insurrection which had been suppressed less than half a year earlier, and with the rôle of the national leader in his country's fight for independence. *Lambro* is a judgment on both the exceptional man, who is incapable of action but finds all his spiritual nourishment in dreams and opium-induced hallucinations, and on the half-heartedness of the nation as a whole, which remains indifferent and by and large is ready to accommodate itself to slavery and submission. Inability to act and half-heartedness (*połowiczność*), accompanied by a profound pessimism, are the essential problem in *Lambro*.

And Berent's Borowski! He echoes the words of Lambro sixty-nine years later: "Dreams, dreams, drooping and powerless on the seared ground of longing. They, too, lose their colours, surfeited with luxury and soft with sensitivity." He echoes Lambro and quotes him for the second time in the same lines as before to stress his existential despair: "And the legacy of the still rich soil will be taken over by death! . . . —Ave! Come! . . . I am condemned to death in any case for I have sold myself for the copper coins of momentary successes and have spent it all completely; for longing now finally devours and burns me . . .

---

[216] *Próchno*, p. 26.

And later, as a result of long reflection it bursts
into flame again in the breast
like the glowing embers of hell.
And after that, after that . . . my entire future turns
into one long and weary process of dying.

May death come for me now, this very minute, . . ." [217]

Von Hertenstein's thought, "life itself is punishment in its hopeless seeking, and all its gifts are unclean" is an echo to Lambro's words: "Page, give me the cup! I drank too little of the burned poison for I shattered myself in my dream by a mundane thought . . . Since I did not perish, I now have life to bear as punishment. And an infernal punishment of the heavens is life . . ." [218]

The heroes of *Próchno* perish because of spiritual collapse and loss of faith. Loss of faith in its extreme form is precisely what is meant by existential despair, or existential boredom. Beyond this, each work is a judgment, *Lambro* a threefold judgment, on the hero, the nation and the epoch, *Próchno* on the spiritual vapidity of Berent's contemporaries. Dreams have come to a dead end and the artistic gift which the heroes had received seems no longer real but a sham. Borowski calls his acting "a likeness of art," and when he does play well, it is only in the identification of his own despair with the despair demanded by the role: "I feel the breaking of the first, the second and third string, of all the strings on which I played for people sadness, grief and despair . . ." Borowski is and plays Słowacki's Lambro and Heine's dying gladiator.[219]

---

[217] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[218] Juliusz Słowacki, *Dzieła wszystkie*, 17 Vols. (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1952), Vol. II, 41.

[219] This analogy suggests itself on the basis of Heinrich Heine's famous poem:

Nun ist es Zeit, dass ich mit Verstand
mich aller Torheit entledge;
ich hab so lang als ein Komödiant
mit dir gespielt die Komödie.

Die prächtgen Kulissen, sie waren bemalt
im hochromantischen Stile,
mein Rittermantel hat goldig gestrahlt,
ich fühlte die feinsten Gefühle.

Und nun ich mich gar säuberlich
des tollen Tands entledge,
noch immer elend fühl ich mich,
als spielt ich noch immer Komödie.

Ach Gott! im Scherz und unbewusst
sprach ich was ich gefühlet;
ich hab mit dem Tod in der eignen Brust
den sterbenden Fechter gespielet.

This poem was also used as the epigraph to Goncharov's novel, *Obryv* (The Precipice), 1869.

Słowacki's ideas were a powerful artistic stimulus to the writers of the Młoda Polska tradition, and the above remarks do not exhaust the subject of Słowacki's influence on Berent by any means. On the other hand, enough has been said to illustrate the link in the conception of the hero, the aesthetic man *per se* whose gifts exist in a spiritual vacuum and whose art consequently is reduced to empty posturing—illustrated in *Lambro* and *Próchno* by the lengthy scenes of suicide by means of an overdose of opium or by a Malayan slow-working poison—a posturing which serves these men as a cover for their weakness, boredom and total disenchantment.

IV

The controversy which *Próchno* aroused in 1903 can no longer interest us, although it is certainly a chapter in the Młoda Polska literary tradition. It produced such a critical response largely "because the Neo-Romantic writers viewed it as a novel about themselves, about their own fate." [220] It was read and interpreted literally as a statement of the artist, an "extremely pessimistic" statement but nevertheless a work showing "unquestionable sincerity and enormous talent." [221] Matuszewski makes a number of perceptive comments, one of the most interesting, however, appears as a footnote where he draws an analogy between the situation of the artist in *Próchno* and Wyspiański's *Wyzwolenie* (Liberation, 1903): "Interesting results might be obtained if one were to contrast the impressions of Konrad in Wyspiański's 'Liberation' with the reflections produced by *Próchno.* Konrad 'wants to act,' but the actress Muse assumes that it is a 'gesture.' Konrad wants 'to create,' but the Muse feels that it is 'a theatrical work . . .' And the old actor is ashamed that 'his father was a hero and he is nothing'; 'in the clowning presentation of successful works, in the comedy of eternal rehearsals I blush, I am ashamed, I take your disgrace personally . . .' Konrad wants *people* but meets *actors* whose 'mind divides thoughts into a rôle and commonplace nothingness' so that soon they utter the rôle smoothly and the stage boards disappear from under their feet and 'the most beautiful rôle turns for them into rubbish.' "[222] This context also brings to mind the situation of Słowacki's Lambro—the empty posturing which is a façade for genuine feeling.

Kazimierz Wyka in his brilliant essay, *"Pałuba* a *Próchno"* (*Marchołt,* 1937; also in *Modernizm polski,* 1959 and 1968, pp. 343-362), contrasts the style and artistic treatment of these two novels in terms of

---

[220] Michał Głowiński, *Powieść młodopolska* (Studium z poetyki historycznej) (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1969), p. 244.

[221] Ignacy Matuszewski, *"Próchno," O twórczości i twórcach* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1965), p. 208.

[222] *Ibid.,* pp. 208-209.

the literary tradition of the Młoda Polska. With his eye on the structural elements of the artistic works from this period he focuses on the "favourite artistic schemes of ideological situations (more frequently miniature situations) which alone were alive at that time, as, e.g., hedonism, nirvana, decadent-eschatological dreams, etc. . . . In short, *Próchno* is an unusually rich compendium of schemes of which the decadent movement was fond. This means that the very new, only recently created (or rather borrowed) ideological tradition of Młoda Polska, in its strictly modernistic sense, is the only vital ideological tradition in this book." [223] Wyka's perceptive method (inspired by Plutarch) of contrasting *Próchno* and *Pałuba* as two statements about the spiritual situation of the time says much that is to the point.

The same may be said of the brief treatment of the structure of *Próchno* in the discussion of the Młoda Polska novel by Michał Głowiński. He speaks of *Próchno* as a polyphonic novel in the sense in which Bakhtin spoke of this device in his discussion of the novels of Dostoevskij: "Berent eliminated almost entirely the traditional narrator, instead he has directed him to speak through the voices of his heroes, and as a result he is the only writer in Polish literature of his time who created a novel by means of a consistently polyphonic statement." [224] Without a clear-cut narrator, through whose eyes the reader can view the action and form his judgment, the interpretation of the novel became difficult. The active participation of the reader's imagination is especially called for in the novels of the Młoda Polska writers because of their frequently weak structure. The relationship between the work and the reader involves a special problem here. With this problem in mind, Berent wrote his "Letter" to the editor of *Chimera*, where it appeared in Valume IV, 1901. The main point of this "Letter" is reproduced in the epigraph to the present chapter.

One of the most recent and thorough scholarly studies is the investigation of the style of the early novels of Berent by Hultberg. While the stylistic analysis particularly with regard to the alternating use of dialogue and internal monologue and the impressionism produced by the use of indefinite pronouns (*ktoś*—someone, *coś*—something, *gdzieś*—somewhere), adverbs and impersonal verbal constructions is detailed and reliable, no conclusions are drawn from this with regard to the meaning.

---

[223] Kazimierz Wyka, *Modernizm polski* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1968), pp. 355-356.

[224] Głowiński, *op. cit.*, p. 243. Głowiński (pp. 247, 251-252) perceptively quotes from Matuszewski's essay *"Próchno"*: True, the reader has to collaborate with the author and by means of his own imagination establish the connections which the author deliberately has placed somehow 'beyond the parentheses' of the narration; but his effort is richly rewarded since it intensifies the impression produced by the novel (Matuszewski, *op. cit.*, p. 204). Głowiński has also addressed himself to this problem in his essay, "Wirtualny odbiorca w strukturze utworu poetyckiego" (The Recreative Recipient in the Structure of a Poetic Work), *Studia z teorii i historii poezji, Seria I* (Wrocław: Zakład Ossolińskich, 1967), 7-32.

But it is precisely the connection between style and meaning which establishes the artistic significance of the work. This question will be taken up on the final pages of this chapter.

V

In *Próchno* Berent tried to attain a unity of expression with regard to the symbolism of life by means of an elevated style rich in symbols and imagery:

> Widzisz — zaczął znów po chwili i uniósłszy teraz dopiero głowę, wskazywał gdzieś przed siebie ramieniem — tam po drugiej stronie zamku, w ocalałym jeszcze jodłowym lesie... Stoją tam drzewa dziwnie kurczowo powykręcane, pełne kłębiastych guzów, grubych narośli, na pół suche, spróchniałe i brodate. Tam dnie całe spędzałem stąpając po głębokim dywanie zielonego aksamitu: takim szczelnym kobiercem pokrywał mech śliskie głazy podłoża.... Stąpiłeś nogą na pień, i wnet pień, konary i gałęzie prysły ci pod stopą rzucając w górę dymne kłęby rudej, grzybiej kurzawy: próchno!...
>
> (You see, he started again after a while, and only now raising his head he pointed somewhere forward with his arm, over there towards the other side of the castle, to the pine forest which had still been preserved. . . . There you could find trees convulsively twisted in a strange way, full of bulging nodules, half dried, decayed and overgrown. There I spent whole days walking on the deep carpet of green emerald. The moss covered the slimy boulders of the underground with a hermetic carpet. . . . And if your foot stepped on a trunk, then suddenly the trunk, the boughs and twigs were crunched under your step and threw up smoky whiffs of a dark brown, mushroom cloud: rotten wood! [225]

This is the style whose model we already observed in "W puszczy": impressionism achieved by pauses and gestures, by a richness of imagery where the fantastic intermingles with the real. It is almost an enchanted forest, as in Berent's earlier work where we would expect suddenly to meet a gigantic creature, in reality only a bison, yet in the setting of this forest a being of strangely unrealistic and exaggerated forms. With its ground cover of emerald moss and its warped trees and thick underbrush this forest of "rotten wood" is both beautiful and repulsive. It stands as a symbol for life: "Such was my dying world, such my young spirit." It is a lyrical description of which there are many in the novel. This lyricism is achieved by the creation of an atmosphere of dream-like perception and recollection. The impression of enchantment and wonder mixed with revulsion is produced by the choice of vocabulary and the musical phrasing of sentences which are primarily hypotactic, with frequent use

---

[225] *Próchno*, p. 307.

of appositions, inversions, setting off of parts of the sentence by colons for purposes of emphasis; repetitions, pauses and sudden breaks that suggest not the logical conclusion of a thought but rather the interruption of a feeling, an impression or a recollection.

Richness of vocabulary is another feature of this lyricism where the enchantment and revulsion of a scene are produced through the choice of elevated and poetic expressions. These measured and slow-moving sentences suggest a tranquillity which is almost complete and at the edge of death:

> W tej cmentarnej głuszy drzemały tylko na gałęziach rude sowy, tak leniwe i harde, że gdym się zbliżał, puszyły tylko pióra na łbie i przewracały kołem te zielonawe, płonące białka na wpuklonej i w piersiach ukrytej twarzy. Węże oślizłymi pęczyskami oplątały wyważone z ziemi korzenie; po dwa, po sześć, w siebie lubieżnie wplątane i senne. Te płoszyły się za każdym moim krokiem i wszczynały naokół obrzydliwe gadzie szelesty wilgotnych grobów. Czasami droga wiodła przez wykrot: w zawieruchę suchych konarów i gałęzi, w kłęby kurczowo sterczących korzeni powplątywały się całe pęki i warkocze rudych i siwych wiedźmowych włosów.
>
> (In this graveyard silence only rust-brown owls dreamt on the branches, so lazy and proud that when I came close they only ruffled the feathers on their head and turned like a wheel those greenish, burning whites of their eyes in their puffed up faces buried on their chests. Snakes, in enormous slimy bundles, wound around roots prised from the ground. By twos and sixes they were lustfully entwined with each other and sleepy. These scampered away with each step of mine and all around me started the hideous reptilian rustling of damp graves. Sometimes my path took me by a tree blown by the wind into a whirl of dry branches and limbs, where whole clusters and tresses of russet and grey haggish hair wound themselves into coils of convulsively protruding roots.) [226]

The strange magic of this scene is due to the mysteriousness of untamed nature. It derives its effect from the choice of vocabulary which appeals to the senses: *cmentarna głusza; zielonawe, płonące białka; oślizłe pęczyska; obrzydliwe gadzie szelesty; siwe wiedźmowe włosy.* There is an attempt to produce synesthesia in the combination of auditory, visual and tactile sensations. Complex participial constructions complement the rich use of synonyms, where not a single word is used twice.

"Lyricism and dramatization coexist in *Próchno* on two levels: in the area of composition of the fable we have the structural plan of a drama, in the area of technical presentation Berent used a device that was unchecked by the strictures of the artist, i.e., the device of the lyrical monologue. The flow of the monologues of the heroes of *Próchno* is the

---

[226] *Ibid.*, p. 307.

flow of a lyrical sequence, unrestricted and unchecked." [227] These observations from the pen of the author of the only monograph on this novel provide additional insight for our concluding remarks on this novel. What interested Troczyński was the relationship between "inner forms" and "meaning." The four sketches of the artist (Borowski, Jelsky, Müller and von Hertenstein) are seen as an intensification of the psychological dilemma of creativeness, in Borowski as a question of "artistic sincerity," in Jelsky as "the unfulfilled ambitions," in Müller as a problem of "artistic performance," finally ending in von Hertenstein's inability to create altogether. The novel thus ends in tragedy: "Every artistic creation is after all only an evasion of tragedy." [228] There can be no argument with Troczyński when he concludes that von Hertenstein's tragedy is not personal but is the tragedy of man in general, in this case illustrated by the artist. *Próchno*, Troczyński says, is a statement of Berent's own pessimistic outlook on the world. There is no salvation for man, tragedy is the general characteristic of life: "The vision of *Próchno* contains the truth about the all-embracing tragic situation of life; therefore, its pessimism and nihilism cannot be overcome. For all values are arranged in terms of antinomical situations, that is, in situations of unattainability." [229] Troczyński views the antinomy between form and expression in art as a feature of this all-embracing tragic situation of life; in other words, the ability to find the form is contradicted by the inexpressibility of the final things. The "how" breaks down when it encounters the "what" and the "why."

This is exactly the situation presented by Kierkegaard in his chapter "Equilibrium between the Aesthetical and the Ethical in the Composition of Personality" in his master work *Either/Or* (two volumes, 1843). The heroes of *Próchno* move in an atheistic world; they are the epitome of the aesthetic man who has lost his ethical ground. The relationship between aesthetics and life, or between beauty and life is not solved by either Borowski, Jelsky, Müller or von Hertenstein. In arriving at this conclusion we have returned full circle to our original quotation from Walter Rehm which ended: "And the question arises if under these circumstances a resurrection is at all possible." Kierkegaard would say: "Therefore, only when I regard life ethically do I see it with a view to its beauty, and only when I regard my own life ethically do I see it with a view to its beauty. And if you were to say that this beauty is invisible, I would make answer: in a certain sense it is, in another it is not; that is to say it is visible in the trace it leaves in history, visible in the sense in which it was said, *Loquere ut videam te.* It is indeed true that I do not see the consummation but the struggle, but after all, I see the consum-

---

[227] Konstanty Troczyński, *Artysta i dzieło* (Studium o *Próchnie* Wacława Berenta) (Poznań, 1938), p. 41.

[228] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[229] *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

mation every instant I will, if I have the courage for it, and without courage I see absolutely nothing eternal, and accordingly nothing beautiful." [230]

It is true that the heroes of *Próchno* do not have courage and therefore see "absolutely nothing eternal, and accordingly nothing beautiful." Yes, the heroes have no exit other than death because of their spiritual helplessness, an idea which Berent wished to stress in the first three printings of *Próchno* by using as an epigraph a statement from the sixteenth-century Polish Renaissance thinker Frycz Modrzewski's (1503-1572) *Commentarii de Republica emendanda* (1551-54): "Incapacity of the heart is a hundred times worse than physical incapacity. Therefore, seek healing for your mind." [231] Berent also said that while these heroes die, their spiritual legacy is "the rotten wood that will form the fertile humus from which some day virgin forests may perhaps arise." [232] Is this outlook then entirely pessimistic, as Troczyński suggests? We should say not and would rather hold with the great Unamuno whom we have had occasion to quote before: "I believe, on the contrary, that many of the greatest heroes, perhaps the greatest of all, have been men of despair and that by despair they have accomplished their mighty works." Apart from this, however, and accepting in all their ambiguity these denominations of optimism and pessimism, that there exists a certain transcendental pessimism which may be the begetter of a temporal and terrestrial optimism, is a matter that I propose to develop in the following part of this work." [233]

We, too, shall next examine a work in which Berent has shown what Unamuno claimed to show, "that there exists a certain transcendental pessimism which may be the begetter of a temporal and terrestrial optimism." From *Próchno* (Rotten Wood) we shall proceed to *Ozimina* (Winter Wheat).

Some of the material in this chapter appeared originally in my essay "Friedrich Nietzsche in the Early Work of Wacław Berent," *Scando-Slavica*, Vol. XVII, 93-111; and in "Juliusz Słowacki and Wacław Berent in their Artistic Relationship," *American Contributions to the VIIth International Congress of Slavists* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973). Grateful acknowledgment is made to both publishers for permission to quote from these essays.

---

[230] Soeren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 2 Vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), Vol. II, 279-280. *Loquere ut videam te* is from St. Augustine's prayer: "Speak that I may behold Thee."

[231] *Próchno*, p. 324.

[232] *Ibid.*, p. 326.

[233] Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life* (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), pp. 130-131.

> Besides, nature cannot take from us more than she has given, and it would be captious and thankless in us to think of her as destructive only, or destructive essentially, after the unspeculative fashion of modern pessimists. She destroys to create, and creates to destroy, her interest (if we may express it so) being not in particular things, nor in their continuance, but solely in the movement that underlies them, in the flux of substance beneath.[234]

Berent's third novel, published in 1911, opens with the description of a party at the palace of Baron Nieman in Warsaw on the eve of the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war in February 1904:

> Lodowy połysk czarnej tafli fortepianu i mocne lśnienie posadzki rzucały mu na salę jakby pył powietrzny i ogromne zmatowanie barw w głębi. W tym dla oka oddaleniu tonowała się jaskrawa rozmaitość kobiecych strojów w kilka plam zamglonych pod czarnym wirem mężczyzn. Tylko na krześle najbliższym odsadą barw mocnych — widniała jakaś bluzka o wodnej zieleni, twarz otwarta, jasna, i włos ciemny, rozjaśniany w ciepłe połyski, zda się, kontrastem do tej hebanowej czerni fortepianu, sponad której padały oczy jego.
> Stał jak wyczekujący rybak tej czarnej łodzi, przerzucając białe karty nut, rozłożonych na hebanie.
>
> (The cold gloss of the black slab of the piano and the strong gleam of the parquet floor struck his eye as he entered the salon like dust in the air mixed with the gigantic blurring of all colours in the distance. The distance absorbed the brilliant diversity of feminine elegance which barely added some bright stains to the black swirl of men. Only on a nearby chair set off in bright colours some sort of blouse could be seen of watery green colour, an open, clear face, dark hair, lit up by a warm sheen which seemed to provide a contrast to the ebony blackness of the piano from where his eyes looked down.
> He stood there like the expectant fisherman of this black ship shuffling among the white pages of notes that were dispersed on this piece of ebony.) [235]

This richly textured impressionistic opening scene with its wealth of imagery, colour (black, white, light green), and rhetorical figures, a scene which is repeated with slight changes throughout the novel, is brought to a synthesis in the final symbolic conclusion:

---

[234] George Santayana, "Lucretius," *Three Philosophical Poets* (New York: Doubleday, 1953), p. 45.

[235] Wacław Berent, *Ozimina* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1958), p. 7. The Polish text is provided only where it is required by the exigencies of analysis.

W pamięci jawiła mu się znów przodowna trójka owej gromadki na uprowadzeniu: a między tym jak chmurą skrytym posępnikiem i chłopem białym z chlebem pod pachą — tamtej dziewczyny, Wandy, uroda coraz to dziwniejsza wspomnieniom: opal twarzy i oczu wielkich fiolet w ramie włosów niby kora schnącej krzewiny, a oblicze to całe jakby prześwietlone skupieniem przeznaczenia i smętu.
Ujrzał ją w wyobraźni nieżywą na tle murów wieżyc miasta — tam gdzie Chrystus pod krzyżem występuje z kościoła i gdzie zasiadł w spiżu ten, co ziemię ruszył. Widział ją tam pod kirem pyłu miejskiego, a tym jaśniejszą obliczem cichym, dzierżącą w dłoniach martwych granatu jabłko i kłosów pęk: symbole dwojakiej płodności ziemi.

(In his mind he saw again that forward threesome in this mass of people as they were being led away; and between this dismal figure, who seemed to be covered by a cloud, and the white fellow with the loaf of bread under his coat flap the beauty of the girl, Wanda, which stood out more and more in his recollection: the opal colour of her face and the violet of her big eyes framed by hair which seemed like the colour of the bark of siccative brushwood; and her countenance seemed all radiant with the concentration on her destiny and sorrow.
He saw her in his imagination deprived of life against the background of the walls of the city's towers, at the spot where Christ steps out of the church carrying the cross and where he who once moved the earth sat in bronze. He saw her there under the pall of the city's dust, yet all the more bright with her quiet face holding in her dead palms a pomegranate and a sheaf of grain, symbols of the twofold fertility of the earth.) [236]

These two quotations suggest the style of the novel. They indicate the two poles of the novel, the stylized high bourgeoisie setting and the symbolic vision. That they should blend so perfectly is an extraordinary achievement due entirely to Berent's mastery of style. The setting and the symbolic vision are designed to complement each other, and it is in this context that Berent unfolds his theme: Whither Poland? Viewing the novel in these terms, our central focus must be the interrelationship between style and theme in *Ozimina,* or, between structure and meaning. First, however, a number of preliminary questions must be raised and discussed. These concern the history of the writing of this novel, the fable, the literary context, and contemporary social and ideological issues. These must be followed by a discussion of the intrinsic literary features of the novel: construction, the dynamic role of events, the presentation of character, the weight of the ideological issues, the language. These intrinsic features, viewed as aspects of style, will lead us back to our original question on the interrelationship between style and meaning and to our final aim of gauging the significance of *Ozimina* as a work of art.

