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[recenzja]

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Book Reviews

Comptes rendus de livres

Czesław Zgorzelski, *Liryka w pełni romantyczna. Studia i szkice o wierszach Słowackiego* (Truly Romantic Lyrical Poetry. Studies and Essays on Słowacki's Poems), Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1981, 264 pp.

Lyrical poetry of Słowacki—the poet whom a distinguished literary theoretician and comparatist, Zygmunt Łempicki, called “the most Romantic of romantics,” according to him “the most prominent place not only in Polish Romantic Movement, but in Romanticism in general”¹—has been the subject of Czesław Zgorzelski's scholarly inquiries for a long time. The book contains studies and essays written in the last three decades; it is the fruit of inspirations, experiences and reflections partly connected with the author's long didactic practice—lectures and seminars held in the Catholic University of Lublin.

Zgorzelski's methodological approach, derived from the best analytic traditions of Russian formalism and the Prague school of structuralism, ranges within the contemporary “close reading” or *Kunst der Interpretation*. While acknowledging to the full the uniqueness and singularity of a poetic text, which he deems to be his task as interpreter to reveal, he seeks—at the same time—the most effective ways of diachronic treatment of the art of literature. For the history of poetry is to Zgorzelski the history of evolution of broadly conceived artistic forms.

What is especially striking in this collection of essays and studies (differing, after all, in character and written at different

¹ Z. Łempicki, “Renesans, oświecenie, romantyzm” (Renaissance, Enlightenment, Romanticism), [in:] *Wybór pism*, ed. by H. Markiewicz, vol. 1, Warszawa 1966, pp. 184–185.

times) is uniformity and consistency of the consciously elaborated language of analysis, free from the impressional style of literary criticism, but also far from trying to impress the reader with modern terminological apparatus; a language that seems to be immune, as it were, to current fashions in literary scholarship. It is a language which allows to describe in precise and yet plain terms the organization and functions of particular strata of a lyrical work, as well as to expose its intrinsic integrational rules on which the latent meaning of the whole rests. Conceiving the poetic work as a "hierarchical system of interplay of various factors of literary discourse, dynamically interconnected – whether in harmony or in opposition" (p. 5), Zgorzelski does not conceal his cognitive modesty resulting from his belief that the deepest arcana of individual artistry are beyond definition: "even after making the most subtle, most penetrating and careful scholarly observations, there always remains the inexplicable core of mystery, the very 'heart of darkness' (p. 45).

Lucid arrangement of the book respects the chronology of the poem discussed. Synthetic studies showing the mechanism and evolution of Słowacki's poetic art from the "observation distance" are preceded by essays that apply the method of "analytic close-ups"; generalizations always develop from thorough-going empirical ascertainment. The author succeeded in presenting a clear and convincing outline of three stages of Słowacki's development as a lyrical poet, as well as in indicating the internal dynamics and rich variety of the poet's creative achievements. Zgorzelski's work, although not meant as a monograph, points out the regularities of the poet's evolution and introduces typological distinctions that can be applied to all lyrical writings of Słowacki.

In the opening study "Liryka młodzieńcza" (Juvenile Lyrical Poetry) the author characterizes Słowacki's early (till 1835) ventures at rhyming—the stage of the poet's searching for his own expression, starting with conventional attempts that abound in compositional inconsistencies and contradictory attitudes and that draw mainly upon sentimentalism (e.g. elegiac stylizations in the passive, doleful, contemplative mood), but also upon Classicism (as in the enthusiastic rhetoric of the poems of the November Uprising of 1830), and resulting in preliminary crystallization of both the Romantic attitude

(pessimistic view on the poet's epoch, fatalistic conception of human fate, the antinomy: man—the world) and its characteristic ways of suggesting lyrical meanings (the artistic function of words and poetic vision in the poems "Paryż"—Paris, "Do M. Rola-Skibickiego"—To M. Rola-Skibicki, "Duma o Waławie Rzewuskim"—Elegy on Waław Rzewuski).

Part II ("Zbliżenia analityczne"—Analytic Close-ups) brings interpretations of "Rozłączenie" (Separation), Hymn "Smutno mi, Boże!" (I feel sad, God!), the cycle of epistles from Egypt ("Listy poetyckie z Egiptu") and the poem "Na sprowadzenie prochów Napoleona" (On the Transfer of the Dust of Napoleon), i.e. poems written in the period when Słowacki was already a fully fledged Romantic poet (1835–1842). Here, like in his previous book, *O sztuce poetyckiej Mickiewicza* (*On Mickiewicz's Poetic Art*, 1976),² Zgorzelski demonstrates a masterly efficient analytic method, combined with his almost programmatic respect for the literary text and its specific features determining the basis and the horizon of interpretative proceedings.

"Rozłączenie" is treated here as a poetic epistle addressed to the poet's mother, and not—as it has been traditionally seen—as an erotic poem to Słowacki's muse at the time, Maria Wodzińska; Zgorzelski bases his arguments not on the biographical context, but on the immanent analysis of the text itself. (The question of the presumed addressee of the poem was once the subject of interesting but not definitely solved polemics among Zgorzelski, Konrad Górski and Wiktor Weintraub.) The constructive hinge of "Rozłączenie" is for him the juxtaposition of two contrasting landscapes (the trivial reality surrounding the addressee is contrasted with Swiss nature, heightened and endowed with the air of uncommonness); Zgorzelski emphasizes the creative power of Romantic imagination and metaphors bringing into being the unique landscape of the environs of Lake Lemán—estranged, dynamically visionary, as if incorporating a dream into reality, thoroughly permeated by subjective, extremely individualized vision and intensive feeling of the speaking subject. The poem, opalescent with a multitude of poetic suggestions, incessantly extending the range of its meanings,

² Reviewed by T. Kostkiewiczowa in *Literary Studies in Poland*, 1980, vol. V.

has the character of a direct, spontaneous, though even-minded, confession (similar to elegy and epistle), its lyrical thread being developed through apparently free variational associations. The penetrating eye of the analyst discerns, however, fairly complicated, ingenious and regular interconnections in the poem: the net of recurring, though each time slightly modified, leitmotifs, as well as a set of syntactic, intonational and metrical interrelations, based on a dialectic interplay of unity and diversity. It is to be stressed that the detailed investigations in versification, which play such an important role in many of Zgorzelski's interpretations, always do reveal an essential stylistic character of the verse form of a given poem.

The analysis of the "Hymn" focuses primarily on the problems of the internal composition and broadly conceived style of this perhaps most popular lyrical poem of Słowacki. Making use of the genre sanctified by a very long religious tradition, solemn and dignified, the poet renders it into an intimate confession to God, pervaded by the pilgrim's grief and homesickness, and kept in the elegiac tone of pensiveness and melancholic resignation. It expresses a sense of the boundlessness of eternity and a bitter reflection on all-powerful and imperishable nature as opposed to the inexorable transitoriness and evanescence of all human achievements. The "Hymn" obeys the compositional principles of the so-called open lyrical poetry: individual stanzas, mutually independent, realize the method of parallel synonymous variations (repeated use of the same motifs, each time somewhat modified and transformed), the integrating function being performed by the refrain. The poetic diction is informed by periphrases based on the principle of metaphor and suggestive of the Romantic way of experiencing the world in the perspective of infinity. There is no clash here of contradictory forces; on the contrary, there is a predominant tendency to smooth and harmonious fusion of all the structural elements. This unity of the final form is, however, far from monotony: the poet is careful to variate unobtrusively the meter of the poem, by introducing – among other devices – a subtle modulation of the "melodious" versification.