---

[236] *Ibid.*, p. 253.

The writing of this novel is directly connected with political events in Europe during the first decade of the twentieth century, yet we don't know exactly when Berent started to work on it. Since the announcement of the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war in February 1904 is used as a central device in the construction of the novel, and the novel came into print in 1911, it can be safely said that he wrote it somewhere between 1905 and 1910.[237]

More important than the process of writing, about which we know almost nothing, is the literary context. Berent's three great novels (*Próchno*—Rotten Wood, *Ozimina*—Winter Wheat, *Żywe kamienie*—Living Stones) belong squarely in the Młoda Polska (Young Poland) tradition which started in 1890 as a revolt against the Positivist school of writing of the last third of the nineteenth century. Opposed to the utilitarian trends in the writings of Orzeszkowa, Prus, Sienkiewicz and Positivism's major theoretical spokesman Aleksander Świętochowski, the Młoda Polska writers restored an interest in metaphysical questions, they revived the tradition of the great Romantic writers in Poland, for the first time they recognized the artistic and spiritual depth of Słowacki and brought Norwid out of obscurity. The affinity between Słowacki and the modern Symbolist movement has been demonstrated in the pioneer study of Ignacy Matuszewski, *Słowacki i nowa sztuka* (Słowacki and the New Art), 1902; and the spiritual tie of the present with the revolutions of the nineteenth century was indicated through veiled allusions in Wyspiański's dramas, *Wyzwolenie* (Liberation), 1903, and *Noc Listopadowa* (November Night), 1904. In the latter drama use is made of the Eleusian myth of Demeter [238] and Persephone as a symbolic motif. We don't know if the idea of using this myth in *Ozimina* came from Wyspiański, but it possible. Wyspiański probably influenced Berent with his *Wesele* (The Wedding), 1901, which is related to *Ozimina* in its very conception as a sharply critical statement on the spiritual immobility, in spite of its great wealth of imagination, of Polish society at the turn of the century.[239]

The Romantics and the Młoda Polska writers were also very interested in the figure of the Stańczyk, the sixteenth-century jester at the court of Sigismund I, and his prophetic significance in the history of the country. He appears in Goszczyński's *Król zamczyska* (King of the Noble

---

[237] Janina Garbaczowska connects the writing of this novel with Berent's "Idea w ruchu rewolucyjnym," published in 1906, under the pseudonym S.A.M. She makes a convincing argument for the fact that the ideas expressed in the novel had their first gestation in this essay which would allow us to further narrow the span of work on the novel for the period between 1906 and 1910 (see Janina Garbaczowska, "U podstaw ideowych 'Oziminy' Wacława Berenta," *Księga pamiątkowa ku czci Stanisława Pigonia*, pp. 525-535).

[238] The extensive use of this myth in world literature can be verified in Elisabeth Frenzel, *Stoffe der Weltliteratur*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1963), pp. 509-511.

[239] Unfortunately, I was unable to consult A. Szczerbowski's article, " 'Ozimina' i 'Wesele'," *Myśl Narodowa*, 1926, No. 17.

Pile), 1842, in Wyspiański's *Wesele*, and in Rydel's *Królewski jedynak* (The King's Only Son), the first part of his trilogy, *Zygmunt August* (1913). Matejko's painting of the Stańczyk in *Hołd pruski* (The Prussian Homage) added to the renewed popularization of this historical figure. Berent refers to him only once in his novel, when he compares the immobile position of the priest at the soireé of Baron Nieman to that of Stańczyk: "I tak się zapamiętał, zastygł w tym ruchu Stańczyka" (And thus he lost consciousness and froze in the position of the Stańczyk).[240]

Młoda Polska tried to come to terms with the deeper realities of spiritual life. While it shared many features with the mainstream of European Symbolism, Théophile Gautier's slogan of art for art's sake could not find the same response in Poland as it did in France, or even in Russia. The tradition of Romantic writing and its connection with national and social problems was too strong in Poland, and the Młoda Polska writers, who became the heirs of Romanticism, did not break with this tradition.

From a formal aspect, the Młoda Polska writers accorded equal significance to all literary genres, drama, poetry and the novel. They created a special poetic language characterized by a wealth of symbolic imagery. They saw to the revival of the poetic drama (Wyspiański, Kasprowicz) and to the loosening of the system of versification. The writers of this school cultivated a style which was suggestive, full of nuances and impressionistic. This feature is particularly true of the prose of Berent: "Impressionistic elements can be found in all the works of Berent." [241]

Ozimina is a novel about contemporary Polish society and an investigation into its spiritual resources. Since the uprising of 1863 Poland had experienced four decades of internal peace which, however, was only a partial blessing. The policy of Russification in eastern Poland and in the area that went under the name of Congress Poland, Germanization in western Poland, and complete social stagnation in south-western Poland, administered by Austria, were largely responsible for the passivity characteristic of large segments of the population. The writers of the period were sharply aware of the apathy that pervaded all classes. Some became apologists of an aristocratic oligarchy (s. Józef Weyssenhoff's political novels: *Sprawa Dołęgi*—The Dolenga Affair, 1901; *Dni polityczne*—Political Days, 1906-1908; etc.), others glorified the revolutionary movements of the past (s. Stanisław Brzozowski, *Płomienie*—Flames, 1908; *Dębina*—Oak, 1911). Critical polemics while ostensibly concerned with aesthetic matters nevertheless had the sting of social polemics, of one class of writers challenging the values of the other. Let us here recall only Brzozowski's attack on Sienkiewicz for his "artistic, social and political conservatism," and Weyssenhoff who violently attacked Wy-

---

240 Berent, *Ozimina*, p. 80.

241 Peer Hultberg, *Styl wczesnej prozy fabularnej Wacława Berenta* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich, 1969), p. 212.

spiański's entire system of aesthetics and world view in a polemic entitled "O laurach Wyspiańskiego" (*Tygodnik Illustrowany*, 1909). The discussion that was waged in these artistic and critical writings was in a certain sense carried into Berent's *Ozimina*. They were a reflection of those movements in society of which Erich Auerbach spoke so perceptively in his *Mimesis*:

> For it is precisely in the intellectual and economic conditions of everyday life that those forces are revealed which underlie historical movements; these, whether military, diplomatic, or related to the inner constitution of the state, are only the product, the final result, of variations in the depth of everyday life.[242]

In the intellectual sphere, this activity in the everyday life of the people took the form of a greatly expanded activity of the press. We need only look into the recently published correspondence of Stanisław Brzozowski (1878-1911) and his exchange of letters with Wilhelm Feldman (1868-1919), Jan Dawid (1859-1911), Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz (1864-1924) in order to convince ourselves of the feverish activity in the editorial offices of those days. No one can better serve as an illustration of that feverish intellectual activity than Brzozowski himself, who worked and published with prodigious speed.

The creation of industrial centres in Łódź and Warsaw resulted in the growth of an industrial proletariat. In 1882, an organization was founded with the name "Proletariat"; and in 1892, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) came into being in Paris. Another group, which rejected the nationalistic tenor of the Polish Socialist Party, was led by Julian Marchlewski and Rosa Luxemburg. Working under the name of "Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland" it brought together a part of the former "Proletariat" and the "Union of Polish Workers" which Marchlewski had organized in 1889. The activity of these various political parties had to be clandestine but it reached a high pitch of action when Piłsudski (1867-1935) and Roman Dmowski (1864-1939), the leader of the National League, both travelled to Tokyo in 1904 in order to gain support for Poland against Russia during the Russo-Japanese conflict. Reflecting their different party allegiance, each of these men had a different idea of what this support should be. In the end, Japan was not interested in helping the Polish cause.

After nearly forty years of political peace, there were, in 1904, demonstrations in several Polish cities. People went out into the streets to protest again the use of Polish soldiers in Russia's war with Japan. Here, in the opposition between these new social forces and the traditional conservatism of the landed gentry and the high bourgeoisie, Berent's *Ozimina* has its social background.

---

[242] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 29.

II

Ozimina has four parts, each subdivided into scenes. This type of construction, plus the extensive use of dialogue, suggests similarities to Symbolist drama, particularly to Wyspiański's *Wesele.* The material of Part One can be grouped into eight scenes. In a few cases the end of a scene coincides with the end of a chapter, otherwise, there is always a clear break between scenes indicated by a blank area on the page. In Part One, Scene One, we are introduced to the guests assembled in the salon of Baron Nieman. We first meet Nina who represents beauty, youth, freshness, inexperience and promise. Her male acquaintance, the Cracow professor, plays a subordinate role, but he is indispensable in his capacity as the silent observer and commentator on the great number of characters and the various minor events that take place. All the threads of the action unite in him, he is the pivotal figure in the structure of the novel. The fact that he is officially a foreigner carrying an Austrian passport while at the same time a Pole connected with the oldest Polish university makes him especially useful as an observer.

Two important motifs occur in this first scene, the wooden statue of a Negro holding a tray with a pitcher and a glass of water, a symbol of subservience and stagnation, and the story of Woyda who committed suicide at a similar gathering two years earlier by mixing poison with a glass of water from the statue's tray. The association of death with this statue is highly important and serves as a recurring motif in the novel. Scenes Two and Three present other female figures, Ola and Lena, whose lack of vigour and artificiality are viewed in contrast to Nina's youthful freshness. Scene Three also presents Bolesław Zaremba, who is destined to have the same fate as Woyda. The scene closes with the appearance of a tenor who sings an aria from Bizet's "Carmen."

Scene Four leads the reader into the group of Polish aristocrats, several of them magnates, who have temporarily interrupted their various pleasant social exchanges in order to listen to the host, Baron Nieman, and deliberate on a public project. There are suggestions to build a tea room, an almshouse, or perhaps a museum of fine arts. Someone suggests the creation of a public library, the building of roads, attention to river rafting and land reclamation. No project is agreed upon, and the scene

---

243 Karl Dedecius, the translator of Polish prose and poetry into German of recent years has used this expression for the epigraph to his edition *Polnische Prosa,* Vols. I-II (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1966). (The word *lampada* is a misprint in this edition and should read *lampadae.*) Dedecius's collection has the additional merit of being the first after thirty years (translation of *Żywe kamienie* in 1936 by Paul Cazin) to have included a passage from one of Berent's works in an anthologoy of translations from Polish literature. In the first section of his anthology under the heading "In the Hothouse of Tradition" he starts with a translation from Section Four of Part Two (pp. 141-152 of the most recent edition of *Ozimina*; the reflections of the Professor in the Baron's library) entitled "Wintersaat (Auch als Vorwort zu lesen):" Winter Wheat (To be read also as Preface).

ends with the Baron's anonymous donation in the form of a bank cheque into the hands of a priest for the support of a Catholic periodical.

In Scene Five the Colonel is introduced. He represents life, vigour and moral strength which are part of his foreign (Russian) background. Scene Six introduces us to Wanda, a girl who is particularly distinguished by her inner beauty and spiritual force. In Scene Seven Komierowski, the cousin of Baroness Nieman, who had grown up in Siberia as a result of his father's participation in the 1863 uprising, is brought on stage; and finally, Baroness Nieman's grandfather, a gentleman of over ninety, joins this illustrious gathering. By virtue of his age (he had already served as a young officer in the 1830 uprising) and his participation in all the military engagements of the nineteenth century (the 1848 uprising in Hungary, Garibaldi's conquest of Naples, the Prusso-French war of 1870/71), he somehow unites in his person and in his experiences the course of Polish history in the nineteenth century. His appearance in Scene Eight coincides with the announcement of the outbreak of hostilities between Japan and Russia. The old gentleman is thus brought to the threshold of seeing a revived Polish state, an expectation that runs through the book as its principal theme and is symbolically suggested in the title. While we see all this before our eyes, the band is heard in the background. One hears alternately a mazurka, a polonaise and again various tunes from "Carmen."

Part Two of *Ozimina* again has eight short scenes. They are not designed to introduce new characters but to focus on the ideological issue of Poland's future against the background of disturbances outside in the street. There are several tense moments: the waving of the French tricolour outside in the street, Bolesław Zaremba's irrational attempt on the life of the soprano, the sharp monologue of this lady whose key words are expressed in the form of oxymorons ("namiętności trupie"—dead passions; "błędne koło"—blind circle), and a second irrational outburst by Zaremba who reaches for Komierowski's pistol. Scenes Five and Six focus on the encounter between the Colonel and Komierowski, who had foolishly involved himself in the fracas in the street and stumbles back into the palace with a head wound. With the shout of "War" at the end of Part One, the Colonel had moved to the centre of the action. Temporarily, the word "war" dominates the action.

In Scene Eight Komierowski gives a magnificent monologue relating his experiences in Siberia. The full force of Nietzschean ideas comes into play in this scene, and it is very likely that Berent here polemicizes with Mickiewicz's *Dziady III* (Forefathers Eve, Part III) and the account of one of the prisoners (Jan Sobolewski) about the deportation of the young prisoners to Siberia. There is much similarity between both monologues while the spiritual subcurrent is different.

Part Two ends with Scene Nine, where the Professor examines Baron Nieman's library and, in a long internal monologue, challenges the spiritual message of the Romantics which is still being fed to the young. The motive of the "unextinguished lamps of life" (*vitae lampadae*

traditae[243] from Lucretius's *De rerum novarum*) occurs here for the first time and from now on becomes a *leitmotif*.

Part Three is much briefer, and its three scenes are designed to unmask the weakness of character of women of whom it had already once been said that "women here have blind souls and misguided instincts."[244] Three times women are shown in terms of their need for the strong hand of a man: Lena versus her husband, the Baron, whom she loathes; Olga, who is condemned to immobility because of her egocentricity; Nina, who willingly submits to the words first of the old grandfather, then the Baron, whose message is diametrically opposed to that of the grandfather. "Slaves of the wise men" are the words that summarize the situation of the women in the whirlpool of different concepts and philosophical approaches.

The eight scenes of Part Four are an attempt to present an alternative to the spiritually stagnant world of the magnate's palace. The confrontation with the other side of reality (here the poverty in the streets of the Powiśle[245] District), the procession of religious sectarians, the political demonstration, which is suppressed by a detachment of Cossacks, these various encounters end with the reflections of the Professor on the banks of the Vistula and his evocation of the Eleusian myth of Demeter and Persephone. By closing with this symbol, the solution for the problems, which were the source of discussion in the novel, is placed at the foot of a higher order, not the Christian God but a pagan deity symbolizing the eternal cycle of nature.

III

One may say that the structure of the novel is loose; one scene does not always necessarily evolve from the other. Berent presents a world of stagnation (four-fifths of the space of the novel is located in the house of Baron Nieman) which is interrupted and disturbed only for one moment by the shout of "war." The last fifth of the novel, which presents an entirely different social milieu, is only superficially shown and is immediately rejected. On the other hand, the author has lingered in the town house among well-dressed people, obedient servants, in a library equipped with antiquarian volumes and the busts of the country's great thinkers and artists, listening all the while to the stately sounds of the polonaise, the equally traditional mazurka, and the tunes of Bizet's "Carmen." With the house of Baron Nieman the author has created a world of culture, of excellent taste and refinement which serves as the setting for the examination of Poland's spiritual situation. There is beauty

---

[244] Berent, *Ozimina*, p. 123.

[245] A district in Warsaw.

in the traditionalism of the setting, but it requires the breath of life and new ideas. Here the announcement of the war between Russia and Japan serves as a watershed. After this announcement, the author turns his attention away from the setting and directs it to a close examination of ideas.

Berent introduces his characters by means of movements and gestures. They are brought before us through association and comparison. They move not in the bright glare of sunlight with sharp shadows but in the subdued glow of candlelight, or in the mellow outlines of afternoon. They speak, of course, but we remain uninformed about the quality of their voices. This is immaterial to the author who concentrates on the richness of the attire, choice perfumes, refined gestures and restrained emotions. The manner of presentation is highly impressionistic and full of suggestiveness. Here he speaks of Nina:

> . . . a cala postać rozbłysła życiem w tym uśmiechu. W bliskości tej kobiety uderzył w niego wiew świeżyzny jak od owoców, a zarazem skwaru, w którym one dojrzewają; jakaś tryumfująca wegetatywność bujnego życia, leniwa do słowa, ciężka do głosu i gestu jak w letnie południe.
>
> In the vicinity of this woman he was struck by the breath of freshness as from vegetables, yet at the same time by the scorching heat in which they ripen. A sort of triumphant vegetativeness of exuberant life, slow in expressing itself, ponderous in word and gesture like a summer afternoon.[246]

The focus is not on detailed description but on the evocation of an impression, on associations (*jak od owoców; jak w letnie południe*) and suggestions. The epithets are not striking but undescriptive and general: "tryumfująca wegetatywność," "bujne życie," "letnie południe." Berent's fondness for colourful epithets, as well as for adjectives, finds a brilliant display in this description of Olga: "Brunatne, rude, rdzawe, żółtawe, oślizgłe, ociękłe, dymne, nadgniłe, błotne, zwiędłe: cała słota miejska (Something brown, russet, rusty, yellowish, slimy, reeky, putrescent, miry, wilted—all the foulness of city life).

Lena, the Baroness Nieman, is simply presented as "Oto pani o długiej twarzy i bursztynowych włosach" (That's the lady with the long face and amber-coloured hair).

Impressionistic characterization is attained either by the use of suffixes (*-awy*, see above), compound adjectives, or by the use of adverbs "jak," "nieco": . . . kobieta w *srebrzystobiałym* stroju (a woman in silver-white dress), o włosach *jak* miedź (with hair like copper), cała od lśnień sukni i od brylantów na szyi *jak* od rosy połyskliwa (all sparkling as if from dew in the brilliance of her dress and the jewels on her neck); . . . chłop *nieco* przytęgi, lecz doskonałym frakiem *jak* koń dobrze stro-

---

[246] *Ozimina*, p. 8.

czony (a fellow who was somewhat stout, yet strapped into an excellent tuxedo like a horse).

The host, Baron Nieman, is presented in the following unprepossessing manner:

> Zjawił się i gospodarz: gorzko uprzejmy, grzecznie wyniosły, ubrany z wyszukaną sztywnością. Czarny i tłusty włos okalający łysinę na ciemieniu miał coś z nadmiernego połysku i *martwoty* peruki, zresztą i niepokalany gors koszuli był *trupiego* blasku: wszystko jakby *martwiało* na tym człowieku, niby na uroczystość dworskiej *żałoby*. Najsztywniejsze wszakże były szeroko rozwidlone szpakowate baki, nadające obgolonym wargom w tej jamie włosów coś z rybiego wyrazu.
>
> The host appeared also, extremely polite, with a touch of haughtiness, dressed with exquisite starkness. The black and thick hair which formed a border around the baldness on the pate was somehow like the brilliance and *lifelessness* of a wig. His spotless shirt front, incidentally, also had the gleam of a *corpse*. Everything connected with this man had a sort of *deadening numbness* as if he were here to observe court *mourning*. Starkest of all were the broadly extended grey whiskers which gave his clean-shaven lips in this cave of hair the expression of a fish.[247]

The focus here is on nouns, adjectives and verbs associated with death (my underlinings). The adjective *trupi* (corpse-like), which is not descriptive but connotative, is used again as an epithet by the soprano when she speaks of the passions of those gathered for the evening. Just as Nina's smile is her characteristic feature, so the host is noticeable by his sideburns and fish-like lips. There is also a symbolic connection between the Baron and the Negro statue. The Baron is referred to as the Negro (*a teraz wejdzie Murzyn*). This again suggests death.

Almost all description is missing when the author speaks of his favourite heroine, Wanda: "Wanda siedziała sztywno, blada na twarzy jak chusta; Wandy sylweta prosta; po raz pierwszy uderzyła go uduchowiona uroda tej twarzy i głęboka prawość jej wejrzenia (Wanda sat stiffly, he face pale like a white kerchief. Wanda's simple profile. For the first time he was struck by the spiritual grace of this face and the deep righteousness of her look).

No device is better designed to create a certain aura around a character than the careful choice of epithets in a description, the attention paid to the colour and form of hair, face, eyes, hands, typical gestures (Nina straightening her hair), and the details of dress. Berent creates this picture less by attention to specific detail than by connotative and suggestive comparisons. In one place he uses the oxymoron "śmiech czerwony" (red laughter) to indicate Komierowski's perverse delight in destruction. There are associations here with fire and the red colour of the Socialist flag.

---

[247] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

IV

The features of this novel are neither of dynamism nor of action or psychological development. *Ozimina* is a novel of reflection and ideas in a splendid, highly refined setting. The device of impressionistic depiction blurs the outlines and seems to cover the entire setting with a kind of haze produced by the smoke of the gentlemen's cigars in the Baron's library, the sound of music in the grand salon, the smell of perfume and the rustling of the ladies' evening gowns. In this context of refinement and exquisite manners even ideas lose their sharp edges and turn into reflections, into "notes of thought" (*nuty do myślenia*).[248]

Basically, the author is concerned with a single idea, and it is not a clearly defined concept, but a vitalistic notion—the affirmation of life. The structure of this novel is constructed around a series of opposites: age versus youth, the past versus the future, resignation versus affirmation in life. It is also built on a series of negations: against Romantic messianism, against religious sectarianism, against revolutionary movements and on only one affirmation—to life, which is irrational and is expressed obliquely through an ancient myth symbolizing the eternal renewal of nature. Here, then, the author has tried to find a unity of vision which overcomes and defeats all rational attempts at system building. All systems are rejected, all rational concepts are viewed with reservations, only the eternal myth is accepted and viewed as a way of renewal for spiritual infirmity.