Zgorzelski's discussion of the poetic epistles from Egypt shows how the epically oriented descriptions and narratives of the cycle

become permeated by totally subjective insights evoked by observations and experiences of the narrator—a Romantic voyager; how this poem of travel, apparently meant as a “report,” becomes a lyrical and reflective piece of poetry. The narrative technique of the epistles is characterized by sophisticated digressiveness, whimsical and ironic changeability of attitudes and perspectives assumed toward the evoked reality by the narrator, who playing with literary genres, demonstrates richness of associations and themes as well as dazzling artistic virtuosity, but whose primary interest is to interpret the signs of history noticeable in the present. For it is in terms of time and space that he conceives the historicphilosophical idea of the tragic decrees of history ordaining that even cultures once great and powerful should perish. This idea is not explicit in the poem, yet it is implied by the lyrically meaningful “polarity” of the juxtaposed ambiguous images-symbols. The amorphous form of the epistles and their incoherence that strikes the reader at the first reading are—Zgorzelski argues—only apparent; a careful examination brings to the light hidden purposefulness of the internal arrangement of the cycle; and he concludes his discussion with an illuminating comparison with Mickiewicz’s “journey to the East”—not with the Crimean sonnets, however, but with the Digression of Part III of *Dziady* (*Forefathers*), a masterpiece of Romantic political pamphlet.

This part of the book is closed by a model interpretation of the exquisite poem “On the Transfer of the Dust of Napoleon.” Having drawn a rich genetic-biographical and historical background, and indicated the major factors contributing to the rise of the Emperor’s myth in European culture, as well as the broad, both Polish and foreign, literary context associated with Napoleon (Byron, Lamartine, Manzoni, Hugo, Heine, Lermontov, Koźmian, A. Czajkowski, Krasiński), Zgorzelski, characteristically of his method, focuses on the structural analysis of the poem itself. He views it as “a monumental Romantic drama about the conflicts inherent in the world of the poet’s times, about actual and apparent forces that govern this world, about irony of men’s fortunes in which human wretchedness and greatness are intermingling” (p. 95). The poetic world is here organized by two visions, each of them referring to a different tradition and generic conventions: the excavation

of the body and its triumphant return to France. The main events and motifs, only seemingly concrete, are pervaded by great emotional (and not visual) expressiveness, for their primary function is to evoke lyrical and symbolic suggestions. The first part of the poem is in the mood of elegiac-funeral reflections, its predominant tone being that of the funeral lamentation. On the other hand, the imagery of the second part, full of enthusiasm and pathetic exultation, is of a hyperbolic character: it is derived from the poetics of the "elevated" classicist ode, and serves chiefly to glorify the hero. Yet the poem is not a dichotomous composition; the poet's artistry consists in the masterly fusion of the melodious elegiac with the declamatory rhetoric into a whole that is coherent, though based on dynamic contrast of its informing factors, and therefore characterized by a certain duality. "On the Transfer of the Dust of Napoleon" is at the same time a threnody and a triumphal elegy; it is both a lyrical reflection and an emphatic monologue, dramatized by passionate, accusing rhetoric. Zgorzelski traces with subtle precision and insight all manifestations of this conjunction of styles and conventions on various levels of the text's structure (he gives a lengthy analysis of the syntactical-intonation, rhythmic and metrical structure), ranking the poem among those which he calls "the most truly Romantic" (together with such poems as "Rozłączenie," "Rzym"—Rome, "Sumnienie"—Conscience, Hymn "Smutno mi, Boże!," or "Pogrzeb kapitana Meyznera"—The Burial of Captain Meyzner).

After such an extensive preparation part III of Zgorzelski's book presents attempts at synthetic generalizations. The author deals here with the mature lyrical poetry of Słowacki (of the years 1835–1842) in its several aspects: he discusses the factors of the so-called lyrical resonance, investigates the problem of the "melodiousness" of Słowacki's poetry, proposes its general typology and division into periods, and finally, dwells on the category of "the dramatic quality" of the lyrical monologue, and specifies the range of the notion.

One of the most characteristic manifestations of the poetic art of the author of "Rozłączenie" is his masterly capability of expressing feelings and reflections indirectly, of constantly suggesting—through implications, allusions and aposiopeses—new semantic dimen-

sions of his poems. This difficult artistic task is accomplished through introduction of two main factors by means of which his poetry gains a deeper lyrical resonance. In the earlier period it is romanticized nature which is charged with the function of multiplying poetic meanings (a good example is "Sumnienie," where the landscape motifs point simultaneously to several different, yet interpenetrating, senses). Later on—in the Roman period—it is reflection on the pathos and passing away of history, sensed in one fleeting moment of the present, which is tinged with lyricism ("Rzym," "Listy poetyckie z Egiptu," "On the Transfer of the Dust of Napoleon," "Pogrzeb kapitana Meyznera"). The antinomy of nature and history, so crucial in that stage of the poet's development, will appear again in the mystical poetry of Słowacki, but then it will acquire a different shape and a different interpretation.

In the essay "Śpiewu tajemnice" (Mysteries of Song) the author is concerned with an extremely complex phenomenon, cumbered with a rather bad scholarly tradition: the so-called "musical quality" of Słowacki's poems. Declining the temptation of easy "musical" analogies, Zgorzelski assumes the perspective of strictly literary scholarship. He treats poetry as the verbal art, and therefore looks for manifestations of this "musicalness" in "those elements of the text [...] which in the set of compositional elements determine the main tone of a poem and its meanderings in the developing stream of speech" (p. 125). Introducing the relevant distinction between the "singsong" quality (the domain of meter and rhythm) and "melodiousness" (the domain of intonation and syntax), the author distinguishes three basic types of Słowacki's lyrical poems. The first type covers the elegiac poems (such as "Rozłączenie," Hymn "Smutno mi, Boże!," "Ostatnie wspomnienie. Do Laury"—The Last Memory. To Laura), among which—as an extreme variant of the type—he ranks also the "songs" (such as "Pieśń legionu litewskiego"—The Song of the Lithuanian Regiment, "Duma o Wacławie Rzewuskim," "Chmury"—The Clouds, "Pieśń na Nilu"—The Song on the Nile, "Rozmowa z piramidami"—A Talk with the Pyramids, songs included in Słowacki's poetic tales and dramas, as well as some playfully satirical or parodistic poems). Those "songs" are characterized by Zgorzelski from the point of view of their versification structure (strong pulsation of the metrical

pattern that somewhat stifles the intonation and syntax, the factors reducing the syllabic-accentual monotony). The second type—contrasting with the first one—includes rhetorical monologues, full of rage and passions, presenting arguments that are in sharp conflict, and marked by “theatrical exultation” (such as “Przeklęstwo”—The Curse, sonnets “To A. M.,” “Grób Agamemnona”—Agamemnon’s Tomb, “Do pani Joanny Bobrowej”—To Joanna Bobrowa, “Testament mój”—My Testament, “Tak mi, Boże, pomóż”—So help me God). Zgorzelski’s close examination of the group brings to the light the stylistic mechanism of those dramatic-oratorical compositions that are entirely conforming with the principles of Romantic expression (e.g. in their orientation towards psychological and emotional facts). The third type, the most interesting and poetically most innovatory, often counterbalancing the elegiac melodiousness with rhetoric (as best seen in “The Transfer of the Dust of Napoleon”), are poems which have the structure of lyrical or narrative description (e.g. “Rzym,” “Sumnienie,” “W sztambuchu Marii Wodzińskiej”—In the Album of Maria Wodzińska, “Pogrzeb kapitana Meyznera,” “Anioły stoją na rodzinnych polach...”—Angels stand on my native fields...).

A separate essay is devoted to the problems of “the dramatic character of the lyrical monologue,” hardly ever noticed in earlier studies on Słowacki. Among the features that contribute to this dramatic quality Zgorzelski sees

the conflicting relation between elements of a poem, implied polyphony generally suggesting a dialogue, the polarity of main persons and points in space around which a poem centers, contemporarization of the situation as a device bringing the situation, as it were, nearer to the reader, the use of “the present” in its subsequent development or in changes in the mental attitude of the speaker, and the “theatricalness” combining to the illusion of experiencing the monologue as if it were delivered on the stage, among theatrical scenery, with gestures and mimic expression, and particularly with noticeable suggestion of differentiated, dynamically faltering intonation (p. 159).

The complex nature of this phenomenon and its functions are analyzed on such differing examples as “W sztambuchu Marii Wodzińskiej,” the two sonnets to A. M., “Przeklęstwo,” and the poem probably written a year before Słowacki’s death and fulfilling the principles of the mystical period of his poetry—“Kiedy pierwsze kury Panu śpiewają...” (When the first cocks crow to the Lord).