In the context of ideas the novel is conceived on the basis of two options—continuing stagnation, which is equalized with deterioration and death, or revitalization through affirmation and faith. Since stagnation is coupled with spiritual weakness and lack of determination, it is never presented as a serious option to man. Berent sees clearly that it will not do to reject one and simply accept the other, and present this as the solution. The question of Poland's past and its meaning for the present must be asked, and it is asked by the Professor in his long monologue in the library of Baron Nieman:

> Jestże to naprawdę błogosławieństwem dla narodu, że najwyższy ton jego twórczości i ostatnie wobec świata czyny dokonały się czasu trafem przez ducha romantyzmu i mistyki? Czy nie kieruje to najlepszych wciąż jeszcze ku przeszłości, czyniąc z nich prędzej czy później puchaczy po ruinach, odwracających na pół ślepe oczy odrazy od życia, każdemu dniu dzisiejszemu nienawistne? Czy nie sprawia to, że właśnie naplepsi nie są zdolni do zachwycenia w piersi tchu rzeczywistości i rozgrzania w nim serca w tempo dzielne? Czy to, co było w najlepszych czasu swego, gdy ziemia własna spod nóg im się usuwała, wybiegiem w gwiazdy: dla wywyższenia sił w ludziach — czy to wszystko, nie rozsiawszy się

---

[248] See Chapter III, p. 92, where Berent suggests using the thoughts of Nietzsche as "*nuty do myślenia.*"

> koleją wieku całego w pospolitość, nie stało się w obliczu znieruchomiałego życia mimowolnym rozsadnikiem omamów, obłudy przed sobą — zastoju? Kostniałoż tak Bizancjum: dusz karmem przez wieki, pod klątwą — niezmiennie jednym. Oblicze najłaskawszego Boga stawało się w surowości swojej coraz to okrutniejsze i coraz to mniej mające wspólnego z życiem ludzi.
>
> (It is really a blessing for a people when the most sublime note of its creativity and its final deeds towards the world were achieved through an accident of time by the spirit of Romanticism and mysticism? Doesn't this direct the best people always towards the past, turning them sooner or later into eagle owls among ruins who divert their half-blind eyes of disgust away from life, eyes which are loathful to each and every day. Isn't it because of this that precisely the best ones are incapable of becoming aroused by the breath of reality and of having their heart warmed with it to active motion? Has not that which was once a part of the best during their time, when the earth withdrew from under their feet, which we call a flight to the stars for the increase of power in people, has not all this by virtue of its diffusion during an entire century into ordinariness, in the face of the immobility of life turned into the inevitable seed-bed of hallucinations, of deception before oneself, of stagnation? Thus, Byzantium became ossified, once the food of souls for centuries, under the curse, however, of being unchangeably the same food. The countenance of the most gracious God became more and more cruel in its severity and less and less did it have anything in common with the life of people.[249]

If we look closely at this scene we notice that it is as highly impressionistic and poetic as the setting of the palace and the characters that move in it. This is not an examination of a certain set of ideas, let us say idealism versus pragmatism—such a direct exposition of certain convictions is given in other scenes (the Baron as the representative of pragmatism in conversation with Nina)—but rather an expression of a quiet reverence for the past mixed with doubt about its relevance for the present. The Professor would be the last to reject the Romantic tradition, which was unique in Poland in its creative originality and imaginative powers. Therefore, his reflections have the character of questions rather than assertions. He turns them over in his mind with as much care and respect as the books that he holds in his hands: "And should our high priests*—he continued to turn this over in his mind—have been aware of something beyond that which they handed down to us, and kept the mystery of their vision to themselves as high priests are wont to do?" [250]

---

[249] *Ozimina*, p. 145.

* The word used here is "druid" (Czyżby druidzi nasi...) which is an allusion to Cezary Jellenta's work, *Druid — Juliusz Słowacki* (Warsaw, 1911), a work that appeared in the same year as *Ozimina*. (For this hint I am indebted to Professor Weintraub.)

[250] *Ozimina*, pp. 145-146.

Berent's reason is aware of the burden of the past and of its "ossification," of what Nietzsche had described in his essay, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie" (Concerning the Benefit and Disadvantage of History), and yet he clung to it emotionally.

One of the most sympathetically drawn characters in the novel is the old grandfather, a man over ninety years old, who is not just a relic of the past. When Nina speaks to him in the library, there is a symbolic suggestion that she hears in him a living voice from the past, in other words, a voice that still has something to say to the present, or it would not be there: "I have looked here for decades on entire hecatombs of young life burnt by the general decay in the fire of its vitality! . . . Is there anywhere else in this world such a life where between these two, treason and sacrifice in spirit and in deed, nothing grows and nothing matures? Everything destroys itself, everything weeds itself out . . ." [251] Is our historicism which is responsible for our "large-scale slaughter" (hekatomby) going to lead to final destruction and to a weeding out of the remainder of life? This question of the old grandfather had been raised by Nietzsche precisely in these terms:

> The excess of history has attacked the applied force of life. It no longer knows how to use the past in terms of a strong nourishment. This evil is terrible; and yet! Had not young people the visionary gift of nature, nobody would know that it was an evil and that a paradise of health had been lost. The same young people, however, also divine with the healing instinct of this same nature how this paradise is to be regained. It knows the healing fluids and medicines against the historical illness, against the excess of the historical.
>
> Let us not be surprised that they have the names of poisons: the antidotes against the historical are the *un-historical* and the *above-historical.* With these names we return to the beginning of our consideration and to its tranquil state.
>
> I call "un-historical" the art and power to be able to *forget* and to enclose oneself in a limited *horizon;* "above-historical" I call those powers that divert one's eye from the process of growing to that which gives existence the character of eternity and permanence, to *art* and *religion.*[252]

As in *Próchno,* Nietzsche's philosophy is used as a counterpoint to the torpid and helpless atmosphere of the aristocratic setting. In a number of places it has been used and integrated into the discussion among the various characters. Here it is particularly the idea of war as a cleanser, as a remedy for weakness and stagnation which has been taken from Nietzsche's *Menschliches Allzumenschliches,* Der Wanderer und

---

[251] *Ibid.,* p. 186.

[252] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1954), Vol. I, 281.

sein Schatten (The Human, All too Human; The Wanderer and his Shadow). The Colonel says to Komierowski, "And believe me, Mr. Komierowski, with such a soul one's own people fares worse than the enemy. And for such a soul there is just one salvation: provide at least an artificial exit for this hatred, but a sudden, powerful, cruel one! If it comes through alive, it will press the sunny life to its chest; if it dies, it will leave for others something of its liberation, of a deeper breath. This salvation is called—war!" [253] When the Colonel asks Komierowski: "If it's not a cause, nor a goal, nor people, what then is it that you still believe in today?" Komierowski answers: "Always in those whose nature drives them to do what they must, to the extent that they do not bargain with fate; for whom their own soul is cause sufficient. Such leave both themselves and their goal at the crossroads, to be picked up, or to be stepped on by others." [254]

In Nietzsche we find the following thought under the heading, "Krieg als Heilmittel" (War as Remedy): "Peoples who are becoming weak and pitiful might find it advisable to take war as a remedy, in case they insist on continuing to live. For such peoples, infected with consumption, there is such a treatment of a brutal nature. Yet, the desire to live forever and the inability to die is itself a sign of senility of sensation. The fuller and more actively a person lives, the quicker he is prepared to give up life for a single good sensation. A people which lives and feels thus does not need wars." [255] When Komierowski speaks of "those who never bargain with fate for success, for whom their own soul is sufficient cause," he again moves in the vein of Nietzsche who innumerable times spoke of the higher man: "I believe that it is precisely out of the presence of opposites and out of these feelings that the great man, the *bow with the great tension* will be born." [256]

V

Kunst und *Religion* (Art and Religion) were seen by Nietzsche as a means of overcoming the dangers of historicism and as a way towards finding the eternal and permanent. If we now look once more at *Ozimina,* Berent's achievement can be seen precisely in this context. Berent's work is not an historical analysis but a work of art. This artistic quality is evident, above all, in its language. Its message is completely subordinated to its evocative potential. It is slow moving and majestic like the polonaise which the Baron opens in this grand fashion:

---

[253] *Ozimina,* pp. 121-122.

[254] *Ibid.,* pp. 136-137.

[255] Nietzsche, Vol. I, 950.

[256] *Ibid.,* Vol. III, 449-450.

Za chwilę kroczył w czole korowodu, by fantazją głowy siwej i gestu powagą przyjmować pięknej pani skłonienia i łaskę w jej płynnych ruchów pochodzie. Wiodąc jakby rozmowę niemą jeno szlachetnego gestu wyrazem, stawali raz po raz oboje, obzierając się na panów tym oto progiem nie gardzących i na dobrodziejki dziś tak łaskawe. Póki zaś najmilszych gości połączone pary po sali wodzić raczyli, kapela, w dalszych grająca pokojach, nie śmiała uderzać w instrumenty głośne; dopiero gdy służba drzwi na ścieżaj otwarła, muzyka echem wszystkich komnat zagadała nagle.
Snuła się poloneza wstęga aż do stołu białej podkowy w świateł, kwiatów i zastawy rozbłyskach.

A moment later he stepped to the head of the procession in order through the halo of his grey head and the demureness of his gesture to accept the bows of the lovely lady and the gracefulness in the march of her fluid movements. Pretending to carry on a silent conversation merely with the expression of a noble gesture, both stopped now and then while looking at the gentlemen, who did not disdain this threshold, and at the ladies who were so charming today. Until the couples deigned to lead their welcome guests around the room, the orchestra that had been playing in the more distant rooms did not dare to strike the loud instruments. Only when the servants opened the doors wide did the music suddenly fill all the rooms.
The ribbon of the polonaise extended up to the white horseshoe of the table in the gleam of the lights, the flowers and the dishes.[257]

The most conspicuous device in this narrative scene is the use of inversions which lends this prose a kind of poetic quality. We can even go further and write down the above passage in the form of a poem, and we shall be struck by the masterful construction of syntactic units and the noticeable tonic beat in the lines:

Za chwilę kroczył w czole korowodu,
by fantazją głowy siwej i gestu powagą
przyjmować pięknej pani skłonienia
i łaskę w jej płynnych ruchów pochodzie.
Wiodąc jakby rozmowę niemą
jeno szlachetnego gestu wyrazem,
stawali raz po raz oboje
obzierając się na panów
tym oto progiem nie gardzących
i na dobrodziejki dziś tak łaskawe.

There is a slow and stately rhythm in these syntactic units which suggests the majestic three-quarter beat of the polonaise. The author furthermore succeeds in making his accents fall predominantly on the back vowels, the "a's," "o's" and "u's." This plus the choice of three- and four-

[257] *Ozimina*, pp. 81-82.

syllable words (korowodu, powagą skłonienia, pochodzie, szlachetnego, wyrazem, obzierając, gardzących, dobrodziejki, łaskawe) enhances the stateliness and beauty of the occasion.

The above passage is to some extent exceptional, but throughout his work Berent has produced a prose in which every word and every line is carefully phrased and balanced against the next. There is no spontaneity, but everything has been discreetly considered and measured. This style has a poetic quality even though the poems that originally were meant to form a part of it were never used. Their elimination shows that the author was not as certain of the design of this novel as he was of *Próchno.* The inclusion of the poems would not have been misplaced. Indeed, they would have fit very well into the poetic fabric of the prose style of *Ozimina.* The style of *Ozimina* invites a comparison with heavy brocade. This is the prose which Ostap Ortwin called *przeładowany i barokowy, styl bez perspektywy i bez światłocienia*" (a style that is overloaded and baroque, a style without perspective and *chiaroscuro*). In the same essay he speaks of Berent as "autor zastoju, skamieniałości" (an author of stagnation and fossilization).[258] Jerzy Andrzejewski was even more severe in his criticism when he spoke of *Ozimina*: "Fałszywie zarysowana wizja rzeczywistości musiała znaleźć stylistyczny wyraz w fałszu artystycznym" (A falsely designed vision of reality had to find its stylistic expression in artistic falseness).[259] If we want to see it as "a vision of reality," *Ozimina* is false and an artistic failure. But if we see it as a poetic creation, where reality is partly concealed under the golden net of a splendid style, the novel is a great success. Berent is clear in what he rejects, and he is vague in what he affirms. The baseness of street life in the Powiśle District, the political and sectarian demonstrations and all demagoguery are rejected. He equally rejects the artificiality and lifeless atmosphere at Baron Nieman's soirée. At the same time, he sees this setting as representing the best of the nation's culture, and it is Wanda, Nina and Komierowski who symbolically make their exit from the Baron's salon and library and through the experiences of the Powiśle district move into some indefinite future. As they are led away into temporary captivity after the roundup of the demonstration, the question of the relevance of Poland's past to the future of these young people is left deliberately unanswered. Indeed, Wanda loses the two small volumes of poetry which she had taken that same night from the Baron's library.

Ultimately the nation's cultural heritage is to be preserved. It will be preserved by those who value it, and the Cracow Professor, who had kept these young people in view, picks up the two small volumes. The ambiguity with regard to the meaning of the novel is only partially resolved by this scene. It affirms the preservation of culture, but it does

---

[258] Ostap Ortwin, "O stylu i metodzie 'Oziminy' Wacława Berenta," *Próby przekrojów* (Lwów, 1936), pp. 348, 354.

[259] Jerzy Andrzejewski, "'Ozimina' Berenta," *Odrodzenie,* March 7, 1948.

not say whether it is to be the foundation of Poland's spiritual renewal. Indeed, this question is left in doubt. But we are certainly mistaken if we expect a clear answer in this novel to the question that pressed for an answer in 1911: Whither Poland? It could not be answered by a man like Berent, least of all in a work of art, and even less in terms of the stylistic devices used in *Ozimina.* There is no answer other than the continuity of life stated with the regularity of a refrain in the reflections and observations of the Professor—*Vitae lampadae traditae* from Lucretius's *De rerum natura,* and in the Eleusian myth.

The theme of this novel and its artistic treatment presented Berent with considerable difficulties, as is evident in the number of changes and the amount of rewriting he did from one edition to the next. The three poems which were briefly discussed in Chapter Four were intended for the novel but were discarded at the proof stage. Later he eliminated another poem which Wanda recited to Nina: *Ofiarnych snów grobnico biała, . . .* (Oh white candle of sacrificial dreams). The entire scene between Wanda and Nina was heavily cut, and as a result we have a rather sketchy portrait of Wanda, the most positively drawn female character. On the whole, the cuts resulted in a greater concentration of the narrative, in the virtual elimination of the Woyda theme, and in the reduction of the mythological allusions. The 1933 edition, the last during Berent's lifetime, carried the following annotation: "In this edition, as in the previous one, two loose narrative interpolations have been entirely eliminated and certain long passages of dialogues have been abbreviated. These expurgations do not in the least diminish the foundation and the thread of continuity of the novel." [260]

The last question that interests us concerns Berent's success with the integration of his theme—Whither Poland?—and its artistic execution. This question will lead us back to our original proposition of analyzing the interrelationship between style and theme in *Ozimina.* The quotations from Ostap Ortwin and Jerzy Andrzejewski have already served as illustrations of mixed reception. All along, however, our analysis has tried to suggest a successful, indeed a brilliant integration of style and theme. In this connection Aniela Łempicka's summary to her discussion of Wyspiański, which is also an implicit settling of accounts with Wyspiański's critics, is totally applicable with regard to Berent: "His dramatic art is different from ours both with regard to the period as well as with regard to the person of the artist. His drama (and his theatre) is 'artificial'—just as verse is 'artificial' speech. The drama of Wyspiański is a high, perfectly-tuned artistic organization. In the 'artificial drama' 'artificial' persons appear. The stage characters of Wyspiański are only to a certain extent real people, in another aspect they are representatives of stage vision." [261]

---

[260] *Ozimina,* p. 254.

[261] Aniela Łempicka, "Stanisław Wyspiański," *Literatura okresu Młodej Polski,* Kazimierz Wyka, ed. (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1967), Vol. II, 89-90.

Yes, *Ozimina* is characterized by all these features: an "artificial" order of the individual scenes, "artificially" conceived characters and an "artificial" language, but this "artificiality" is nonetheless *genuine art with a religious basis.* "Artificiality" in the sense in which it is used here means highest refinement and cultivation, a high degree of perceptiveness penetrates superficiality. The phenomena of the world are seen in terms of their symbolic interrelationships. The "artificiality" transcends the visible. Poland's destiny is weighed in the scales of eternity. Her past is examined in terms of its relevance for the future. Since the past can never provide a blueprint for the future, and its ideological weight should never become stifling and oppressive, the author has turned to mystical religion to provide a vision for his country. The real hero throughout the novel has been none other than Poland herself, and all the individual characters are mere extensions of this hero. It is Poland which is still dormant like winter wheat, yet the seed is in the ground and will produce fruit in time.

In the mystical vision of Demeter and Persephone, which promises a spiritual and physical resurrection for Poland, just as the earth returns from death to life, the Professor links his reverent recollections of Poland's historical past and cultural glory with the natural cycle of eternal rebirth, whose meaning is shrouded in mystery. Man and his cultural achievements are thus united and made one with nature in the mystical and inexplicable progress of life.

The role of the Cracow Professor as the keystone of the novel's synthesis is profoundly significant. By the very nature of his profession he is expected to have respect for traditions and for the culture of the past. Nothing is to be lost then, tradition will continue to be looked upon with reverence, the Professor will see to that; and his retrieval of the two volumes of poetry is another hint that life without the art of the past is unthinkable.

The theme of Berent's *Ozimina* is marked by idealism. Its focus is on the present, yet its vision is directed towards the future. This lofty idealism, whose source is placed in a highly cultured aristocratic context, demanded an adequate style of expression. Berent achieved this with his stylized and impressionistic prose from which everyday concerns and expressions are absent. The fate of Poland, pitted against the eternal cycle of life's renewal, could be discussed only in a slow-moving, stately prose full of allusions and symbols, a prose whose impressionistic quality cast a hue of poetry and ethereal loftiness over this work.

A slightly different version of this chapter will appear in the *Festschrift in Honor of Wiktor Weintraub* (The Hague: Mouton & Company, 1974). Grateful acknowledgment is made to Mouton for permission to quote extensively from the original version of this analysis of *Ozimina.*

LIVING STONES

> All honour to unto the highest poet! His shade returns to us, that was departed.[262]
>
> Thus, the wandering pupils under the posthumous guidance of the poet found the Grail.[263]

I

With Berent's greatest artistic achievement, his novel *Żywe kamienie* (Living Stones, 1917), we enter the highly complex world of Symbolist poetics. Almost six decades after the publication of Berent's work, we can assess the astonishing achievement of his scholarly and intuitive penetration into the medieval world. He was then at the height of his creative powers—in his early forties—when he wrote this novel, and it seems as if he intended to give here a final statement of his philosophy of life in terms of the fate of the artist through the centuries and his mission in this world. It turned out that this was not his final statement, but the publication of *Żywe kamienie* was followed by a fifteen-year break in his artistic creativity, and he resumed it only in the early nineteen-thirties under different circumstances and in a completely different system of poetics. Until and including *Żywe kamienie,* Berent had held to an aesthetic vision of the world, with *Nurt* (Current, 1933), his vision became predominantly ethical. The aesthetic posture which we observe in his three great novels in terms of style and meaning reaches its culmination in *Żywe kamienie.* Berent here gives the most accomplished expression of that "aesthetic seriousness," of which Kierkegaard had spoken, "like seriousness of every sort being profitable to man, yet unable to ever save him completely." [264]

Today, we are better able than the scholars of the twenties and thirties to assess the value of Berent's work, after the brilliant studies of Huizinga, Vossler, Curtius and Auerbach. It is also easier for us to understand the revival of interest in medieval culture in the light of the discovery of the Baroque and the connections that were drawn between the Baroque in painting and literature in the second and third decade of the 20th century.[265] The discovery of the spirit of the medieval world and an appreciative understanding of it belongs, of course, to Romanticism.

---

[262] Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 17; from Dante, "Inferno," IV, 78 ff.

[263] Berent, *Żywe Kamienie* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1958), p. 328.

[264] Soeren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or,* 2 Vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), II, 230.

[265] René Wellek, "The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship," *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 69-114.

Medieval piety, Baroque preoccupation with death, Romantic maximalism and Symbolic mysticism all share the same spiritual ground of internal exploration and of relating the self to the eternal.

Thanks to Romanticism, the medieval world was no longer looked upon with condescension. Its open-mindedness to the spirit of other epochs and its willingness to see them on their own terms without prejudging them made historicism possible, this same historicism which focused on the individual while trying to preserve the vision of the whole:

> The Middle Ages are described and frequently thought of as a gap in the history of the human intellect, as an empty space between the education of antiquity and the enlightenment of newer periods. Art and science are permitted to go into a complete decline in order to make it possible to raise them suddenly again in even greater brilliance as if from a void after a thousand-year period of darkness. But this is false in a twofold sense, it is one-sided and erroneous. The essential in education and knowledge of antiquity has never disappeared and much of the best and noblest which newer periods have produced has sprung from the Middle Ages and from its spirit. . . . What a marvellous period these Middle Ages were; how the earth glowed with the fullness of love and the exuberance of life; to what extent peoples were still strong, young trunks, not wilted, not feeble; everything was sappy, fresh and full; all the pulses beat vigorously, all springs bubbled forth rapidly, everything was alive to the extreme! [266]

It is to this period to which a number of Symbolists in all European countries turned and drew on for their inspiration. One thinks of Brjusov's *The Fiery Angel* (1907) and Merezhkovskii's *Leonardo da Vinci* (1901) from Russian literature and Hermann Hesse's *Narcissus and Chrysostom* (1930) from German literature. Another splendid recreation of the period of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance is George Eliot's *Romola* (1863), a three-volume novel of the life and times of Savonarola. In Polish literature this trend can be observed in Żeromski's "stylized medieval folktale" *Powieść o udałym Walgierzu* (Tale of the Bold Walgier) and in the brilliant and prolific scholarship of the Lwów medievalist Edward Porębowicz (1862-1937), author of studies of St. Francis of Assisi (1899), of Dante (1906), and translator of Dante's *Divine Comedy* into Polish (1899-1906). Porębowicz's evaluation of Berent's work as "a splendid rendering of the interaction between reality and visionary longing in the medieval mind" was a high tribute to the author.

The background to the writing of *Żywe kamienie*, aside from the general interest of the Symbolists in the medieval world, is now hard to reconstruct. There are no personal documents relating to Berent's career as a writer. It is possible, however, that his trips to Italy—he went there

---

[266] Gerhard Stenzel, ed., *Die deutschen Romantiker* (Salzburg: Verlag "Das Bergland-Buch," 1954), Vol. I, 307-308.

several times between 1906-1916—supplemented by extensive reading, was probably of great importance during the germinal stages of the writing of the novel. Berent's high esteem of Gebhart's *L'Italie mystique* is clear, e.g., from his efforts to have this work translated into Polish: "Once Berent appeared at the Jachimeckis—he was at that time working on *Żywe kamienie* in his Cracow refuge—and told them that the translation of Gebhart's *L'Italie mystique* into Polish was absolutely essential. This emphatic suggestion, which only a close friend could permit himself, was directed at Mme Sophie Jachimecki.' [267]

II

The fable of the novel is not complex and intricate: A band of minstrels and itinerant entertainers arrives in a fortified medieval town to present their various arts to the local population. The town remains unnamed; most likely, however, it is located somewhere in Provence (reference to cedar trees which are found only in temperate regions, the ruins of a temple from antiquity dedicated to Aphrodite, references to the "Ultramontanus" who had brought news of Dante [268]). The city's gates are opened to them on the day dedicated to the memory of St. Florian. Outstanding moments in the performances during the afternoon of this day are the retelling of the legend of Lancelot by the Jongleur, and the words addressed to the crowd by the Goliard. At the end of the day the performers gather at a tavern, spending the day's earnings on a banquet. Their feasting is brought to an end by a call for help from two errant knights who want to gain their freedom by escaping from within the city's gates. The minstrels realize the danger they all face from the enraged burghers, whose wives and sons have been infected with the spirit of freedom and

---

[267] Aleksander Ziemny, "Portrety i życie," *Ty i ja* (1970), No. 2, pp. 3-5.