An intensified dramatic element informs primarily the rhetorical monologues and those poems which bear a distinct discursive and polemic stamp; the least affected by it are, of course, melodious compositions—internally harmonious and rhythmically smooth.

Summing up his reflections Zgorzelski traces out the line of evolution of “the most truly Romantic” poetry of Słowacki. Generally speaking, it runs from lyrical treatments of landscapes (bearing the traits of descriptiveness) to lyrical treatments of situations and events (acquiring the structure of narrative). In other terms, it is an evolution from lyrical poetry of emotion to poetry of reflection, which towards the end of the period 1835–1842 leads to a certain programme. It is to be remembered, however, that such a scheme levelling individual character of particular poems stresses only the predominance of certain features, and not their exclusiveness.

Part IV of the book, “*Liryka ostatniego etapu*” (The Lyrical Poetry of the Last Period), deals with poems of Słowacki—the mystic enraptured by his new “perception of nature”. A radical turning-point in the poet’s inner life, in 1842, brought about also serious transformations in his poetics, although—as it is emphasized by Zgorzelski—“we cannot speak of a complete cut off from the lyrical art of his mature period” (p. 215). A new vision of the world, founded on the sense of metaphysical oneness of the universe, on the belief in the absolute unity and integrity of the sensory and the transcendental, compelled Słowacki to fundamental revision of his own artistic achievements, predilections and habits. The principal problem that he faced then was to elaborate such means of expression which could render reality in “forms that are poetic and real at the same time” (as he put it in a letter to Krasieński in July 1843), and which would allow him to present in a plausible way the tangible reality of the unreal shining with the truth of mystic experience. This unreality had cosmic dimensions, it was unlimited in space and time. Such a view of the world had to result in elimination of dream from poetry, in rejection of “overt poetization of reality adorned with wreaths of the beautiful details” (p. 221) in favour of literal presentation of naturalness and perceptibility of what appears to be immaterial and elusive. And at the same time

everything that by the reality of its existence and relations with the everyday world had seemed common and simple, became compassed by the atmosphere of the poetic strangeness [...] Consequently, the world as given to us in this poetry strikes us [...] with an unusual, strongly intensified poetic quality of its structure" (p. 226).

This is due mainly to the method of "multidirectional opening of simultaneous semantic perspectives of a motif or expression introduced into a poem" (p. 222); these perspectives glisten with at least two interplaying and interpenetrating senses: one taken from the domain of material phenomena, the other—from the realm of the supernatural, thereby making the presented phenomena function not only as concrete, sensuously distinct elements of imagery, but—above all—as signals leading to the understanding of what is hidden beneath the outward order of existence.

The poetic diction of Słowacki's mystical poetry is determined by the tension between two contradictory tendencies: inclination to the prophetic elevated style on the one hand, and stylization on simplicity and unaffectedness on the other. On this basis Zgorzelski divides the poems of the last period into three different, though related in some of their structural aspects, groups. In the first one, linked in a way to the tradition of declamatory rhetorical monologues, we would find programmatic confessional poems, impassionately apostolic and testifying the fervent faith of the mystic (such as "Tak mi, Boże, dopomóż," "Wierzę"—I Believe, "Do Ludwika Nabelaka"—To Ludwik Nabelak), alongside the inspired prophetic poems envisioning the future history of Poland and the world (e.g. "Kiedy prawdziwi Polacy powstaną..."—When true Poles will rise..., "Wyjdzie stu robotników"—A Hundred Workers will Come out..., "Ratujcie się! Pan wielki narodów nadchodzi..."—Rejoice, the great Lord of the nations is coming..., or the most brilliant of the prophecies, and poetically most amazing, "Uspokojenie"—Appeasement). Predominant in this group is the tone of solemnity, far from rhetorical affectation, this tone being strengthened by frequent Biblical allusions. The second group would include—beside "songs" in the naively devotional style ("Chwal Pana, duszo moja..."—Praise the Lord, my soul..., "Baranki moje..."—My flock, "Bo mię matka moja miła..."—For my dear mother...)—also contemplative, prayer-like, intimate poems in the tone of beseeching