[268] Kolbuszewski remarks on this point:
Die Handlung spielt sich also weder in Polen noch in Deutschland ab. Dass Frankreich nicht in Betracht kommt, beweist das Gespräch Goliards mit dem Abt, der Dantes "Gottliche Komödie" in der Originalsprache besitzt. Goliard bemerkt, dass man im Reiche des Königs von Frankreich dieses Werk in *einer anderen* Sprache gehört habe. Ein anderes Mal erklärt er, dass die Sprache Dantes *jenseits des Gebirges* gesprochen werde. Also kann nur die Provence Ort der Handlung sein, die bekanntlich im Jahre 1248 unter die Regierung Karls von Anjou kam, unter dessen Geschlecht sie bis 1481 verblieb. Erst dann ging sie an Frankreich über. In dem von Berent geschilderten Zeitraum war die Kenntnis der italienischen Sprache in der Provence möglich (Dante in der Originalsprache) und nach Aussage der Provençalen sprach man in Frankreich eine andere Sprache als diese. Ein weiterer Beweis sind die überwucherten Ruinen aus dem Altertum, die den Hintergrund zu dem wundervollen Bild für den Tod Goliards und der Tänzerin bilden. (Stanisław Kolbuszewski, "Ein polnisches Werk über mittelalterliches Bänkelsangertum," *Slavische Rundschau*, X, No. 6, 190-194.)

the call of the wide world by the day's events. Various sinister hirelings have already found occasion to harass the entertainers. In addition, arson had occurred in the city, for which the visitors would certainly be held responsible. In a desperate attempt, they try to take one of the city gates to help the two knights and themselves to freedom. Outside the town walls the Goliard and the woman acrobat (*skoczka*) separate from the group. The Goliard seeks consolation at the Franciscan monastery but is rebuffed by its prior. He returns to the woman acrobat and at the site of old pagan ruins consummates his love for her. Then they both re-enact the joyous Bacchanalia of antiquity in spirit and in deed. After this climactic moment the tension in the novel recedes. The woman is bitten by a poisonous snake and the Goliard provokes his own death by tearing the bandages from a neck wound which had not healed. The band of minstrels finds the Goliard bled to death in the arms of the dying woman acrobat. They carry his body to the Franciscan monastery asking for burial, which is granted. The prior of the monastery sees them off with inspiring words about their duty and calling in this world.

Here ends the fable. What interests us, however, is not the sequence of events but the manner of their presentation—the subject; and this subject is extremely rich and varied. The material of the novel is presented both on a visual and on a spiritual plane, and both of these are carried by a subcurrent which transcends the medieval world, reaches into our present time and seems to run into infinity. This subcurrent suggests the eternal and is grounded in mysticism. The question which Berent again raises in this work is that of the artist and his role in life. This is an eternal theme. Can the artist live in a world which stifles his freedom? The answer has to be no, he cannot: "We die, art will live. Its purpose is unknown and will remain unknown to us. It is indivisible in its essence." [269] These words of Alexander Blok (1880-1921), a contemporary of Berent's in Russia, spoken on the 84th anniversary of Pushkin's death, could stand as a motto over the following observations. We shall first discuss Berent's re-creation of the medieval world in its visual and in its spiritual aspect and then turn to the wider implications. As a part of this discussion we shall again have to account for the style of the novel and the harmony which the author has achieved between his material and its form. If we recognize the interrelationships between the various aspects of a work of art (its foreground, background, wider implications and manner of presentation), we shall have understood it in its wholeness and in its permanence within the chain of human creativity.

---

[269] Aleksander Blok, Uber die Bestimmung des Dichters," *Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1964), p. 124.

III

In his important study [270] of the stylistic aspects of the lyrical, the epic and the dramatic, Emil Staiger has defined the lyrical style as "recollection." In the preceding chapters of the present study we have frequently pointed to the suggestiveness and impressionism of Berent's style. We might also have described Berent's manner of presentation as lyrical. This lyrical aspect is particularly strong in *Żywe kamienie.* Its theme of the passing of life into "living stones" and the "living stones" then serving as an inspiration for new life is founded on the realization of death which is conquered only by recollection. This theme of the passing of life is lyrical in the same sense as Goethe's "Wanderers Nachtlied" (Uber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh, in allen Wipfeln spürest du kaum einen Hauch; Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde. Warte nur, balde ruhest du auch), or Verlaine's "Et je m'en vais au vent mauvais, qui m'emporte deçà delà, pareil à la feuille morte." [271]

In *Żywe kamienie* Berent again adopts a symmetrical structure of four parts (*Fachowiec* had had two parts). This symmetrical type of construction suggests the four equal sections of a circle. This circular and symmetrical shape of his novels is fundamental to Berent's vision of life.

The story of the novel, placed in the second half of the fourteenth century (the author himself gives no date) [272] opens with the following scene: "On the steps of the sanctuary a secular service was in progress in tranquillity and in the sunshine. Here, to the sound of the litany of the beggars and the melodious rumbling of the pigeons, the simple folk knelt down in order humbly to kiss the church walls. Their lips touched many forms chiselled into the stone, kissing in excited submissiveness the images of both the wise and foolish virgins, the figure of Job on his litter as well as the centaur, which represented paganism, and the dove subduing the dragon. The beggars added their prayers to these pious kisses, and the sunshine of the early morning placed a gilded mantle of grace over these heads of matted hair, over their sackcloth shirts and feet black as the earth. Meanwhile, the birds of the church square chirped gaily with the same simplicity that marked the worshippers." [273]

This first scene presents the crowd outside the medieval cathedral, kneeling in prayer and devotedly putting their lips to the enchiselled

---

[270] Emil Staiger, *Grundbegriffe der Poetik.* Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1946.

[271] *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

[272] Kolbuszewski has convincingly shown that this is where the novel should be dated on the basis of our information of the tradition of minstrels and vagabonds and its decline in the second half of the fourteenth century: "Es scheint also, dass sich die Handlung der 'Lebenden Steine' abspielte, als sich das Mittelalter dam Ende näherte und die Renaissance langsam in Erscheinung trat, also in der 2. Hälfte des 14. Jhs." (Kolbuszewski, *op. cit.*, p. 191).

[273] *Żywe kamienie*, p. 7.

figures of the past regardless of whether these are Christian or pagan. The cathedral stands as a monument which dwarfs everything else. It draws people to its walls and it stands as a symbol of their hopes, but it lifts no one's heart and gives no one any joy. Everyone drags himself to church, the beggars, the flagellants, the lepers, like "the ghosts of life," and their hearts are heavy with sadness: "In the ashes of life the last embers of fervour were burning down. This leprosy of the soul, the sin of unbridled sadness, branded by the Church with the name of 'acedia' breathed with an air of pestilence on the secular and spiritual life." [274]

Despondency, in spite of a profound piety, is a characteristic mark of the late Middle Ages. It was one of the extremes which manifested themselves in so many ways during this period: "At the close of the Middle Ages, a sombre melancholy weighs on people's souls. Whether we read a chronicle, a poem, a sermon, a legal document even, the same impression of immense sadness is produced by them all. It would sometimes seem as if this period had been particularly unhappy, as if it had left behind only the memory of violence, of covetousness and mortal hatred, as if it had known no other enjoyment but that of intemperance, of pride and of cruelty." [275]

Into this world of sadness and depression, physically circumscribed by the town walls, and spiritually dominated and held down by the towering cathedral, arrives the band of minstrels made up of the "fabulator" (story-teller), the ropewalker, the trainer with his bear, the fire-eater, the athlete, the woman acrobat, the singer, the mandolin player and finally the Goliard [276] himself. The arrival of the performers, joyfully greeted with the shout of "Joculatores" (Clowns), leads to general gaiety among the population, to singing and dancing. After the games and frivolous activities outdoors have ended, many of the citizens gather in one of the houses to hear the popular tale of the adventures of Lancelot narrated to the accompaniment of the viol by the "Jongleur."

All the wandering artists enjoy success and share the general exuberance except the Goliard, who finds no welcome. "Where shall I go?—he will tell them—The castle bridges no longer are let down and the gates of monasteries are no longer open, neither benches nor warm dishes await us at the bishop's, nor do the hearts of monks or of ordinary men beat faster at our sight. The market squares are full of legends, the halls of brainless women . . ." [277]

From the beginning these pages illustrate the strong contrasts in medieval life, of what Huizinga had called "the violent tenor of life":

---

[274] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[275] Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), p. 31.

[276] The name "Goliardus" seems to have been derived from the Old French word "goliard" describing a wandering poet.

[277] *Żywe kamienie*, p. 43.

despondency and frivolousness, piety and glorification of the flesh, spirituality and earthy crudity, ascetic striving and unabashed lechery. In scene after scene the author recreates this medieval life on a visual plane. The women in the cloth hall are delighted with the trinkets brought from afar. Everyone surrounds the stall of the Levite, admiring his display of jewels and no one pays any attention to the Dominican friar collecting alms for his Order. However, his violent harangue condemning these worldly treasures and threatening hell and purgatory somehow diminish the women's joy. Their earlier delight turns into fear and consternation when a monk, masked in the paraphernalia of death, appears in the cloth hall announcing the death of a citizen: "I, *Radocha*, a sinner, inordinately fond of people, died this night in luxury and foul wealth, having turned over my entire wealth to the church, yet unatoned for my sins. Pray that my soul may be freed from the torment of purgatory, liberate it with your alms! I beg for a penny, I ask for a prayer!" [278] Soon the women throw all their trinkets into the Dominican friar's alms box, and the young girl with the garland of roses on her cap suddenly breaks out into sobs: "I don't want to die this night." And a moment later through her sobs she repeats only one line: "I want to live! Live! Live!"

The accumulation of decorations and worldly trivia in pyres was a common sight in the Middle Ages: "In Paris and Artois in 1428 and 1429 all that was burned were playing cards, game boards, dices, hair decorations and various other trinkets which men and women willingly turned over. These pyres were a frequently repeated element in the fifteenth century in France and Italy as a result of that great emotion which wandering preachers produced. It was the ceremonial form in which remorseful denial of all vanities and secular pleasures found expression, the stylization of a passionate emotion converted into a common solemn deed just as that period in all aspects inclined towards the creation of stylized forms." [279]

Another aspect of this "violent tenor of life" was the appearance in every city of the diseased and afflicted and the deliberate showing of one's physical afflictions and deformities: "But again people became abashed and the tumult ceased. From afar one could hear the rattles of the lepers. The pestilential crowd drew near. Clanging with their rattles as they had to, they strike at their tin cups. One of them, with a somewhat more lively spirit, jumps up from his crutches, leaps like a frog, flutters with his multicoloured rags, and grins towards the women." [280] These processions were another feature of that "ostentatious and cruel

---

[278] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

[279] Johan Huizinga, *Herbst des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1939), p. 9.

[280] *Żywe kamienie*, p. 83.

desire to manifest everything in public, a feature characteristic of all spheres of life: lepers clanged their rattles and walked around in processions, beggars lamented in the churches and there exhibited their deformities." [281]

Yet another feature of this life was its symbolism, readily understood by everyone, and here illustrated by the red glove of the king nailed to the church door as a sign of the king's wrath and impending vengeance for the murder of one of his knights.

Above the tumult of life in the medieval town, towers the cathedral, a constant reminder to the citizenry not to lose themselves in the vanities of life. The ringing of bells in medieval times was an awesome experience: "Here near the wall the air trembled from the strikes of the metal as if choruses of angels on both towers had been let loose. And whatever one tower was blasting out with its bass, the other would take up on a higher note and would proclaim and sound forth: *And where are you going? . . . [Kędyż wam? . . .] And where are you going? . . . [Kędyż wam? . . .]* The sound of the parish church rang into the great stillness of the town carrying the summons of conscience. *And where now? . . . [Kędyż-bo? . . .] Where now? . . . [Kędyż-bo? . . .]*—the second tower took up—*where are the summonses of your consciences, the judges of your hearts? Where will you find the proclamation of indulgence? When will all human sufferings be gathered up?* [282]

The ringing of bells was a regular feature of the day in the fourteenth century. They sounded either sadness, joy, peace or calamity. The ear of the citizens never became indifferent to their ringing. On important occasions such as the election of a new pope in Constance (Martin V), which was to put an end to the papal schism in 1417, the bells of all the churches and cloisters of Paris rang throughout the day and even through the night.[283]

Berent had obviously done considerable research into this period, and he portrays many of the typical aspects of life in the fourteenth century. His intention, however, went far beyond the re-creation of the visual and auditory aspects of the medieval world. He wanted to recreate the spirit of this period, an age which formed a transition between the high Middle Ages and the birth of the Renaissance. It was an age of introspection and melancholy. The fervour which had produced the crusades was long gone, and it seemed as if God had turned his face away in wrath. The papal schism and the devastating plague, popularly known as the Black Death, were interpreted as manifestations of God's displeasure. Artistic representations of melancholy can be found as late as the first decades of the sixteenth century, for example the engraving by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), entitled "Melancholia." The engraving is

---

[281] Huizinga, *Herbst*, p. 2.

[282] *Żywe kamienie*, p. 108.

[283] Huizinga, *Herbst*, p. 4.

dated 1514 and shows the heavy-set figure of a woman in a sitting position supporting her head on her arm which rests on her slightly raised knee. Heinrich Wölfflin has pursued the matter of the various interpretations of this slouching figure and has concluded that this is not an allegory of deep, speculative thought or a representation of the searching intellect. Comparing other sources and statements of melancholia, particularly that of Marsilius Ficinus, whose study on the subject had been published in 1489 and translated into German in Strasbourg in 1505, Wölfflin states that "it seems impossible to me to regard the woman as anything other than what the inscription declares her to be, namely Melancholia, and I have no doubt that what is represented is not activity but, on the contrary, the interruption of activity. And if one is to say why activity is interrupted, the natural answer is this: melancholic depression prevents the woman from continuing her work. . . . The term melancholia is sufficiently expressive, and this very simple interpretation corresponds exactly to the written passage which must be taken as the picture's source: reason becomes blocked when 'black gall' thickens. Of course, Dürer too associated the concept of melancholia with temperament—he did not merely see it as a mood which could befall anyone." [284]

Through the ages melancholy has been particularly associated with the gifted man, the artist and philosopher: "All men who have excelled in great art have been melancholics." In this phrase Marsilius Ficinus restates Cicero's *Omnes ingeniosos melancholicos esse.*[285]

Melancholy is the state of mind of the Goliard in *Żywe kamienie* and *acedia* is the sickness that has taken hold of the Franciscan monk Łukasz. The symptoms of both are related and their manifestations are similar. Both are varieties of despair, of suspension of faith and separation from God. Described by Thomas of Aquinas (1225-1274) in his *Summa Totius Theologiae* acedia was called a spiritual condition characterized by "langour of the heart, disintegration of the will and the desires: Acedia is that human sin where man has insufficiently striven for the *summum bonum* and has therefore forfeited the salvation of his soul." [286] Originally the so-called "monk's disease," in the late fourteenth and fifteenth century, it affected above all the secular, lonely man, and in this group particularly the creative and gifted individual. In Dante's

---

[284] Heinrich Wölfflin, *The Art of Albrecht Dürer* (London: Phaidon, 1971), p. 202. Berent knew Dürer's engraving already in 1901 when he wrote *Próchno*. Kunicki feels "that from the dark corner of his room cold, searching melancholia, morose in her thoughtfulness, was glancing at him like the one on the Dürer engraving which had laid the globe, her books and telescope aside and looked with concentration into the soul of man." (*Próchno*, p. 59).

[285] *Ibid.*, pp. 297-298.

[286] Walther Rehm, *Gontscharow und Jacobsen oder Langeweile und Schwermut* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), p. 97.

Inferno (the Fourth Circle) we meet a group of those whose life had been affected by *acedia*:

> This, too, for certain know, that underneath
> The water dwells a multitude, whose sighs
> Into these bubbles make the surface heave,
>
> As thine eye tells thee wheresoe'er it turn.
> Fix'd in the slime, they say 'Sad once were we,
> In the sweet air made gladsome by the sun,
>
> Carrying a foul and lazy mist within.
> Now in these murky settlings are we sad.'
> Such dolorous strain they gurgle in their throats,
>
> But word distinct can utter none." [287]

Acedia, or sloth, was a fundamental concept in the moral scheme of the Middle Ages. In the order of Seven Deadly Sins as outlined in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa* (I-II, Q. 84, art. 4) it followed pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony and anger. The Goliard is in despair. He is an outcast. His is the only art that is no longer respected and finds no response: "The Goliard passed along the streets of the town. It was bitter to be rejected, sometimes very bitter. And he felt a revulsion for life and knew no longer what to live for." When he does find an audience, his speech, richly sprinkled with Latin phrases, turns into vituperation: "Gentlemen! . . . Beautiful is the performance of minstrels in the market, beautiful the dances and the legs of the woman acrobat, beautiful the daring of the rope walker . . . beautiful is each audacity and swiftness of body! But even more beautiful is our ancient art! . . . Different is our art, the art of the poets and different are its charms! . . . The limit of disrespect is reached when the sons in excess of pride have rejected the Muses in whose company their fathers' spirit had been trained, these Muses who are now cast among the rabble. . . . Such is the limit of indolence when the lamps of the spirit are in the hands of women only, both the wise and the foolish. . . . Oh fools, oh idiots, oh illiterates!" [288] The Goliard is alone and rejected not only by society but also by his own comrades. He longs to withdraw from the tumult of the market place, to devote his time to studying, to the reading of the verse of Horace and to the solace of the philosophy of Boëthius.

The Goliard's despair has a twofold basis: his art is rejected and he has lost his religious faith. After leaving the town with the other laymen he turns to the Franciscan monastery in hope of finding consolation and peace: "I have brought my sadness here, father, from the high

---

[287] Dante, *The Divine Comedy* (H. F. Cary Translation) (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948), p. 30.

[288] *Żywe kamienie*, p. 51.

road. There another thorn pierced my chest with its message so that I left my comrades and came here to your monastery. May it then happen here amidst the tranquillity of your hearts that my wound will bleed out its black blood of pride until it reaches that final humility where I shall shout: May my life be cursed!" [289] The dialogue which follows between the Goliard and the Prior of the monastery reveals the conflict that rages in the Goliard's soul and focuses on the essential problem in this novel —the relationship between art and faith.

The Goliard is outraged by the appearance of a new singer, news of whom had been brought by the "Ultramontanus," a man from "beyond the mountains," from Italy. This is the news of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1307?-1321?), a work which is already in the Prior's possession. In the confrontation between the Goliard and Dante, whose spokesman here is the Prior, we have a confrontation between the secular art of the High Middle Ages (the chivalric-courtly romance, the poems glorifying the free life of the Archipoeta [290]) and the new pietism of the late fourteenth century. On the one hand, we have the pride of the secular poet—the *Carmina burana* [292] associated with the tradition of the goliards are completely secular, and in the nineteenth century many of them formed the major part of song books of German students with which he was familiar in his Munich days—and on the other, the humility of a man who places the highest value on the spiritual aspect of art and the fulfillment that results from an awareness of man's transcendence as in Dante's *Divine Comedy.* The spirit of love—caritas, not amor—leads the poet to paradise and it is Beatrice who leads him not Pythagoras, or Virgil. Reading from Dante's *Vita Nuova* the Prior reminds the Goliard that

> "Those of you who walk along the road of love,
> Listen and look upon me! . . .
> Listen and look upon me:
> Was there ever a power of grief that equalled mine?" [293]

The Goliard is outraged. His is the anger of the old order seeing itself

---

[289] *Ibid.*, p. 223.

[290] A specimen of the poetry of the Archipoeta is given on p. 205 of *Żywe kamienie* (1958 edition). It is from "The Confession of the Archipoeta" (No shackles will bind me, no keys confine me, I seek the *free* in the world, I roam with those who are unattached. Like a bird in the sky I draw my circles over that which cannot be hunted; Like a rudderless boat . . .) sung by the Goliard accompanied by his fiddle "to strengthen the spirit of the free-roaming life among the young scholars." The best scholarly treatment of this area of medieval literature can be found in Ryszard Ganszyniec, "Echa pieśni goliardowej w Polsce" in *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, V (1930), pp. 57-78 and 161-204.

[292] A collection of these songs was discovered at the monastery of Benediktbeuren in Bavaria and published by Schmeller in 1895 (3rd ed.) under the title *Carmina Burana.* They were translated by John Addington Symonds in a small volume, *Wine, Women and Song* (1884).

[293] *Żywe kamienie*, pp. 227-228.

replaced by the new. The Goliard's mission has come to an end, a new and greater master building on the old Christian tradition has superseded him. He was a precursor, a John the Baptist, to a greater master, and he responds to this realization not with humility but with wrath. The Prior tells him: "Like the Jews you have not yet outgrown in your soul the Law of Wrath . . . You will see, you will learn. Every soul succumbs to such a Law as it deserves in terms of its spiritual maturity." To these words the Goliard replies: "Your Law of the Spirit is even more severe, I see, than God's wrath . . . Nor is this master of yours probably any better (He lifted the book for a moment, but presently put it down again). . . . Dante? He who from our lines removed all . . . imperfections, and it is precisely he who has broken our portentous instruments and has destroyed us players, too. Such, father, are the messiahs of your Law, that its Johns . . .' Here the Goliard breaks down altogether." [294]

The Goliard senses that he is the "last poet with a lyre," and as a symbolic gesture to the end of his mission he leaves his lyre behind. It is the noble gesture of an artist who has suffered defeat. Pride did not permit the Goliard to stay at the monastery and to join his gift as an artist with faith in God. He prefers to accept loneliness and rejection rather than to embrace what he calls "the poison of monkish sadness, after the holocaust the bitter draught of *acedia*." [295] After a scene of pagan Bacchanalia which invokes the beauty and abandon of pagan, fleshly desires and satisfactions he bleeds to death in the arms of the woman acrobat. This scene is an ecstatic feast of corporeal joy dedicated to Bacchus and Dionysos to the accompaniment not of words of Christian edification but to the joyous lines of Horace's poems and the sounds of the flute of Pan. Under these sounds the poet bleeds out his "black blood of pride," and the acrobat is bitten by a poisonous snake, the symbol of temptation.

The Goliard represents the last secular poet. His melancholy results from the rejection of his art and from his inability to regain his foothold by linking his art to faith. He had rejected faith long ago at the seats of learning in Paris and Salerno, and cannot find his way back to it. In the consummation of his love for the woman acrobat, among the ruins of antiquity, he ends his life in a tribute to the flesh and not to the spirit. Thus, in a way he has overcome the melancholy in whose grip he had earlier been.

A case of real *acedia* is that of the Franciscan monk Łukasz, a man of considerable artistic talent, who is unable to free himself from an inner longing that would render his art more productive. A constant struggle takes place in him between the desire to join the minstrels and experience all the dangers and joys of life and the fulfilling of his duty in the tranquil atmosphere of his cell: "By God, he whispered, what is

---

[294] *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230.

[295] *Ibid.*, p. 236.

happening in the city?! The same that's happening in you, brother: the struggle between the souls of the settled and the homeless." [296] The Prior has his monk firmly in hand and takes pride in his artistic talent: "This, my vagrant, shall be your penitence, more productive than flogging. I shall bind you to your task! You stand before this book as before the gates of purgatory where the figures of your experience of earthly timidity pass by in order to be purified through conscious knowledge. Therefore, you will use only such a corporeal frame, you will use garments and colours only to such an extent, as to make them speak some day not to the body but to the soul." [297]

Łukasz is an illuminator of manuscripts, a craft which was brought to a high development in the Middle Ages. However, the rebellion that rages in him (*bunt jest we mnie*) [298] prevents the completion of any artistic project. Brother Łukasz is incurably ill. One of the Prior's final words are addressed to the brotherhood of minstrels and concern Łukasz: "Heal him for me, boys, for my old age is helpless in the sight of *acedia* of a young soul. If he must drag as a shadow of his own self through the monastery, teach him rather to dance. For brother Łukasz (I have seen it) is absolutely unable to dance." [299]

Among the many characters of this novel the physician and the armourer stand out, the physician as a member of the band of minstrels, the armourer as a resident of the city; both of them as heretics. The physician is a man of the Horatian principle of *carpe diem.* He fires the band of performers with his enthusiasm and affirmation of life. The armourer is a man inclined to moroseness. He first drinks with the Goliard, who had wandered aimlessly through the town pursued by the local ruffians. Then he invites the monk of the order of Misericordia, dressed in the paraphernalia of death and proclaiming the death of the Goliard, and drinks with this messenger of death until he himself collapses and dies. His time, too, has passed: "Time itself wants us to make room for others. The spirit of the general public has changed . . . Hey, you gentlemanly troubadours who have become silent! And you Goliard, who have just passed on! And you, jongleurs, the last narrators of the Grail! It seems that it's time for you to cede to the spirit of the burghers; and I must join you, for different are the churches which are now going up in the towns . . . [300]

---

[296] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[297] *Ibid.*, p. 218.

[298] *Ibid.*, p. 274.

[299] *Ibid.*, p. 325.

[300] *Ibid.*, p. 308.

III

There is a great deal of joy and ecstasy in this work, an afternoon and evening of death, and a night when the promise of a new and continuing life is sounded. While "the cicadas sing their convulsive lament of raptures and death," the minstrels gather up the body of the Goliard (the woman's body is left at the site of the ancient ruins and will be attended to by the bear trainer whom she had rejected as a lover) and carry it to the monastery. Here, the mystical undercurrent, which has run through the novel, is presented in the form of a vision of life in the words of the Prior at the hearse of the Goliard. This vision is based on a figural interpretation of reality, and the figure in this case is the Goliard, symbol of the indomitable human spirit, a spirit which had not succumbed until it saw its role fulfilled, a spirit which in death had again attained union with faith and had renewed the hearts of its disciples to the continuation of their eternal mission. The Goliard is a figure in the same sense in which Cato is a figure in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Purgatory I, 70-75): "Now may it please thee to be gracious unto his coming: he seeketh freedom, which is so precious, as he knows who giveth up life for her. Thou knowest it; since for her sake death was not bitter to thee in Utica, where thou leftest the raiment which at the great day shall be so bright." [301] What is here said of Cato is true of the Goliard: "Cato is a *figura,* or rather the earthly Cato, who renounced his life for freedom, was a *figura,* and the Cato who appears here in the *Purgatorio* is the revealed or fulfilled figure, the truth of that figural event." [302] The Goliard in *Żywe kamienie* appears at a moment when his role has been fulfilled, when his art has been superseded by that of another as he learns from "the man from beyond the mountains." Through his art he had kept alive the legends of the past, the search for the Grail, the tale of Lancelot and had inspired knights to new adventures and new valorous deeds in accordance with the demands of their position. The statues of stone and marble decorating the churches were a form of "living stones" in terms of the spirit which spoke from them and which animated others. The eternal anxiety of their faces were taken by the sensitive observer as "living reproofs of his conscience: which are your aspirations?"

The Goliard is a man who had rejected the dogma of the church—in the early fourteenth century "the privileges of clergy" were withdrawn from the goliards—in exchange for freedom, satire, poems in praise of wine and riotous living. When we meet him first in the novel, he suffers from melancholy, the spectre of *acedia* hangs over him. But when we part from him, he leaves us as a symbol of joy and Bacchian ecstasy: "Life's joy itself hovered about the ruins of the ancient temple as if bewitched into its death-like silence. And the Goliard himself here froze

---

[301] Erich Auerbach, "Figura," *The Drama of European Literature* (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1959), pp. 64-65.

[302] *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

into a living stone, into the expression and gesture of marble enchanted by the rapture of Bacchus without tears." [303]

The Goliard is not only a *figura* of joy and freedom. Through his death he has become transfigured into a symbol of inspiration for others. His life had been fulfilled, the Franciscan friar Łukasz's life remained unfulfilled in the area of secret and suppressed longings. Is the Goliard's image then to be left in marble as a living memorial, a living stone? No, the Prior rejects the offer of the sculptor, doubting in his heart whether he will be able to infuse his statue with the spirit that will render it alive. He sees the living spirit of the Goliard in his youthful pupils who in joyousness are reunited with the faith of the Church and who will carry this joy of their master to the far corners of the earth. This reunion of joy with the spirit of love, not "*amor*," not "*misericordia*," but "*caritas*" is a sign that they, the disciples, under the leadership of the poet have found the Grail: "Rejoice, scholars!—You are on Montsalvat! . . . Here the walls themselves breathe the *faith* of Abraham, the *hope* of the prophets and the *love* of our Redeemer! Here you may renew in your breast that most joyous of news which ever was: the good tidings of the Christians! And you may place the thirsty lips of the wanderers to that cup which will illuminate in your souls the entire world—the living heart of St. Francis." [304] The Grail then as a symbol of salvation is not to be looked for outside in distant adventures, but it has to be found in the inner self, and it reveals itself in the union of joy and faith, the union of joy in artistic creation with the Christian message of faith, hope and love.

It is most significant that the path to salvation originates with the figure of the Goliard and his death, the Goliard who was an artist and is now a "living stone," under whose leadership his disciples have found the Grail. Here the wider implications of this work are to be found. The vision of this work again has its basis in mysticism. This mysticism is the undercurrent, the spiritual basis of *Żywe kamienie*. It appears on the one hand in the figure of the pagan divinity Pan belonging to the retinue of Dionysos and running through the ruins of the ancient temple with the last Nymph, relived and re-enacted by the Goliard and the woman acrobat; on the other hand, it appears as the myth of the search for the Holy Grail and the prophetic proclamation of the arrival of the Kingdom of the Spirit in the writings of Gerard de Borgo (*Introductorius in Evangelium Aeternum*, 1254) and Joachim de Fiore (1135-1202), biblical commentator and philosopher of history, and teacher of Gerard de Borgo. On the basis of the Apocalyse of St. John these medieval Christian philosophers tried to predict God's plan for the world in terms of definite dates.[305] On the basis of these calculations conducted in the thir-

[303] *Żywe kamienie*, p. 249.

[304] *Ibid.*, p. 328.

[305] Mystical thinkers and various so-called millenary movements have always built their predictions of Armageddon and the Day of Judgment on calculations derived from the Book of Revelation.

teenth century the number thirty played a fundamental role as a figure indicating roughly the span of one generation. Here the year 630 B.C. was seen as the end of one period, the first period of humanity, which was followed by the second period, the period of the Old Testament prophets. The period up to the birth of Jesus and the thirtieth year in his life was viewed as equal in length in God's plan to the period that would follow and when God would intervene again and put an end to the world on the Day of Judgment. This date was to be the year 1260. The same, incidentally, was expected to happen in the year 1492, a date that would bring the age of the world to the "number of fulfilment," the total of 7,000 years since its creation (5,508 B.C.).

The Franciscan order and especially its most rigorous wing known as the Spirituals saw in their founder St. Francis the initiator and in their order the "spiritual men" of the new age, as Joachim de Fiore had predicted. When the year 1260 passed, and nothing happened, there was a general sense of anti-climax and disappointment, yet attempts continued to sustain Joachim's reputation as a thinker and prophet, and "he enjoyed a high reputation until the seventeenth century." [306] The Prior in *Żywe kamienie* has recalculated the Second Coming in terms of the sixty-three generations which were to have preceded the year of the start of Jesus's mission, and the sixty-three that were to follow, thus the new Kingdom of the Spirit would start with the year 1890.

These reflections of the Prior are brought to an end with the arrival of the young scholars and minstrels carrying the body of their master, the Goliard. Their arrival at the monastery is like a homecoming, it is a return for spiritual regeneration before they will go out again. The Prior gives them a warm welcome, and he will not hear of any sadness: " 'There is no sadness in death! The Goliard is alive in each of you through his word. I heard this a while ago.' 'He is alive'—they agree sadly. 'And he still leads you even now. And he has after all brought you here—already after his death'." [307] These words are followed by the Prior's twofold exclamation: "*You are on Montsalvat.*" This Montsalvat is the spirit that drives them "so that sadness might be wiped off the face of the earth: Wherever you take up any cause of the Spirit with the fire of your young hearts, for the purpose of wiping off all sadness from the face of the earth and in order to restore human hearts, there you will be doing the service of the Grail." [308] "Thus," the work concludes, "the wandering scholars under the posthumous leadership of the poet found the Grail." [309]

---

[306] *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago, 1965), XIII, 2-3.

[307] *Żywe kamienie*, p. 327.

[308] *Ibid.*, p. 328.

[309] *Ibid.*, p. 328.

IV

The past scholarship [310] on *Żywe kamienie* has not paid sufficient attention to this mystical ending of the novel and to its religious basis. When the wandering scholars and minstrels leave the monastery, they do so after having renewed their vision of life in the joyous message of Christ. What else is the Grail after all but the discovery of the faith, the knowledge that God is in His place and that those who laugh are blessed (*beati ridentes*)? Faith and affirmation of life are not based on rationalism but on mysticism. It is the recognition of the mystery of life which propels man to his ceaseless searching, a searching, however, that is not "aimless." If it were it would be a ceaseless treading on the same spot. The aim of this searching is the Grail, or faith. It is the synthesis of all human striving.

There is an epilogue in this work in which the narrator makes a leap from the period of the late fourteenth century to his own day. Suddenly we realize that all this time we have listened to a "fabulator" giving us an allegory of life and art just as the women in the crowded servant's hall had listened to the story of Lancelot and Parsifal from the mouth of the Jongleur (*gęślarz*). The narrator has given us "living stones": "errant knights, wandering minstrels, clerks and young scholars as well as other vagabonds according to the spirit." Now, what is their significance today, he asks; is this freedom of the spirit, the search for faith and truth that animated these men more than five hundred years ago still a relevant force, and can it still speak to us meaningfully? While the answer is stated explicitly in the epilogue as an eternal phenomenon of the human spirit, it is, of course, implicit throughout the novel.

There is, as Kierkegaard has shown, an Either/Or in human affairs. There is a state of spirit of the settled and unadventuresome, often having its roots in materialism, sometimes finding expression in pure aestheticism and heightened concern with one's own person, a state of mind that can result in melancholy and *acedia,* and there is a state of spirit which is grounded in affirmation of life, in faith, a spirit that has the powers of self-renewal and renewal of others, where the aesthetic appreciation of beauty is united with ethical knowledge. The "living stones" are an allegorical figure of this spiritual state. They are not just stones but *living* stones, and life suggests movement, development, flux. Art then is figuratively shown here in the Goliard and his band of minstrels and scholars as a living force grounded in affirmation and faith and inseparable from the vitalistic drives of nature. Art is linked with a basic need of the human spirit, a need just as great as bread and water for the body, the need for joy. Life without joy is *acedia,* just one step removed from death.

---

[310] *Janina Rosnowska, "Żywe kamienie" Wacława Berenta,* Warsaw, 1937. Andrzej Konkowski, "Na drogach graalowego szukania," *Myśl i życie,* XX (1970), No. 3. This critic speaks of "wieczne, bezcelowe dążenie człowieka" (the eternal, aimless striving of man).

We spoke of the novel *Żywe kamienie* as an allegory of life and art, conceived as one. Allegories state essential truths in figurative language. In the course of the discussion of this novel we have several times referred to the figural interpretation of reality with the Goliard a *figura* of freedom and art, the Franciscan monk a *figura* of *acedia* and the Prior a *figura* of faith. Such interpretation of reality, which tries to state an essential truth about life, could not but find expression in an elevated style. This elevated style in terms of vocabulary and syntax, sometimes called "Neo-Baroque" (*neobarokowość*), has usually been the reason why some critics today see Berent as a writer who has outlived his day and has nothing more to say to the present generation. There is no denying that the difficulty of Berent's style has seemed puzzling.[311] Porębowicz has described it as "initially disquieting and cumbersome, forcing the reader to an intensification of attention."

Feldman described the Młoda Polska writers as "fanatics of style," and this is certainly true of Berent. Stylization was a necessity to him in order to state his vision of the interrelationship between art and life. By means of this stylization he creates a mood, an artistic environment where phantasy and reality can mix freely, where he can introduce lyrical passages and philosophical digressions. Stylization is the very life-blood of his symbolism. It is suggestive and prophetic without being didactic. His stylized form of expression creates an artistic realm all of its own, it returns to every word a quality and meaning in which the profane usage is absent and only the artistic function is retained. The difficulty for the reader is in the unaccustomed confrontation with this type of style. We shall look only briefly at a typical example which was already translated on page 200 of this chapter. The novel begins with the following lines: "Na schodach świątyni sprawowało się nabożeństwo wtóre w ciszy i słońcu. Pod żebraków litanie i śpiewne turkanie gołębi przyklękiwało tu chłopstwo na korne ucałowanie kościelnego podmurza. Lizały ich wargi kształty mnogie w kamieniu tam zdziałane, całując w zachwytliwej pokorze i mądrych, i głupich panien wyobrażenia, i Hioba na barłogu, i centaura, który pogaństwo oznacza, i gołębicę zwalczającą smoka. Żebractwo zamadlało te całunki bogomolne, a rozsłonecznienie ranka kładło pozłocisty płaszcz miłosierdzia na te łby kołtuniaste, na parciane giezła, na nogi czarne jak ziemia. Zaś ptactwo kościelne gwarzyło ochotnie z serc onych prostotą."

In these few lines Berent has created a scene which is apparently very simple, showing the devotions of beggars and poor folk (*chłopstwo*) who do not dare to enter the church because of their rags and various physical afflictions and therefore in "ecstatic submission" kiss the stone

---

311 Michał Głowiński once admitted to me privately in the summer of 1970, that he found it difficult to analyze the rôle of the narrator in *Żywe kamienie* in terms of language and did not quite understand what this rôle was in connection with the meaning of the whole. It seems to me that this may be a shortcoming of the Structuralist method.

figures and other images on the church walls. This is their "secondary worship" conducted in the sunshine of the early morning. The scene suggests the re-creation in words of a painting which Berent himself may have seen somewhere, or which his imagination created for him. It is simple only on the surface with the poor folk at the centre kneeling and praying and kissing the stone figures while the pigeons whirl about cooing in the church square. Below the surface lies the mystical basis of this scene in which all creatures, the living and the dead are fused in unity with the universe. The devotions are a mystical act and significantly enough no differentiation is made in reverential admiration between "the wise and foolish virgins," "Job on his litter" and "the centaur which represents paganism." An everyday scene of medieval life is shown against a mystical background that unites all creation, living and dead, and in which the chiselled stone figures, the pigeons and the sunshine all have their place and are indispensable to each other. It is God's universe, a realm of wholeness and unity. Yet, the spirit of man is not whole. It is characterized by longing and devotion, by eternal unfulfillment. Visible reality and spiritual longing for unity are the context of man's life, but an indispensable intermediary between these two is art: "Art is an intermediary stage between the incomplete and the complete. As long as the human world has not yet been fulfilled and while, on the other hand, we no longer find our way in the realm of the senses, art supports us in our endeavour to regain that 'tension' which was originally our own. By itself it does not yet create that new reality, but it is a step in man's ascendance towards it and as such art remains in suspension between not being and being." [312]

Berent uses art precisely in this context. The range of his vocabulary is extremely rich, often archaic (*turkanie, giezło*) and usually poetic (*rozsłonecznienie, gwarzyć*). His syntax is frequently rhythmic, built on short units of enumeration (*i głupich panien wyobrażenia, I Hioba na barłogu, i centaura, . . . , i gołębicę zwalczającą smoka*), on inversions (*kształty mnogie w kamieniu tam zdziałane, i głupich panien wyobrażenia*), and on the alternation between paratactic and hypotactic phrases. Sound instrumentation is used in many places, the most conspicuous of these in the imitation of the sound of church bells in *Kędyż wam? . . . Kędyż wam? . . .* which was discussed above on page 203.

Intuitively, throughout his life Berent knew something about the Kierkegaardian *Either/Or.* With the writing of *Żywe kamienie* he completed the *Either* and stepped into the *Or. Żywe kamienie* saw the end of his "aesthetic seriousness, like seriousness of every sort profitable to man, yet never able to save him completely." Fifteen years later, when he again took up the pen to do artistic writing, the ethical was more important to him: "It affords peace, assurance, and security, for it calls to us constantly: *quod petis, hic est* (What you seek, is here)." [313]

---

[312] Ernesto Grassi, *Kunst und Mythos* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957), p. 105.

[313] Soeren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, op. cit.*, Vol. II, 328, 366.

But sometimes like a pebble from the sky,
News dropped on Lithuania. Passing by
Some ancient, who had lost an arm or leg,
Would stop and for a crust of bread would beg,
And when he had received it, looking hard
To see there were no Russians in the yard,
Of Jewish skullcaps and red collars wary,
Would tell them who he was: a legionary
Returning to his native land to end
His days—the land he could no more defend.
How they would gather round and kiss him all,
The family and servants of the hall,
Choking with tears! Then sitting at a table
He'd tell a story stranger than a fable:
How General Dąbrowski makes a plan
To cut his way to Poland from Milan, . . .[314]

I

When Berent resumed his creative literary activity, after fifteen years, the Młoda Polska period had been replaced by new literary movements. New groups had been formed (the Skamander poets: Tuwim, Lechoń, Wierzyński, Słonimski and Iwaszkiewicz; the Avantgardists: Zegadłowicz, Peiper, Przyboś) and new names had made their appearance in drama (Witkiewicz) and in the novel (Dąbrowska, Nałkowska, Kaden-Bandrowski and others). The refined style of the Młoda Polska works had given way to the use of less poetic expressions, the introduction of linguistic experiments in poetry (s. Tuwim's "Zieleń-Fantazja słowotwórcza": on Greenness), and the use of slang and colloquial language. With the tone of its poetic vocabulary lowered, writing poetry was no longer considered as a sacred activity, nor an activity destined to fulfil a special mission. Its master was no longer Mallarmé (1842-1898), but Rimbaud (1854-1891) and Apollinaire (1880-1918).

This situation continued into the nineteen-thirties, a time which also witnessed a brilliant flowering of Polish prose. Here, too, a wide variety of styles and genres flourished. In the same years as Berent's *Nurt* (Current, 1934) and *Diogenes w kontuszu* (A Diogenes in Native Garb, 1937), Bruno Schulz's *Sklepy cynamonowe* (Cynamon Shops, 1934) and *Sanatorium pod klepsydrą* (The Sanatorium under the Hour-Glass, 1937) reached print; and one year later (1938) Gombrowicz published *Ferdydurke* while Berent's last publication *Zmierzch wodzów* (The Decline of the Leaders) appeared in 1939. Thus, the literary background against which Berent created his last three works was highly diverse. It covered a wide spectrum marked on one end by catastrophism (see Roman Jaworski's *Wesele hrabiego Orgaza*—The Wedding of Count Orgaz, 1925; also Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's *Nienasycenie*—Insatiability,

---

[314] Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz* (Kenneth MacKenzie translation) (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1966), p. 26.

1930), on the other end by vitalism and optimism (see particularly Kazimierz Wierzyński's[315] *Wiosna i wino*—Spring and Wine, 1919; *Laur Olimpijski*—Olympian Laurels, 1927). Why then did Berent turn to fictionalized biography for the form of his works and why did he choose the period between 1770-1830 as the focus of his interest? Let us start by answering the first of these two questions.

Like his friend Leopold Staff, Berent, in the twenties, had devoted his energy to the translation of selected works of outstanding West European writers from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Translations of the European classics were produced with feverish speed in those years. Let us only recall the outstanding achievement in this area of Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński (1874-1941) whose plan it had been to translate all of French literature starting with the *Chanson de Roland* and ending with Proust. Berent translated Maupassant, Stendhal and Roland from French literature: Maupassant's "Boule-de-suif" from *Soirées de Médan* (1880), Stendhal's "Vittoria Accoramboni" from *Chroniques Italiennes* (1855) and Romain Rolland's *Michel-Ange* (1905). In terms of form both Rolland's and Stendhal's works may have served as models for Berent in how to write such works.

The vogue of the *vie romancée* in those years is a familiar fact of literary history. Julian Krzyżanowski suggests that the flowering of the fictionalized biography was a general phenomenon of the inter-war period. In England it was practised by Lytton Strachey, in France by André Maurois, in Germany by Emil Ludwig and in Russia by Leonid Grossman. Their works, which enjoyed enormous success, stood on the borderlines between reality and fiction, scholarly-historical biography and historical fiction.[316]

In the introduction to *Nurt*, dated December 1, 1933, Berent addresses himself to the specific literary character of the biographical genre. We might add parenthetically that this brief introduction seems to be as much a defence for what he was doing as an explanation, and the need for it seems to have arisen in the same context of misapprehension or fear of it as the postscript to the book edition of *Próchno* (1901). He begins by saying that "the form of the biographical tale continues to arouse with us profound misunderstanding. It is often connected with 'the character sketch,' or the so-called 'essay' and even though it possesses all the advantages over other works it lacks one feature—

---

[315] This is the very Kazimierz Wierzyński (1894-1969) of whom on his death Józef Wittlin (1896-) wrote so movingly in his Epitaph (*Wiadomości*, London, July 29/July 6, 1969, p. 1):

> You infected me with your elemental joy in life and you made me drunk with poetry: your own and the poetry of Tuwim, Severjanin and Blok. In the streets of Warsaw just then the lindens gave off their fragrance, and their perfume to this day is associated in my mind with you and with the blossoming poetry of reborn Poland.