imploration or religious worship (e.g. “Kiedy pierwsze kury Panu śpiewają...,” “Gdy noc głęboka wszystko uśpi i oniemi...” – When the dark night puts everything to sleep..., “O! wielki Boże – o Panie wszechmocny” – O! great God – o almighty Lord..., “Dusza się moja zamyśla głęboko” – My soul is pondering deeply, “Jeżeli kiedy w tej mojej krainie” – If ever in my country...). Those poems, to a certain extent exploiting the inspiration of the reflective elegies characteristic of the preceding period, express frailty and submissiveness of man towards his Maker. “But simplicity is not always a decisive element of the style in this group of poems [...] It might be said to be predominant, but never overwhelming” (pp. 230, 232), for it usually clashes with a force that leads to poetization and marks the poems with manifestations of the typically “literary construction” (p. 232). The third, mediate, group would cover poems whose stylistic dynamics is determined by a struggle of two contradictory tones of the speaker: pathos of the proud-hearted prophet and his humble sincerity before God (e.g. “Panie! jeżeli zamkniesz słuch narodu...” – Lord, if you make the nation deaf..., “Najpiękniejszy, najświętszy Boga tron na ziemi...” – The most beautiful, most holy throne of God..., “Zachwycenie” – Enrapture).

This general treatment (contained in the study “Ostatni etap liryki Słowackiego” – The Last Stage of Słowacki’s Lyrical Poetry) is verified and completed by the analyses in interpretative essays concerned with the poems “Gdy noc głęboka wszystko uśpi i oniemi...” and “Kiedy pierwsze kury Panu śpiewają...,” as well as by a comprehensive study entitled “‘Miniatury’ liryczne” (Lyrical “Miniatures”), in which Zgorzelski investigates short poetic fragments hitherto neglected by historians of literature. Those diary pieces, practically scraps, spontaneously recorded in the private notebook of the mystic on the spur of the moment, while examined under a magnifying glass of the critic prove to be “the most lyrical of lyrical utterances”; referring to the most essential and ultimate questions, they reveal their astonishing artistry in the many-dimensional symbolism of “open” lyrical meanings, semantic density of succinct constructions, the role of preteritions and aposiopeses, fine cohesion of interconnections between even the smallest bits of the whole, internal dialectics of discipline and liberty.

The book closes with the essay written a quarter of a century ago, "W odbiorze dzisiejszego czytelnika" (Reception by the Modern Reader). Pointing out those features of Słowacki's poetic art that are close to literature of our times (such as the revealing of general truths and perspectives through individualized situations made concrete and unique; modern use of metaphor as a means of extending the semantic range of the text, indirect suggestion of artistic means), the author finds that most appealing to the contemporary reader are—beside meditative mystical miniatures—those poems which have the structure of lyrical narrative or description.

The collection of Zgorzelski's studies is an outstanding book; presenting the most serious so far, and in many respects illuminating, treatment of Słowacki's lyrical poetry, and thus becoming a classical position in Polish literary scholarship, the book opens new interpretative horizons also before those students of Romanticism who base the hermeneutics of poetic text on quite different methodological principles.

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Transl. by Maria-Bożenna Fedewicz

Adam Karpiński, **Staropolska poezja ideałów ziemiańskich. Próba przekroju (La Poésie vieille polonaise des idéaux campagnards*. Essai d'analyse)**, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1983, 208 pp.

Il y a près de cinquante ans, Stanisław Windakiewicz a remarqué que la littérature vieille polonaise se distinguait par un culte particulier de la vie à la campagne. L'engouement pour la campagne a atteint en Pologne un degré inégalé dans aucune autre littérature de cette époque, ni dans la littérature italienne, ni dans la française,

* Je traduis ainsi, faute d'un autre terme, l'adjectif *ziemiańskie* qui signifie non seulement «se rapportant à la campagne», mais aussi «se rapportant à la propriété terrienne». Celle-ci était, en Pologne plus qu'ailleurs — rappelons-le — l'apanage de la classe — nombreuse — des nobles, lesquels étaient souvent les propres gérants sinon les cultivateurs de leurs terres, des *gentlemen farmers* en quelque sorte (note du traducteur).