[316] Julian Krzyżanowski, *Dzieje literatury polskiej* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1969), pp. 624-625.

narration. More persistent is the measuring of this form of writing against the devices of the novel in expectation of a type of *vie romancée* whose focus as a genre, however, will always be a 'Roman,' or in our language a *powieść* (novel)." [317] Then he goes on to mention the Clark lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge University, which E. M. Forster had given in 1927 on "Aspects of the Novel," followed in 1928 by André Maurois who lectured on *Aspects de la Biographie.* While neither of these names, nor the years are given, these are matters that can easily be traced by the researcher.

Berent's remarks indicate that he sees here a confirmation of the development of the novel in the direction of the biographical tale which corresponded to his own inclination in the later years of his career as a writer (he had just turned sixty in 1933). His own position is further clarified when he adduces for support Henryk Rzewuski (1791-1866), famous for his *Pamiątki Soplicy* (Memoirs of Soplica, 1839) as well as for other novels, a writer who despised the contemporary novel of his time but turned instead to the historical biographical tale. Berent seems to be interested as much in the success of Rzewuski's accomplished work as in his plans when he says: "At another moment he dreams of a type of writing which again would be completely different—this, too, remained unfulfilled—a type of writing with an undefined form but which would show our age its predecessors on that level where history was silent." [318] It seems as if Berent tried in his last three works to realize these unfulfilled plans of Rzewuski's, clearly setting forth, however, not to write "a fictionalized life," with the emphasis on fiction, but a biographical tale with emphasis on the biographical.

While we have answered the first question on the choice of genre in the context of contemporary European literature, we have not yet answered the question of why he chose the years preceding Poland's dismemberment at the end of the eighteenth century and the three decades following and leading up to the November Uprising in 1830. Drawing upon the information received from M. Danilewicz, Studencki tells us "that Berent frequently drew analogies between the social and national life of the years between 1800-1830 and the current scene." [319] Then he quotes from M. Danilewicz directly: "He frequently said that Polish history had lost one hundred years and that as a country we would have to link up with the situation of the 1830's, when the process of national renewal initiated by Drucki-Lubecki, the Society of the Friends of Science, etc., had been interrupted. This was his 'hobby horse'." [320] Berent obviously drew a negative comparison between the rather half-

---

317 Berent, *Nurt* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1958), p. 5.

318 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

319 Władyslaw Studencki, *O Berencie*, 2 Vols. (Opole, 1969), II, 19.

320 *Ibid.*, *II*, 19.

hearted support of the arts in the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century and the full commitment to the preservation of Poland's heritage in the first three decades of the preceding century. He most certainly drew a further comparison between the situation after the suppression of the uprising in 1831, and the *coup d'état* by Piłsudski in 1926.[321] Since Berent repeatedly had declined to support Piłsudski, he could hardly have approved of his new dictatorial powers. Berent, however, was not a political man. His concern was the spiritual fibre of the nation, and it was this concern which prompted him to entitle his new work "Wywłaszczenie Muz" (Dispossession of the Muses), his series of biographical tales that appeared starting in 1931 in *Pamiętnik Warszawski,* and starting in 1932 in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany.*

In the introduction he set forth the purpose of his work: "On the ruins of the Old Republic, five years after the collapse of the Kościuszko Uprising, already in the face of German administrations and the forcibly Germanized schools of "South Prussia," the most outstanding members and collaborators of the National Commission of Education for the *second time* put their minds to the salvation of Polish culture. . . . One is even more surprised that this learned geologist, the creator of industry and of Polish mining, founder of several towns (in the Kingdom) the most fervent builder of technical schools, always gave his most benevolent care not only to literature but to "the Fine Arts" (Sztuki Przyjemne). It was he, after all, who founded such a section in the Society precisely under this name of his own invention. . . . The cautious addresses in every single word of the presidents of the Society to Frederick Wilhelm, Frederick August, to Alexander and Nicholas, mention, however, as one of the chief tasks of the Society, the problem of language and literature. . . . And this task was underlined in the principal reports every four years by Staszic himself. . . . 'Learned men! The chief undertaking of our Society is to perfect our native language, this most basic element of our nationality, . . .' " [322]

Berent's polemic in "The Dispossession of the Muses," which was a challenge to the cultural policies of contemporary *independent* Poland, and particularly the use that was being made of the Pałac Staszica, was not left unanswered.[323] Ignacy Chrzanowski (1866-1940) corrected a number of errors in Berent's "impassioned" essay. He showed, e.g., that it was not true that the Kasa Mianowskiego neglected the support of Polish creative writing and gave a number of illustrations to the contrary.

---

[321] Gotthold Rhode, *Geschichte Polens* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgemeinschaft, 1966), p. 486.

[322] Berent, "Wywłaszczenie Muz," *Pamiętnik Warszawski* (1931), No. 1, pp. 15-19.

[323] I was fortunate to have had my attention drawn by the librarians of the Institute of Literary Research (Instytut Badań Literackich) to Stanisław Pigoń's article, "Berentowy Pozew o Pałac Staszica" (Berent's Citation of the Staszic Palace), *Stolica,* June 2, 1968, pp. 6-7.

Berent's interpretation of the work of Karpiński was found wanting, and other oversights were pointed out. While Chrzanowski's letter to Berent has not been preserved, Berent's reply belongs to the few items in the archives of the writer at the National Library in Warsaw. Berent here thanks Chrzanowski for "graciously pointing out the errors" in his essay and promises to remove them in the separate book edition. Finally, he not only corrected the errors, but he decided to publish the separate book edition without the introduction altogether. The only place where we can now find it is on the pages of *Pamiętnik Warszawski* (January 1931).

In *Nurt, Diogenes w kontuszu* and in *Zmierzch wodzów* Berent set forth to recreate the spirit that animated the national leaders of those years. It was the intellectual fervour of those years which prompted his research into the Dąbrowski archives and the history of the Society of Friends of Science at the National Library in Warsaw, clearly stated in the Introduction to "Wywłaszczenie Muz":

> We are here, after all, not concerned with the history of the Society, nor with its inevitable decline under the conditions of those years, but with the spirit of the best years and best aspects of that tradition *which no civilized people would permit to go to waste in order later to reach exclusively for foreign models and foreign traditions. . . .*—I see for myself no other way but to start my work with the opening *tale of the John the Baptist of contemporary Polish poetry, the patriarch of our narrative prose and drama and the first independent Polish 'litterateur,' then to speak of the 'codifier' of the Polish language, and also of the 'intellectual' dinners given by the King at the castle and of the Royal Society.* Finally, *I must speak about the posthumous supporter to this day of so many generations of men of work in our country and reviver of science and Polish art.*" [324]

Such were Berent's plans as set forth in the Introduction. It set the tone for the task the author was about to undertake, and it remains doubtful whether its replacement by a two-page Introduction in the book edition enhanced the total achievement. In this new Introduction, from which we have already quoted, Berent is above all concerned with the form of his biographical tale, justifying its looseness in terms of the tradition of the *gawęda* (causerie) established by Rzewuski's *Pamiątki Pana Seweryna Soplicy* (Memoirs of His Worship Seweryn Soplica, 1839), emphasizing, however, two aspects, the *living* elements of history and *not* historical laws ("It is not the *logos* but the *bios* of history which an epic presentation of history is concerned with; and the same here in this extremely, let's say, modest contemporary branch of that same trunk, the biographical tale"), and its special relationship to life and truth to which it stands closer than the historical novel." [325] Two aspects then, history

---

[324] "Wywłaszczenie," *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[325] *Nurt*, p. 6.

in its irrational manifestations (*bios*) and at the same time verisimilitude, are claimed by Berent for his biographical tales.

Berent read his sources well. Repeatedly we have had occasion to observe that he approached the craft of fiction with the thoroughness of a researcher in the natural sciences. He knew André Maurois's *Aspects de la Biographie* and would subscribe to the latter's statement that "when Homo Biographicus falls into the hands of a capable doctor, the latter may by proper injections communicate to him that life which is so characteristic of Homo Fictus and he may do this without damaging truth." [326] In addition to Maurois Berent may have also known Lytton Strachey's (1880-1932) *Eminent Victorians* (1918). It certainly seems as if he followed his method closely: "A biographer will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank, on the rear; he will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses hitherto undivined." [327]

II

Berent's *Nurt* is divided into sections: *Ludzie starodawni* (People of Bygone Days) and *Pogrobowcy* (Successors). The first section consists of three biographical tales: "Pustelnik" (The Hermit), "Mnichy" (Monks) and "Żywa pamiątka" (A Living Relic). *Pogrobowcy* is subdivided into seven chapters. "Pustelnik" is a biographical tale of the pre-Romantic eighteenth-century poet, Franciszek Karpiński (1741-1825), author of the verse tale *Laura i Filon*, a man of great popularity whose religious songs (Kiedy ranne wstają zorze. . . : When the early dawn is breaking; Wszystkie nasze dzienne sprawy. . . : All our daily cares) were known and sung throughout the country. Berent now examines this man's life and tries to shed light on him by recreating certain significant moments. Without adhering to any chronological sequence he shifts back and forth in his attempt to illuminate outstanding features of character. Karpiński was honoured on his seventieth birthday at a special session of the Society of Friends of Science, November 3, 1811, and it is this moment where the narrator starts his account on the basis of the memoirs of a young contemporary poet, Franciszek Morawski; and he closes his tale with an account of the session and Karpiński's appearance. In this framework we are told about his poetry, we learn of the King Stanisław August's patronage, Karpiński's role as a "John the Baptist" "whom Mickiewicz

---

[326] André Maurois, *Aspects de la Biographie* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1930), p. 258.

[327] Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1963), p. v.

Polish state, the "black melancholy" which seized him, his visit to the deposed King in Grodno, his paeans to the Russian authorities, the Rus- would not only imitate initially but also always most sincerely overrated." Next, we are informed about Karpiński's withdrawal to his country estate (his "hermitage") after the Kościuszko Uprising and the collapse of the sion governor Koszelew, and Emperor Alexander himself. These paeans later cost him his respect in Mickiewicz's eyes who denied him the role of national poet in his Paris lectures.

This biographical tale, interspersed with the narrator's observations of the literary scene, with interesting remarks on Trembecki and Krasicki, on Naruszewicz and Albertrandi, and on the King Stanisław August himself, brings to life the cultural atmosphere of that period just before and after the national catastrophe. In the loose style of a *gawęda* (causerie), sprinkled with parenthetical remarks often of an ironical character, we are made to feel the refined tastes of a highly cultivated epoch in which Karpiński as a lyricist of sentimental poetry played an incongruous role. Yes, poetry flourished at the court of Stanisław August, "*civilized,* cold and without fragrance, admirably supple in unexpected forms and *polished* in smooth shapes." In this atmosphere Karpiński as a man and as a poet represented the genuine Polish features of a minor country squire: sentiment and simplicity. Yet, it was these qualities of sentiment and simplicity which endeared him to his countrymen: "Several decades passed—Morawski says in his old age—when somewhere on the border of Silesia I heard in the houses of the squires this song: 'Rzeka w górę nie popłynie, nie powrócą moje lata...' [A river does not flow uphill, my years will not return. . .] A thousand times it had circled around all of Poland on its pilgrimage, had made its way through all the waves of Francophilism, through all the storms and clatter of arms, and again it sounded as fresh and graceful as ever—" [328]

Here ends the sketch of Karpiński, but Berent adds a short epilogue, not concerned with Karpiński but with the work of the Society of the Friends of Science and its continuing significance in Polish cultural life. Karpiński as a poet of the heart, as a predecessor of Mickiewicz, and the Society whose task it was to foster and preserve a rich cultural tradition—these two are indissolubly linked in the conception of Berent's work. First brought to Warsaw by Stanisław August, then recognized by the Society many years later, Karpiński stood as an illustration of how artistic achievement was valued in Poland in those years and how its role as a manifestation of the spirit survived misfortunes in other areas of national life.

The same subject of intellectual achievement and recognition is presented in "Mnichy" (Monks), a sketch of Onufry Kopczyński (1735-1817), author of the famous *Gramatyka dla szkół narodowych* (1778-1783), the first grammar for use in elementary and high schools. A

[328] *Nurt,* p. 36.

Piarist [329] monk, Kopczyński had worked in the seclusion of his monastery until he produced his monumental work. He was not the only one who had outstanding achievements to his credit. The Piarists had a tradition of intellectual pursuits, and Berent, who had gone through the Annuals of the Society of the Friends of Science, here meant to pay them a tribute, these forgotten men of an earlier day who left their contribution to the intellectual history of the country: Father Dąbrowski, Prior Wiśniewski, Józef Osiński and Jan Gwalbert Bystrzycki. Again, the author throws his searchlight on the spirit of those times: "It was not the grammarian whom we called forth from this picture but a worthy Piarist together with the spirit of his order, realizing today, of course, that the codification of language alone will not raise him to the state of a dignitary like the compilations of the civil and penal codes, of manners and morality, although all of these three codices are equally indispensable." [330]

In the form of a *causerie* with frequent digressions into philosophical reflections, historical explanations and satirical asides at this period, Berent has set an inconspicuous monument to the intellectual achievements of the Piarists. These pages are filled with information on these achievements. Is there anyone who will go to the trouble and familiarize himself with them? Is there anyone who will draw inspiration from the years of selfless labour which Kopczyński put into his Grammar? It is these questions with which Berent wants to challenge his reader.

The third sketch is a work in whose centre we find Niemcewicz and Kościuszko: "Among the incessant errors and uninterrupted misfortunes which fell on that generation, among the instantaneous eruptions of its courage in the manifold variations of the life and aspirations of the people, the name of Niemcewicz represented the unsubdued vitality of the Polish spirit, and became in the end the symbol of this vitality among his own people and among others." From here the author goes on to ask: "What do we know today of 'this living relic of our history?' " [331]

After these introductory observations on the neglect of study of Poland's great historical and literary figures, Berent gives a brief account of Niemcewicz's role at the battle of Maciejowice in October 1794, where Kościuszko made his last stand against the Russian army under

---

[329] The Piarist schools in the middle of the eighteenth century gave serious competition to the Jesuit schools which had enjoyed the almost unchallenged privilege of educating the children of the nobility since the sixteenth century. After the liquidation of the Jesuit order in 1772, the rôle of the Piarist schools grew further in importance. They had undergone a reform on the initiative of Stanisław Konarski in 1754. Konarski had founded the famous Piarist Collegium Nobilium for the sons of Polish magnates and upper Szlachta in 1740. It existed until 1832.

[330] *Nurt*, p. 61.

[331] *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

the command of general Fersen: "On the battle field of Maciejowice the Polish people annihilated, in spite of its defeat, the disgrace of the partitions which were weighing it down and 'rescued its spirit from eternal death.' " [332] Spirit here has been identified with pride, with awareness of one's heritage, of one's mother tongue and its cultural foundation. The details of the battle are of secondary interest to the author. He is again interested in the spirit which the men of those days carried away from it. They did not allow themselves to be defeated in spirit; and while many fell victim to "the common plague of black melancholy" (even Karpiński in his verse to Repnin addressed Poland as "dear Mother; if my ear does not betray me, it is your final sigh I hear"), others looked for consolation, not the consolation of Stoicism of Boëthius (480-524) at the end of the fifth and beginning sixth century in the face of the total annihilation of Rome, but consolation from the lute, "in the Slavic manner in order to pour out the tears that had run dry." [333] "To salvage and preserve" (*zratować i zachować*) became the slogan of those days, and here the history of the Society of Friends of Science is closely intertwined with the continuing creative and scholarly work of such men as Kopczyński, Linde,[334] Mostowski and Niemcewicz. Staszic, whom Berent compares to the ancient Roman scholar and politician Cassiodorus (490-575), encouraged and promoted the writing and publication of Niemcewicz's *Śpiewy historyczne* (Historical Songs) as a project of the Society. They appeared in 1816 with musical notes and illustrations as "a book of songs of Polish history, a source of education of several generations, one of the most popular books of the nineteenth century." [335] Yes, Poland had fallen, but not perished, as Staszic said when he greeted Dąbrowski as a new member of the Society upon his election in 1811. Science and the arts flourished, now no longer at the court of his Majesty the King, but among the people itself. Both the Warsaw Duchy (1805-1815) and the Polish Kingdom (1815-1830) promoted and encouraged the work of enlightenment of the Society and of other groups.

"Żywa pamiątka" concludes the first part of *Nurt*. Based on solid research in the archives of the period Berent has tried to recreate the spirit of Poland's artists and intellectuals at a critical period of the country's history. He has dipped into the cultural atmosphere of those years and sprinkled his observations with comparisons from other cultures, primarily from Roman history, betraying his own wide knowledge. The form of these biographical tales is loose, as was said earlier, the language straightforward. At the same time, the choice of words, the

---

[332] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

[333] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

[334] Samuel Bogumił Linde (1771-1847), author the "monumental" *Słownik języka polskiego* (1807-1814).

[335] Zofia Lewinówna, *Mały słownik pisarzy polskich* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1969), p. 138.

phrasing within the sentence, the artful arrangement of the individual parts in each work, balancing the accounts of events against the continuing cultural stream of those years, and the farflung comparisons with ancient history and mythology, these again are proof of the high cultivation and talent as a literary craftsman of the author.

III

Intellectual continuity is the watchword of these last three works in Berent's *oeuvre*, and it is the focus of his account of the Polish Legions in Italy presented in the second part of *Nurt* under the title *Pogrobowcy* (The Successors). While Dąbrowski stands at the centre of this account, the author constantly shifts his light in order to illuminate the entire situation of the Polish Legions in Italy: their abandonment to foreign interests and exploitation, their battles on foreign soil and the problems resulting from this, the great opportunity for enlightenment and learning provided by the prolonged stay of the Legions abroad, the Republican fervour which pervaded them.

Berent avoids creating a heroic myth around his central figure Dąbrowski, instead he reveals his personality in various significant moments particularly in his friendships and in his attitudes as a family man. In both areas Dąbrowski was less than successful, not to mention the slight which he received from Napoleon who upon the return of the various Legions to Poland appointed Prince Józef Poniatowski *général-en-chef* and made Dąbrowski the latter's subordinate. An outwardly unsuccesful life then? Yes, if one looks only at the surface, but if one looks below, there is a reservoir of spiritual strength which served as inspiration for thousands of Poles in a hopeless situation, at the mercy of forces they could not control. This spiritual strength and undaunted vision for the future of Poland made Dąbrowski an outstanding leader and allowed him to stand even above the vicious campaign of libel and slander brought against him by other émigré Poles in Paris, a campaign which nevertheless came close to breaking him.

In the seven chapters of this work Dąbrowski and his fate—certainly not his entire life—are used as the centre for an illumination of the events outside and inside Poland during a period of approximately eighteen years (1795-1813). What is new in this account of the fate of the Polish Legions in Italy is the presentation of Dąbrowski as a man who saw clearly that the freedom of Poland would have to be regained more by the pen than by the sword, and therefore made available to the officers and simple soldiers under his command every opportunity to learn and to deepen their knowledge of culture and science.

The amount of material on these two hundred pages of *Pogrobowcy* is great, and a seemingly endless procession of names of military men and intellectuals passes before the reader's eyes: Godebski, Wybicki,

Chadzkiewicz, Kossecki, Dmochowski, Szaniawski, Hoene-Wroński, to mention only a few and only those who left their names in the history of Polish intellectual life after they returned from the military campaigns in Italy. The list of generals and diplomats, Polish and foreign, is even longer. Berent is not telling a story, however, in the narrow sense. He is presenting a panorama of the times following chronologically the fate of the Polish Legions in Italy through the period of their return to Poland and their participation in the fight against the partitioning powers in Napoleon's armies. On the surface this participation in someone else's battles brought no benefits to Poland. Indeed, Napoleon played the Polish card cynically and the Polish armies were decimated in his campaigns in San Domingo, Spain and Russia. Dąbrowski experienced this cynical treatment twice personally when Napoleon passed him over and appointed others to the position of general-en-chef.

These observations with regard to the Polish cause and Dąbrowski's personal fate do not touch the deeper strata, however, and it is these deeper strata of national life which Berent wants to explore. He is intent on showing that it is not the surface failures and successes which are responsible for the course of history. Dąbrowski needed no monument for his role as a general in the military campaigns in Italy, but he deserved a monument for his foresight and vision in making use of the cultural opportunities for his men while they were away from their country. This would not only make their forced separation from home more tolerable but would bring fruits in the future, which it did. When these men returned to Poland in the first years of the nineteenth century, they were absorbed into the cultural stream of their country and invigorated it with the knowledge and experience gained in western Europe, in Italy and France: "All of them knew that the general had a fine understanding of the marvels of Italian art, therefore they listened to him attentively when in the presence of his generals and even of his staff officers he came upon his favourite topic, the art of the ancients, with which the goddess of armour had blessed them after all. He got excited. And when he walked through the room speaking animatedly 'in the language of Petrarch' for a change, every moment pulling up his constantly slipping baggy trousers, and when he switched from Italian to German in order finally to quote Schiller, at those times his generals stopped and wondered, his colonels were surely brought to laughter, but his officers in the simplicity of their hearts were carried away and stirred until their young eyes caught fire:—This is the Polish Athens . . . !" [336] Such moments are designed to reveal the type of man Dąbrowski was. Or, take this sequel to the above scene: "The following day he became even more rough and short in the service as if he regretted his performance. Yet, he could not forget the expression of those young eyes nor get rid of the thought that while Poland had been subdued she had given

---

[336] *Nurt*, p. 119.

into his hands this flower of her young people, trained in the most thorough fashion in the revived schools of the Commission of Education, by this time already suppressed by the invaders. . . . 'I shall try nevertheless—he proclaimed in the order of the day—that this Institute might be the least burdensome for its students and maximally useful.' And he took along this Institute of his on his campaigns through bloody battles and industrious 'days of rest'; this Institute which indeed was not composed of scholars but of young people with 'a heart of kindness' and an even greater fervour for knowledge." [337]

Berent has made prudent use of his sources, first of all of Dąbrowski's *Pamiętnik wojskowy legionów polskich* (Military Memoir of the Polish Legions) combined with diplomatic documents of the period such as the reports of the French ambassador at the Prussian court at Berlin and other historical accounts. In his descriptions he made use of historical sources adding only here and there touches of his own imagination for emphasis and visual effect. A fine example of the judicious combination of a historical account with imaginative embellishment is the description of Suvorov's entry into Milan at Easter 1799 after the battle of Cassano, brilliant in its subtle irony of the Russian ability to display both power and piety. The knout and the cross are the symbols of this combination:

> On the very day of Easter Suvorov made his triumphal entry into Milan. He rode in on a white horse, white himself in some sort of linen trousers not reaching down to his bare knees. When he stopped before the huge edifice of the Cathedral, which indeed had been built of white stone, when the whole city of one hundred churches began to ring with thousands of bells in honour of his victory, his squinting glance suddenly came to life with a flash of Russianism—'Christ has risen!'—he shouted to the people with delight and began to send down kisses from his horse as is customary in Russia on that day. Breaking their tongues in their mouths the Italians, who had clearly been taught, ingratiatingly answered these kisses by saying: 'He has risen indeed!' Meanwhile from one arm there hung literally on a strap a knout while the other arm raised towards the doors of the Cathedral, where at this moment a *Te Deum* was being sung in his honour, blessed the West with the threefold sign of the Eastern cross.[338]

The description of this "white Suvorov" with his kisses and his knout has the semblance more of an evil ghost than of a benevolent conqueror.

It has been said that the tenor of *Pogrobowcy* is not pessimistic, on the contrary, it breathes an air of hope and promise: "Staszic honoured in him [Dąbrowski] a man of *amazing fortitude*, who as the first after the

---

[337] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

[338] *Ibid.*, p. 205. *Nurt* and the other biographical works of Berent can be translated into English without doing offence to the style of Berent's original.

partitions *started the acts of the restoration of the Polish people*, himself not only the *chief initiator* of this restoration but a writer as well." [339]

In terms of this hope and promise *Pogrobowcy* and the entire *Nurt* stands in contrast to Żeromski's *Popioły* (Ashes, 1904). Żeromski had dwelt on the tragic, discordant notes in the Legions' history. Basically, he approved his heroes' urge to join the army and to fight for the restoration of Poland's independence. On the other hand, he also shows the dilemma of these young Poles (Rafał and Cedro) whom Napoleon was using to fight his battles in Spain, San Domingo and Russia. This dilemma had to be felt with sharp pain by those who realized that while fighting to regain their own freedom they were helping to suppress the freedom of others in the service of a dictator. The image of Napoleon was tarnished in *Popioły* as it was in *Nurt*. But whereas *Popioły* focused on the tragic elements in everyday life, the cruelty and barbarism of war, *Nurt* showed the beneficial aspects of these years of wandering in Western Europe by the Polish divisions. The scope of *Popioły* is, of course, much greater, its psychological penetration deeper, its lyricism in the description of nature and man's union with it masterful, yet its basic note is bitter, bitter as the harvest which Poland reaped from the Napoleonic wars. *Popioły* is beautiful in its poetic prose and the vividness of individual scenes, *Nurt* is a highly accomplished work because of its enlightened vision and its statement of national values.

IV

Diogenes w kontuszu (A Diogenes in Native Garb) with the subtitle "Opowieść o narodzinach literatów polskich" (On the Origin of Polish Litterateurs) and *Zabawy przyjemne i pożyteczne* (Pleasant and Useful Amusements), described in the subheading as "Opowieść z zarania inteligencji krajowej" (On the Early Days of the National Intelligentsia), were published as part of the *Collected Works* in 1937. Just as in *Nurt* the structure of these works is biographical, the focus, however, is the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere of the times.

The hero of *Diogenes w kontuszu* is Franciszek Salezy Jezierski (1740-1791), a publicist, author of political pamphlets and writer of tales. Trained in the Piarist school in Łuków, he tried himself in a number of professions (law, military, church) before taking a position with the Commission of National Education in 1781. His prominence in Polish history of those days is due to his writing activity in the "Kuźnica Kołłątajowska" (The Kołłątaj Smithy) between 1788-1791. Those were years of feverish political activity leading up to the Constitution of May 3, 1791,

---

[339] *Ibid.*, p. 291.

and it is this period on which the author has thrown his searchlight. By using Jezierski's diary as source material, now quoting and then again commenting on it, the author tries to reveal the personality and the achievement of Jezierski. Offspring of the minor szlachta from the Polesie area of eastern Poland ("there was perhaps in Poland no other area which was equally derided in innumerable proverbs and sayings" [340]), Jezierski acquired a sense of social justice, an understanding for the role of the cities and for the non-szlachta social groups, "for he saw in them the only force in Poland capable of saving the entire nation from slavery." The author makes use of frequent shifts and flashbacks to Jezierski's young years, the political agitation of the "Kołłątaj Smithy," excerpts from Jezierski's writings, glimpses into the life style of the magnates, notes of events in the social and public life of the capital such as the performance of Beaumarchais's "Le Nozze di Figaro"; and finally he gives a detailed presentation of Dekert's (the mayor of Warsaw) mission to the Polish Sejm at the head of a delegation of the union of Polish cities.

The looseness of form corresponds to Berent's concept of writing of these biographical tales. A tight structure would have destroyed the possibility of presenting such a diversity of material, of what he considered the "*bios* of history versus the *logos*: "I am concerned with the *living* passions of those times and of the people who were active *then*." [341] The atmosphere was obviously tense in view of the events of the French revolution whose echo was heard in Warsaw as well as everywhere else. Dekert, who had presented the cause of the Polish cities to the Sejm, did not survive the physical exertion of those days, nor could Jezierski's health stand up to the pressures and demands of the period. He died before the promulgation of the Constitution of the Third of May in early 1791, confident that he had served a good mission. His life had been inspired by high ideals for the renewal of Poland ("I see the splendour of life of a great gentleman in the fact that he shows me in his palace a treasure of Polish antiquities, a picture gallery or a library, or a study with a collection of objects from natural history"),[342] and his last words were an expression of gratitude to his youth, "that time in my life which once was so pleasant, and as a testimony to which I would like to have the flowers on my grave serve as a decoration to beauty and youth." [343] This "Polish Diogenes"—the name was coined by a contemporary (Jezierski's room—"a broad and well laid out barrell of Diogenes")—is presented with warmth and with great appeal for his idealism and simplicity.

---

[340] Berent, *Diogenes w kontuszu* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1958), p. 8.

[341] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[342] *Ibid.*, p. 88.

[343] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

The last thirty pages of this biographical tale are a summary of the posthumous fate of his writings, and a summary of the significance of his thought in the following years. Future events showed that this "Diogenes in Native Garb" had a wide audience in his home country. The simplicity of his life style and the sharp polemical form of his writing are shown against the background of the vibrant intellectual atmosphere of those years: the translation into Polish of the works of Chamfort and La Bruyère, Kołłątaj's eulogy one year after Jezierski's death, the King's hatred of this entire group of liberal thinkers and agitators. When the catastrophe that had been standing in the wings finally broke in upon the country, the King and his entourage clearly placed the blame for the Warsaw disorder and the foreign intervention on "Jezierski *e tutti quanti*".[344]

The title, *Zabawy przyjemne i pożyteczne* (Pleasant and Useful Amusements), was borrowed by Berent from a literary periodical that existed for seven years (1770-1777) under Stanisław August. His hero is the young intellectual Frederick Schultz, offspring of a family of rich bankers from Gdańsk, living in Paris after 1795: "That youth coming from the most persevering banners of Dąbrowski deliberately sought the renewal of the spirit of the Polish community, with which the leader of the Legions had entrusted them. These last errant knights of Europe, transformed into wandering intellectuals turned this extinguished flame for action into a new inspiration 'for the people': into enthusiasm for work." [345] Deprived of financial support, Frederick Schultz, a man of great intellectual acumen, died in poverty and despair in Frankfurt.

Again a parade of many names, shifting scenes, changes of places from Western Europe to Warsaw, quotations from the sources and the author's observations, all the while keeping in the centre of attention the intellectual contributions of these burghers, Germans and Jews, Schultzes and Lachowickis. They were the spiritual forerunners of those Polish intellectuals who after the destruction even of the Kingdom of Poland in 1831, preserved the Polish intellectual heritage abroad: "Who would be the last guard of the ever-burning fire of Dąbrowski, of the Kościuszko Light of society? . . . Not one single class, but the *national intelligentsia* drawn from all classes and dispersed among them all. These were the only and the most dependable *restorers* of the Polish nation." [346]

These collections of biographical tales were well received by the critics. Zofia Starowieyska-Morstinowa summed up their significance for Poland in *Kurier Poranny* (Morning Courier):

---

[344] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

[345] Berent, "Zabawy przyjemne i pożyteczne," *Diogenes w kontuszu* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1958), p. 144.

[346] *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.

> This will to nationhood is extracted by Berent from "the futile labours" and from the testament of Dąbrowski, from the sparks of the "Smithy," from the "Pleasant and Useful Amusements," from the travels of snobs and even from the love letters of Italian women to Polish men. He shows how all these important and unimportant events lived and interacted, how as trends of the West they were transformed into a national culture. He embraces everything: victories and defeats, truth and errors, that which fills us with pride and that which does with shame, for all of this was *"bios,"* and because it was this it gave rise to what we have today—our current life. It gave rise to all that we have and is best, is most active, and which holds in its hands that most important "will to nationhood." Here precisely lies the source of the great ideological significance of Berent's work, its weight as a work of art. The work of Berent is marked from within by a mysticism of the Polish spirit, as a tree in spring by the juices flowing through it.[347]

This was high praise in aptly chosen words.

V

The same praise is due Berent's final work, *Zmierzch wodzów*[348] (The Decline of the Leaders, 1939), published just before the outbreak of World War Two. These three biographical tales on Crown Prince Constantine, the late Dąbrowski and on Niemcewicz just before the 1830 November Uprising resume the thread of discussion left off in *Nurt.* Like Żeromski's *Popioły, Nurt* had ended at the threshold of Napoleon's campaign into Russia. Here in *Zmierzch wodzów* Berent recreates the atmosphere during the years of 1813-1830. Constantine is shown very negatively as a man who was neither a genuine friend of the Poles, nor was he quite their enemy. He did not fulfil the role versus Poland that was expected of him by St. Petersburg: "This constant discord in him between the feeling of order and propriety and licence and cruelty, his continual shifts between the spirit of the east and the west made him 'one of the most curious and original people of whom history has ever told.' " These words by Mochnacki obviously sum up Berent's own opinion. Constantine instilled in the Poles something of the slyness and

---

[347] Berent, *Zmierzch wodzów,* Warsaw: Gebethner and Wolf, 1939. (Some critical voices of the preceding volumes in this trilogy are listed on the introductory pages.)

[348] This work was not republished in the 1956 edition of Berent's work, which is most regrettable. Stanisław Pigoń in "Trzy słowa o Wacławie Berencie" (Three Words on Wacław Berent), *Wiązanka historycznoliteracka,* 1969, pp. 327-342, observed that the 1956 edition sold only with difficulty and therefore the publishers decided to cancel the remaining volumes. Six volumes were produced, but the very early works of Berent were not published, nor was *Zmierzch wodzów* and, most regrettably, the projected volume of Berent's essays.

cruelty of the Russians (*wszczepił Moskala w dusze Polaków*).[349] He left a system founded on distrust, on the paid services of informers, on terror and suppression. His favourite activity was the daily review of the military garrison.

The biographical tale of Constantine served only as an introduction to a much more detailed and affectionately drawn presentation of the old Dąbrowski. Yes, he was still basically the same as he had been when a commander of the Legions in Italy: interested in the military, in reviews and drills but even more so in books. Now he would no longer recite Schiller in German, Petrarch or Ariosto in Italian but Niemcewicz in Polish. His apartment at the corner of Trębacka and Krakowskie Przedmieście was a place where young officers could still breathe Polish air (*nałykać polskości*). When he would give a reception these young officers would assemble at his apartment, and "the seeds sown in those meetings would not fall on hard ground." Dąbrowski's favourite question still was: "What are you by nature? To which destiny were you born? That's what I am interested in, and not in your opinions and beliefs." [350]

The leaders of Poland were passing on, Kościuszko in Switzerland in 1817, Dąbrowski in Poland, 1818. Only Niemcewicz was still left and unappeased in his contempt of the Russian conquerors. Yet, a new spirit had already set in, a spirit of submission and acceptance promoted by the growing influence of the movement of Free-Masonry.

The last of these tales is devoted to Niemcewicz who was the remaining "moral power," a man whom people called "man-Poland" (*człowiek-Polska*): "There were two powers in the country, physical power in the hands of Constantine at the Belveder, moral power in the hands of Niemcewicz in the city." [351] He inherited the spiritual authority left after the death of Dąbrowski. He was certainly an outstanding man, but again he was not great. He was sought out by the young talents such Słowacki, at that time the young author of *Mindowe*, but others saw in him "a careless writer": "Unaware of one single emotion as a poet he often did injustice to his subject." These interesting details mixed with the author's aperçus on the spiritual and creative connection between Niemcewicz and "the three prophets" of Romanticism, who lived abroad, assure the liveliness of this biographical tale just as of the earlier ones. Again as before we find here the same richness of facts, associations, literary allusions, reflections, quotations from original sources and contemporary memoirs, and the same rich gallery of personalities from those days.

All of this is history just as the fact that Niemcewicz declined to accept the role of head of the revolutionary government during the

---

[349] *Zmierzch wodzów*, p. 38.

[350] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[351] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

1830/31 Uprising. This decline by a man who was revered by his people as its intellectual spokesman was misunderstood by many of his contemporaries. But Niemcewicz, essentially a man of the Classicist eighteenth-century mould, never sought the role of prophet-leader of his people. The fact that people tried to force this role on him was obviously a misunderstanding and a sign that a different spirit was abroad in the nation, a spirit that looked upon the poet not only as an inspirer of his nation, but as a man of action when the hour called: "Pushed to the forefront of his generation through his popularity, 'canonized on Parnas' (as Mickiewicz told him to his face) by the idol-worshipping youth, he was eventually proclaimed in Warsaw the hope of our future and the father of our nation, this first leader of a period without a helmsman. Plato would not have proclaimed such a man the embodiment of the spirit of the Republic; and he would not have wreathed his herma on the Agora." [352]

VI

Berent, however, sees not only the historical events and gives them his own interpretation, he also tries to look beyond them. In these approximately two and a half decades of the Duchy of Warsaw and the Kingdom of Poland he saw a kind of fulfillment, the completion of an epoch. As it often happens when a writer works on a certain historical period, the events with which he meant to start causes him to ask questions about their origin and thus leads him back into earlier periods.[353] Berent had started his trilogy with the battle of Maciejowice ("Żywa Pamiątka"). From there he went on to show the fate of the Polish Legions in Italy under Dąbrowski. But the enlightened outlook on education and intellectual pursuits had to take the author back to the period of great intellectual fervour just before the Second Partition in 1792. In a sense, *Diogenes w kontuszu* reaches back to 1769, the year of Stanisław August's election to the throne and the revival of the arts in Poland. In his final work, *Zmierzch wodzów*, Berent brought this period to a close, a period of inquiry, of enlightened pursuits, essentially a period of Classicism. When the November 1830 Uprising came, this period had already passed its apex.

In the introduction to *Nurt* as well as in the three individual works Berent repeatedly returned to his idea that he was not interested in the *logos* but the *bios* of history. He asked what were the spiritual resources

---

[352] *Ibid.*, p. 136. Quotation from Prince Adam Czartoryski.

[353] Tolstoj while working on *War and Peace*, originally mapped out to show the reactions of a member of the Decembrists returning after thirty years of captivity in 1856, and entitled "All is Well that Ends Well," in the course of writing came upon the December Uprising itself and from there went back to the period that produced the intellectual situation in which the Decembrist movement could grow, viz., the Napoleonic wars.

of this period of approximately sixty years, and he answered his own question. The discussion of these works on these pages has shown the richness and diversity of intellectual pursuits in those years, the devotion to the arts.

The choice of heroes for these biographical tales is highly instructive. They carried no special halo. They were neither kings, nor magnates, but representatives of the middle szlachta. Berent, however, is not merely interested in rehabilitating the role in Polish history of such men as Karpiński, Dąbrowski, Jezierski and Niemcewicz, or such early litterateurs as Frederick Schultz, although he deliberately conducts his search in an area which was less known to his contemporaries, an area that lacked the inspiring aura of Romanticism which had nourished Polish national consciousness and national pride for so long. More than once he points to the unfair judgment and the slighting by the Romantics of the Classicist period that had just preceded it. Yes, rehabilitation of the role of the intellectuals and the role of the Legions in this period of Poland's history was one of his aims. His more important goal, however, was the pursuit of the spirit as it manifested itself from generation to generation. He had once before tried to take hold of this spirit in *Ozimina* when the Professor saw the coming and going of life as the passing of the torch from one generation to the next (*vitae lampadae traditae*). He tried to get a hold of it again in this series of biographical tales. He tried to put his searchlight into the *bios* of history, that is, into that region of human affairs which is irrational, where we see the manifestations of the spirit, but can't explain them.

We saw how Dąbrowski respected learning and culture, how he encouraged others to study, and we saw how much he loved his country and its traditions, we saw how Jezierski fought with the pen for the ideas of French Enlightenment, for a less class-oriented social order, and we saw how Karpiński and Niemcewicz served as beacons of inspiration to their countrymen. This was the *bios* of history at the heart of which stood human history. Now, finally, what was the ground of action of these men as Berent showed them, what moved them, what was the source of their inspiration, what was the destiny they tried to fulfil? This, after all, had been the question that Dąbrowski had asked of the young officers. The answer is faith, a faith in themselves, in their country, in their destiny, and essentially in God. This needed not to be stated explicitly, but it is implicit and very clear from the context of these biographical tales.

Stanisław Pigoń mentions that in the course of his work on these three collections of biographical tales Berent essentially failed to achieve the unity he had aimed for. He failed particularly in the last part, *Zmierzch wodzów*, where instead of returning to Dąbrowski and Niemcewicz he should have chosen the mighty figure of a restorer (*odnowiciel*), the figure of a Polish Pericles, Stanisław Staszic. Staszic on the whole remains in the wings just as the work of the Society of Friends is frequently referred to but provides only the background for the other

material. There is, however, one hero who dominates these biographical tales and that is the gifted human spirit in the service of Polish culture and the preservation of its heritage and by implication in the service of human culture. The definition and the artistic depiction of this human spirit, and the faith in the efficacy of its work is based on a mystical and unified vision of the world, and the presupposition of the human spirit which moves and lives in history presupposes the grounding of this world in a general spirit, in what is called God.

The positive and affirmative tenor of these three works then is the decisive step which Berent had taken from an aesthetic vision of the world, which still manifested itself in *Żywe kamienie*, to an ethical vision. Here in *Nurt*, *Diogenes* and *Zmierzch wodzów* the purpose of the work of the spirit is service, service to one's country, service to man. Here Berent achieved the famous *Or, the Equilibrium*, in Kierkegaard's well-known scheme of the *Either/Or*.

The new orientation of these three collections is also manifest in their style. Their language is simpler and more direct, the syntax less complex than that of the early Młoda Polska works. Berent's style, however, is never colloquial, it is always polished and highly literary, rich in archaisms and the use of imagery: "His language tries to define each object with precision and only occasionally does his concern with clarity of expression give way to his fondness for linguistic ornamentation." [354] This is, of course, a decisive difference to *Próchno*, *Ozimina* or *Żywe kamienie* where the ornamental expression took precedence over the simpler but more prosaic form.

Pigoń attributes the lack of popularity of Berent's work to the fact that their author was a hermit and a poet. He lived withdrawn, and his works did not easily find their way to the reader's heart. Yet, all he needed, Nietzsche had said, were a few readers (*satis sunt pauci*), and that's all Berent needed then and now. No doubt these few will find the road to Berent's work via these last of his writings the more direct and less rugged. Later they will find it easier to understand and enjoy Berent's Młoda Polska works both in terms of style and material.

---

[354] Studencki, II, p. 62.

SUMMARY

Ponad wszystkie wasze uroki,
Ty poezjo, i ty wymowo,
Jeden — wiecznie będzie wysoki:
Odpowiednie dać rzeczy słowo! [355]

Janusz Wilhelmi in the introduction to *Fachowiec*, Volume One of the *Collected Works* (1956), makes an assessment of Berent's role as an intellectual rather than as an artist in the forty-five years (1894-1939) of his creative career. He looks at the relevance of Berent's writing in terms of the manner in which his individual works address themselves to the burning intellectual questions of the day. He finds some aspects in Berent's work with which he is pleased, others he finds unacceptable. Then he raises and answers the question of the writer's responsibility towards society and in this framework finds *Ozimina* and *Diogenes w kontuszu* Berent's most successful works. In setting forth his viewpoint Wilhelmi is not afraid of strong words: "In spite of that we are probably not exaggerating when we say that among all the books which the revolution gave Poland, *Ozimina* is probably that work which goes deepest and therefore precisely stirs up most . . . and uncovers the deceit and falsehood, the social mannerisms and the self-preserving fear of that class doomed to extinction." [356] On *Diogenes w kontuszu* he says that "here we find what is most permanent and genuine in the position of Berent: a view of the responsibilities and goals of literary creation. Not as an aloof intellectual but as a man of social action, such is the characterization of the writer by Berent in *Diogenes*. . . . The moral of *Diogenes* rings strongly and harshly, yet truthfully especially when translated into our contemporary language." [357]

In the context of this viewpoint of art and the rôle of the artist in society Wilhelmi does not take well to the ambiguity of theme in *Fachowiec* and *Próchno*, or the even more aloof *Żywe kamienie*. He also

---

[355] C. K. Norwid, *Wiersze wybrane* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1953), p. 59. Translation:
Above all thy attractions,
Thou poetry and thou eloquence,
There is one that will be eternally high:
To find for an object the suitable word!

[356] Janusz Wilhelmi, Introduction, *Fachowiec* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1956), p. 25.

[357] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

disagrees with Berent's representation of the Enlightenment view of learning and culture which are presented in *Nurt in* terms of a force of passive resistance which preserved Poland's spiritual heritage. Other recent critics [358] in Poland regrettably have viewed Berent's artistic achievement through a similarly biased spectrum, which may be one reason as Pigoń has observed for the small readership which Berent enjoys today: "It has become clear that this writer today does not have a broad circle of readers who are fond of him. Furthermore, there is no reason to conceal the fact that our critics have not prepared the way to him in the proper fashion." [359]

Undeniably, all human beings have their prejudices and biases which Francis Bacon (1561-1626) described in his *Novum Organum* (1620), and it is unlikely that any agreement will be attained on how to interpret a work of art: from a Formalist, historical, sociological or Marxist point of view. In the present study a combination of the Formalist and historical method was used with a deliberate attempt to arrive at an understanding of the ideas of Berent in terms of the idealistic world view which we perceive in his work.

First, however, in judging a writer's work one should assess him in terms of his craftsmanship as an artist. This was done in our detailed analysis of each work, in the illumination of the scenic method of presentation, the poetic and lyrical approach to reality built on suggestion rather than on precise identification, on mythological vision rather than on the imitation in art of the scientific method of analysis. Berent's

---

[358] Garbaczowska in "Wacław Berent wobec zagadnienia rewolucji (Konspekt referatu) — Sesja naukowa IBL'u PAN zorganizowana ku uczczeniu 50 rocznicy Wielkiej Rewolucji Październikowej, Warszawa 11-13 stycznia 1968" (Wacław Berent and the Problem of the Revolution. Learned Session of the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Great October Revolution, Warsaw, January 11-13, 1968) stresses the connection between Berent's essay "Idea w ruchu rewolucyjnym" and his novel "*Ozimina*, "so full of expression and perhaps his most splendid work."

Lech Budrecki, whose studies are available in typescript at the Library of the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences has described Berent as "a not very rewarding subject for research, mainly because of the legend which the 'bourgeois' scholars of the inter-war period have built around him (. . . nie stanowi najwdzięczniejszego przedmiotu badań, a to głównie ze względu na opór, jaki próbom analizy stawiają legendy powijające postać pisarza, ukute przez burżuazyjnych naukowców.) The incongruousness of such a critical approach which sets a value on an artistic work because of its ideological orientation is excellently illustrated in Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki's essay "Na marginesach 'Oziminy'" (Marginal Notes on *Ozimina*), *Museion* (1911), No. 4, 105-121, No. 5, 59-76; No. 6, 58-75: "Therefore, the history of literature will not pass over *Ozimina* with indifference; it will weigh its mistakes, it will take note of its spirit and then it will give its judgment: This is a work of high stature and high elevation, yet full of errors." (See Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, *Ludzie i dzieła* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1967), p. 131.)

[359] Stanisław Pigoń, "Trzy słowa o Wacławie Berencie," *Wiązanka historycznoliteracka* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1969), p. 337.

most obvious and striking literary device is his use of language, rich in nuances, archaic, interlaced with poetry, itself often built on rhythmical principle. Finally, Berent's language is symbolic. Everyone of his works starting with *Próchno* and closing with *Zmierzch wodzów* is symbolic even though they reach, of course, beyond the period which we call Symbolism *sensu stricto.* What is the significance of these symbols: "It is the function of symbols to open up levels of being and levels of the soul which symbols alone can open. This is true of all realms in which symbols appear. As an example let us look at artistic symbolism. . . . Symbols create levels of reality which remain hidden in our ordinary encounter with reality. In relation to these levels they are symbolic even if they try to be as naturalistic as possible. The tree in a picture by Ruysdael is symbolic for treehood, but it is not the beautiful copy of a possibly real tree. It is the expression of a level of experience which may be provoked by an actual tree. But the picture does not depict the actual tree. It transforms it into a symbol." [360]

"Rotten Wood" stands for the artist at the turn of the century, "Winter Wheat" for the entire Polish society in the first decade of our century representing the good seed and the bad, that which will go up in the spring and that which will die, the "Living Stones" the artists and *free* inquirers of all ages, "Current" the intellectual heritage in the suppressed Polish nation; and even "Diogenes in Native Garb" reaches beyond the presentation in the strict sense of a historical figure to the suggestion of the eternal value of a free and critical mind like that of the Diogenes of Greek antiquity of the fifth century B.C. Rather than putting our stress on the pursuit of practical gains by Jezierski, should we not point out the importance of his work in terms of the power of the pen in the hands of a man determined to express his views in *freedom* and with the *voice of conscience?* "The Decline of the Leaders" again is symbolic as an indication of the end of an epoch, of an enlightened and highly cultured elite. There is, of course, a nationalistic element in this final trilogy which addresses itself to the cultural achievements of Poland during its period of Classicism, but it is far removed from the Messianic posture which was to arise in Poland with Romanticism and which Berent would reject. A reflection of this Messianic posture was noticeable in the last years before World War Two and must have filled Berent with apprehension for the future of his country.

Now, finally, did Berent as a writer and as a thinking man stand *au-dessus de la mêlée?* Was his character marked by Horace's (*Odes,* III, 1, 1) famous *Odi profanum vulgus?* Wilhelmi introduces this question in terms of the concept of the *clerk* in its archaic usage as a learned man, a scholar or artist. What is their responsibility towards society? Should they enter the fray of politics or preserve their splendid isolation

---

[360] Paul Tillich, "The Word of God," Ruth Nanda Anshen, ed., *Language: An Enquiry into its Meaning and Function* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 132.

in order to be better able to reflect on the eternal questions and devote their talents to the creation of new values? This was a question raised with great timeliness by Julien Benda (1867-1956) in *La Trahison des clercs* (1927). He looked with great apprehension at the intellectuals who had given up their proper role as guardians of conscience and taken up partisan politics. We need not wonder that Wilhelmi's judgment went against Benda. He sees the role of the intellectual in terms of "the man of social action" as he saw Franciszek Jezierski, the Polish Diogenes. Since this is a question of human conscience there cannot be a definite answer either way, and in a sense it has already been answered in Chapter Two (The Essay) although somewhat differently from the way Wilhelmi would have answered it.

Berent, of course, felt the "responsibility of the intellect" (Die Verantwortung des Geistes). His essays testify to this as well as his entire work. His work, however, transcends the question of the relationship between intellectual concepts and their application to social causes. He inquires into the existential question of how we should live and justify it afterward (*Fachowiec*), the relationship between art and life (*Próchno*) and the role of the spiritual ferment of the artist (*Żywe kamienie).* In his Młoda Polska works his emphasis is on the side of the aesthetic (*Próchno, Żywe kamienie*), life seeking its fulfilment in creativity, in beauty. In *Ozimina* he suggests a spiritual continuity based on a cultural tradition which renews itself from generation to generation. All of these works end in a mystical vision of the world. Conceived on the basis of an aesthetic world view, they are in search of the eternal, of what Renouvier called "a transcendant truth": "Le monde souffre du manque de foi en une vérité transcendante."

In his last trilogy Berent had found the ethical approach to life, a life whose value rested in the quiet study of the culture of the past, its preservation and increase. Quiet study, research, the obscure life in the service of one's country became a source of emulation for him.

It would be incorrect to say that Berent occupied a commanding stature among his contemporaries, especially during the years between the two world wars. He did not have the same position in Poland as Thomas Mann did in Germany before 1933, Valéry in France or Unamuno in Spain. But in his quiet and withdrawn way he reflected on and expressed in writing fundamental questions on art, the intellect, the spiritual values of a nation just as his great contemporaries in their respective countries. He was too shy a man to become the major spokesman on the intellectual scene of his own country, but his voice and his message, driven by conscience, were heard in Poland. In this sense he belongs to the family of great European minds of the first half of our century.

Life as a chain of culture, of the civilizing beautiful sheen over the base of vulgarity and the abyss of nothingness—this became his ideal and his source of faith. He was a man who possessed both a sense of mysticism and a sense of the tragedy of life. His works abound with men who

are failures in the ordinary sense, and yet were restored by history to triumph. He was a rationalist, and at the same time an idealist. The ambiguity of life's ultimate questions is apparent in his work. There was, however, one feature of existence to which his being responded with absolute affirmation, that is the affirmation of the inquiring mind: "Without the desire to see there is no seeing; in a great materialization of life and of thought there is no believing in the things of the spirit." [361] He was a humanist of the highest and finest sort, with a faith in art and culture, and it is in this context that he will continue to be recognized as an important writer of his period: "Ceux qui pour cette étude montrent le plus de goût et de dispositions sont aussi les plus dignes d'être appelés *humanissimi.* Car, seul entre tous les êtres, l'homme peut s'adonner à la culture de cette étude qui pour cela a été appelée *humanitas.*" [362]

---

[361] Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life* (New York: Dover Publication, 1954), p. 113.

[362] Julien Benda, *La Trahison des clercs* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1927), p. 191. (Note I from Aulu-Gelle, *Nuits attiques*, Livre XIII, xvi.)

NECROLOGIA

THE LATE GENERAL MARIAN KUKIEL

Marian Kukiel, professor and general, was born in Dąbrowa Tarnowska on May 15th 1885. In 1909 he took his doctorate of philosophy at the University of Lwów on the strength of a thesis entitled: "The Expeditions of General Denisko" (from Moldavia to Bukowina in 1794 and 1797). He followed this up by a further study of the same period: "Attempts at Insurrection after the Third Partition of Poland" (i.e. after 1795). Ever since 1908 and up until 1914, Marian Kukiel belonged to the leadership of the Polish insurrectionist movement directed against Tsarist Russia. At the same time he was the star pupil of professor Szymon Askenazy of Lwów University (1867-1935), the first man in Poland to undertake a fundamental and critical reappraisal of post-partition history, with particular reference to considerations of Polish statehood and to the connection between the country's political life and her cultural evolution.

A sizeable group of professor Askenazy's pupils, following up his admiration for the personality within the histories of nations, and particularly for Napoleon's leadership, turned to the hitherto neglected subject of Polish military history. The leading light of this group was Marian Kukiel, whose approach to the problem, though historically sound, was characterized by an ever growing military experience and steeped in the tradition of the insurrections. Kukiel had by this time chosen military history, in its widest sense, as the main field for his historical writing.

The period which attracted the students grouped round Askenazy most was that which saw the more active segments of the Polish nation siding with the French Revolution and, through their contribution to the Napoleonic wars, bringing about the resurrection of a part of the former Polish Republic in the shape of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. The young Kukiel's share in these studies came out in the form of a general review of the whole subject: "Polish military achievements during the Napoleonic wars", first published in 1912. Fifteen years later, as a general, he was to give a compendium on the subject to the pupils of the Higher Military Academy entitled: "The Napoleonic Wars", a synthesis of the major military activities of the period. His ability to generalize in this way again reaffirmed itself through his textbook, universalized in military schools, entitled "An outline of Polish military history", which ran into five editions between 1921 and 1949, thereby largely shaping the outlooks of at least two generations of Polish officers. However, it was not until 1937 that he rounded off this series of studies, with his very fine two-volume work entitled "The Campaign of 1812". In this, he undertook to carry through professor Askenazy's original intention of presenting the Polish question in its entirety against the background of the Grande Armée's Anabasis through the territory of the former Polish Republic. This work was accompanied by a series of minor supporting

studies, such as "Polish Cavalry at Moscow 1812" (1925) and "Napoleon's movement on Smolensk" (1927), and a couple of articles in periodicals, such as "The question of independence in the years 1795-1815" (1930) and "Influence de la tradition et de la révolution sur les armées de l'époque Napoléonienne" (1938).

However, long before Kukiel's interest in the Napoleonic era had led him on to the territorial problems of Eastern Europe, the subject had been brought up by the long-awaited Great War and by the disintegration of the Russian Empire. The young Kukiel had always been an advocate of the idea of casting a Polish military contribution on to the scales of war, and faced by events so propitious to the Polish cause, he joined the Polish Legions. He took an active part between 1914 and 1918 in their fighting on the side of Austria-Hungary, at the same time probing with his writings the various political possibilities of solving the Polish question through this alignment.

At the moment of collapse of the Central Powers in November 1918, he had attained the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and commanded a section of military schools. In the ensuing Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1920 he opted for front-line service, showing great ability in commanding an infantry brigade and making proof of outstanding determination.

Soon after the conclusion of hostilities in October 1920, he was appointed head of the Historical Department, a post which he filled, with a two-year gap until the coup d'état of May 1926. During this period, he wrote several historical studies of the fighting in the summer of 1920, including "The Battle of Wołoczyska" and "Raid of the Red Cossacks on Stryj." At the same time he embarked on what was to be a collective work covering the whole of the war. He himself completed two chapters for this: "The Preliminary Order for the Battle of Warsaw," and "An Analysis of the Battle of Warsaw." Aside from the genuine criticism with which these met, they provoked what was to become a personal campaign to discredit their author, which placed him under great emotional strain. The coincidence of these disappointments in his historical work with the events of May 1926 prompted him to resign from active service and, two years later, to retire completely.

After leaving the ranks of the army, General Kukiel became a lecturer in modern and military history at the Jagiellonian University, where he conducted a series of study lectures and a general seminar between 1927 and 1939. At the same time he held the post of director of the Czartoryski Museum and Library in Cracow. His writings during this period of his life included a fundamental study of the tactical course of Kościuszko's last battle at Maciejowice on 10th October 1794, and articles on the Polish military effort during the Vienna Campaign of 1683, on the national and social composition of the Crown Troops during Sobieski's reign and on the attempts at raising the technical level of the army under the Saxon Kings. The afore-mentioned work on the 1812 campaign was in some measure the culmination of this stage in his work. In recognition of these activities, the General was in 1932 elected to the

Polish Academy of Sciences and Letters as an associate member, and became a full member five years later.

On 1st September 1939, with the outbreak of war, Kukiel volunteered for active service, but in view of the rapid developments he was only able to play a minor role, in the defence of Lwów. In October of the same year, he made his way to France, where he was appointed vice-minister for the newly-recreated armed forces. He administered this department until the capitulation of France and the evacuation of the last units on 25th June 1940, after which he arrived in England and on 2nd August took command of the 1st Polish Corps, which he held for the next two years. From 24th September 1942 until 10th February 1949, he was Minister of Defence in the successive governments of General Sikorski, Mr. Mikołajczyk, Mr. Arciszewski and General Bór-Komorowski.

His historical activity during this period was obviously limited, and consisted of minor papers in periodicals, drawing parallels between current events and those of the Napoleonic wars, and a chapter for the collective Cambridge History of Poland (1941), on the relation between Kościuszko's insurrection and the Third Partition of Poland.

After retiring from the government, Kukiel concentrated exclusively on setting up the Polish Historical Society, of which he was president for 25 years, the General Sikorski Historical Institute, of which he was president for sixteen years, and on holding down the chair of Modern History at the Polish University in Exile for 23 years, and this involved him in the efforts of the Polish Society of Arts and Sciences in Exile to co-ordinate all the different currents of emigré academic activity.

During these twenty-five years, he helped to orientate the studies of his group of collaborators on to those events of the last century-and-a-half which had exerted a formative influence over the national awareness of the Polish people. He synthesized Poland's relations with France, Russia and Belgium during the November Insurrection of 1830 into two monographs: "La Révolution de 1830 et la Pologne" (1953), and "Notes and studies on the genesis of the November Insurrection" (1958). He followed these up by probing the principal dilemma of the Great Emigration; the choice between insurrection, partisan action and revolution as the surest road to national independence. Between 1948 and 1952, Kukiel delved into this subject, producing articles such as: "Concepts of a national uprising before 1848", and "Problèmes des guerres d'insurrection au XIXe siècle." To this category one can add Kukiel's work on Prince Adam Czartoryski, one-time Foreign Minister of Tsar Alexander I, later President of the National Government during the Insurrection of 1830, and finally, in exile, champion of the idea of intervention by the Western Powers on behalf of Poland's freedom and in defence of the Treaties of 1815. This work appeared under the title of "Prince Adam" in Polish in 1950, and five years later in English, as "Czartoryski and European Unity," But the crowning of this whole course of study came in the form of the monumental "History of Poland since the Partitions"

(1795-1921). This was published in 1961 and was preceded by a course of "Lectures on the History of Poland . . ." which covered the same period.

Finally, General Kukiel offered a broad panorama of more recent events with his outline "General Sikorski, Statesman and Soldier" (1970). Dogged by the unavailability of pre-1939 archival sources, the author was obliged to fall back on his own extremely rich reminiscences and those of his old companions. Hence the narrative character of the events portrayed, and also the stress laid on the activities of this personality during the Second World War. This lends the work not only a certain lively quality, authenticity and tight relation to current events, but also a subjective outlook and a very constitutive appraisal of the man.

The sum of General Kukiel's activities was nowhere more apparent than in the "Historical Papers" ("Teki Historyczne"), a series edited by him running to sixteen volumes. Here one finds a treasury of articles, reviews and reports written by him, not included in the present bibliography of his works.

He died on 15th August 1973, and his ashes were placed in the tomb of his late wife Stanislawa in Kensal Green Cemetery in London.

General Kukiel's whole life was spent in the service of the Polish Republic, and his personal historical work contributed to her heritage in three ways, by helping to reshape the upbringing of her youth since 1918 along the lines of ancient Polish military tradition, by placing Polish military conceptions in their correct European context, and by constantly stressing the need to place the principle of Poland's political sovereignty above all other considerations, whether territorial, social or economic, affecting the resurrection of the state. His spirit will live on in the memory of his countrymen and of friends of Poland.

Stanisław Biegański.

ELEMENTA AD FONTIUM EDITIONES (cont.)

Vol. VIII — *Documenta Polonica ex Archivo Generali Hispaniae in Simancas,* I pars. Ed. V. MEYSZTOWICZ, pp. X+214, 157 doc. (A.D. 1514-1576, 1720-1791) 7 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. 1963.

Vol. IX — *Res Polonicae ex Archivo Regni Daniae,* I pars. Coll. L. KOCZY, pp. XII+184, 98 doc. (A.D. 1526-1572) 8 tab. Ind. nom. propr. 1964.

Vol. X — *Repertorium Rerum Polonicarum ex Archivo Orsini in Archivo Capitolino,* III pars. Coll. W. WYHOWSKA - DE ANDREIS, pp. XVI+343, 1399 doc. (A.D. 1568-1676) 12 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. 1964.

Vol. XI — *Documenta Polonica ex Archivo Generali Hispaniae in Simancas,* II pars. Ed. V. MEYSZTOWICZ, pp. VIII+287, 214 doc. (A.D. 1567-1578) 7 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. 1964).

Vol. XII — *Documenta Polonica ex Archivo Generali Hispaniae in Simancas,* III pars. Ed. V. MEYSZTOWICZ, pp. V+291, 163 doc. (A.D. 1571-1576), 5 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron., 1964.

Vol. XIII — *Res Polonicae ex Archivo Musei Britannici,* I pars. Ed. C. H. TALBOT, pp. XVI+175 (A.D. 1598), 2 tab. Ind. nom. propr. 1965.

Vol. XIV — *Collectanea ex rebus Polonicis Archivi Orsini in Archivo Capitolino Romae,* I pars. Ed. W. WYHOWSKA - DE ANDREIS, pp. VI+234, 177 doc. (A.D. 1575-1668), 4 tab. Ind. nom. propr. 1965.

Vol. XV — *Documenta Polonica ex Archivo Generali Hispaniae in Simancas,* IV pars. Ed. V. MEYSZTOWICZ, pp. VI+340, 211 doc. (A.D. 1576-1586), 5 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. 1966.

Vol. XVI — *Documenta Polonica ex Archivo Generali Hispaniae in Simancas,* V pars. Ed. V. MEYSZTOWICZ, pp. VII+336, 227 doc. (A.D. 1587-1589), 5 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. 1966.

Vol. XVII — *Res Polonicae ex Archivo Musei Britannici,* II pars. Ed. C. H. TALBOT, pp. VII+311, 169 doc. (A.D. 1411-1616), 2 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. 1967.

Vol. XVIII — *Collectanea ex rebus Polonicis Archivi Orsini in Archivo Capitolino,* II pars. Ed. W. WYHOWSKA DE ANDREIS, pp. VIII+256, 140 doc. (A.D. 1669-1676), 4 tab. Ind. nom. propr. 1968.

Vol. XIX — *Documenta Polonica ex Archivo Generali Hispaniae in Simancas,* VI pars. Ed. V. MEYSZTOWICZ, pp. VIII+429, 121 doc. (A.D. 1556-1620), 4 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. 1968.

Vol. XX — *Res Polonicae ex Archivo Regni Daniae,* II pars. Ed. C. LANCKORONSKA et G. STEEN JENSEN, 266 doc. (A.D. 1577-1696), 4 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. 1969.

Vol. XXI — *Documenta Polonica ex archivo Generali Hispaniae in Simancas,* VII pars. Ed. V. MEYSZTOWICZ, 187 doc. (A.D. 1491-1696) 2 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. pp. VIII+262, 1970.

Vol. XXII — *Documenta Polonica ex Archivo Parmensi,* I pars. Ed. V. MEYSZTOWICZ et W. WYHOWSKA DE ANDREIS, doc. 183 (A.D. 1535-1588) pp. VIII+210, 2 tab. 1970.

Vol. XXIII — A. *Documenta Polonica ex Archivo Parmensi,* II pars. Doc. NN. 184-319 (A.D. 1598-1772) Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. B. *Documenta Polonica ex Archivo Capitulari in Brisighella.* 63 doc. (A.D. 1578-1588) Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. Ed. V. MEYSZTOWICZ et W. WYHOWSKA DE ANDREIS, p. 297, 2 tab. 1970.

Vol. XXIV — *Res Polonicae ex Archivo Regni Daniae,* III pars. Ed. C. LANCKOROŃSKA et G. STEEN JENSEN, 152 doc. (A.D. 1419-1564) pp. VIII+301, 4 tab. 1971.

Vol. XXV — *Res Polonicae ex Archivo Regni Daniae,* IV pars. Ed. C. LANCKOROŃSKA et G. STEEN JENSEN 78 doc. (A.D. 1563-1572) 6 tab. Ind. nom, propr., ind. chron. pp. VIII+248, 1971.

Vol. XXVI — *Res Polonicae ex Archivo Mediceo Florentino,* I pars. Ed. V. MEYSZTOWICZ et WANDA WYHOWSKA DE ANDREIS, 145 doc. (A.D. 1559-1589), 4 tab., pp. VIII+320, 1972.

Vol. XXVII — *Res Polonicae ex Archivo Mediceo Florentino,* II pars. Ed. V. MEYSZTOWICZ et WANDA WYHOWSKA DE ANDREIS, 262 doc. (A.D. 1589-1612), pp. VIII+377, 1972.

Vol. XXVIII — *Res Polonicae ex Archivo Mediceo Florentino,* III pars. Ed. V. MEYSZTOWICZ et WANDA WYHOWSKA DE ANDREIS, 205 doc. (A.D. 1613-1626), 4 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron., pp. VIII+376, 1972.

Vol. XXIX — *Res Polonicae ex Archivo Regni Daniae,* V pars. Ed. C. LANCKOROŃSKA et G. STEEN JENSEN, 139 doc. (A.D.1578-1630), 5 tab. Ind. nom. propr., ind. chron. pp. VIII+376, 1972.

Vol. XXX — *Documenta ex Archivo Regiomontano ad Poloniam spectantia,* I pars. Ed. C. LANCKOROŃSKA, 447 doc. (A.D. 1525-1548), 9 tab. Elench. epistolarum, elench. sigillorum, ind. nom. propr., pp. XII+259, 1973.

Vol. XXXI — *Documenta ex Archivo Regiomontano ad Poloniam spectantia,* II pars. Ed. C. LANCKOROŃSKA, 405 doc. (A.D. 1549-1562), 7 tab. Elench, epistolarum, ind. nom. propr., pp. VII+241, 1974

Vol. XXXII — *Documenta ex Archivo Regiomontano ad Poloniam spectantia,* III pars. Ed. C. LANCKOROŃSKA, 382 doc. (A.D. 1563-1572), 10 tab. Elench. epistolarum, ind. nom. propr., pp. I+265, 1974.

Printed and made in Great Britain by Caldra House Ltd.,
23 Coleridge Street, Hove, Sussex, BN3 5AB, England.