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CANONIZING THE *WIESZCZ*: THE SUBJECTIVE TURN IN POLISH LITERARY BIOGRAPHY IN THE 1860s

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In the Polish literary tradition, the romantic age marks an important turning point in the development of an explicitly national literature. While many features of literary romanticism, such as its emphasis on folk culture and the development of national languages, contributed to “the rise of the modern nation-state in Europe” (Brennen 48), in the Polish context the lack of an independent state in this period only strengthened the connection between literature and national identity. In the words of Jerzy Ziomek, “upon the loss of independence, Polish literature assumed the function of replacing and substituting for the non-existent state institutions” (23). Similarly, Beth Holmgren maintains that Polish literature afforded “the most revered and accessible expression of nationhood after Poland’s political erasure in the late eighteenth century” (11). Adam Mickiewicz quickly came to occupy a central position in the Polish literary canon as a national figure, being recognized by critics as a national poet soon after the publication of his first two volumes of poetry in his early twenties.¹

But the shift from being recognized as a national poet by a cultural elite to being accepted as a poet-prophet, or *wieszcz*, by a large part of the populace was enormous and required decades of cultural work. In the Austrian, Russian, and Prussian partitions of Poland, a good deal of this work was carried out at the institutional level of primary, secondary, and higher education. John Guillory has argued that it is largely through educational curricula that literary and cultural canons are formed (vii–xiii). Even though (and, it could be argued, precisely because) Mickiewicz’s works were the object of strict censorship in the partitions of Poland, textbooks of literature played a large role in the process of his literary canonization. As Mieczysława Mitera-Dobrowolska states in her study of the presentation of Mickiewicz in nineteenth-century school primers,

school readers and other textbooks, despite political or social censorship and the particular approach of [individual] teachers, played a particular role in the popularization of Mickie-

wicz's works as often the sole compendia of literary works available to the general public. Despite their omissions and constraints, they demonstrated the beauty of his works to young people, developed in them a moral-national position, and conveyed the greatness of the national literature in a time of national abasement.² (106)

Because of the lack of a standardized school curriculum in the partitions of Poland, presentations of Mickiewicz were highly variable, reflecting the different political climates and censorship policies in each partition. In texts published in the Russian partition of Poland, changes in the treatment of Mickiewicz reflect the twenty-four year ban on his works from 1833 to 1857, and his subsequent rehabilitation during the thaw following the death of Tsar Nicholas I in 1855 (and the death of the poet himself that same year). In the Prussian partition, the 1850s were likewise a period of liberalization following the germanification policies of the 1830s and 40s. In the Austrian partition, a state school system was not established until 1848, and Polish literature became part of its curriculum at that time.³ It was not until the early 1860s, however, that presentations of Polish literary development began to assume a similar appearance in textbooks of literature published in all three partitions of Poland. It was precisely in this period that a Polish romantic canon with Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, and Zygmunt Krasiński as its central figures began to be consistently reproduced in textbooks of literature published in each of the partitions.

One of the most striking developments in Polish textbooks of literature published in the early 1860s is the radical change in their presentation of the poets' biographies. This change reflects a general trend in literary historiography of the period marked by the appearance of the literary monograph, such as Józef Przyborowski's 1857 study of the life and work of Jan Kochanowski, Kazimierz Wójcicki's 1858 biography of Mickiewicz, and Antoni Małecko's study of Juliusz Słowacki published in 1866–1867 (Skrót 109, 119). While biography as a literary genre dates back to antiquity, literary biography was still a relatively new form in this period, having come into widespread practice only in the second half of the eighteenth century with the professionalization of letters and the appearance of the "author" as a distinct social category (McKeon 17, Foucault 108). In the Polish tradition, it is no coincidence that the rapid development and dissemination of literary biography in criticism, the academy, and the popular press accompanied the stabilization of a Polish romantic literary canon. Before the 1860s, authors' biographies in textbooks of literature appeared as short descriptions of usually no more than a paragraph listing the author's date and place of birth, civil status, profession, places of study and travel, and publishing history. Beginning around 1860, however, both the form and content of authors' biographies changed dramatically; biographical studies were expanded in length many pages to include anecdotal stories about the writer's childhood, upbringing, character traits, love affairs,

friendships, religious beliefs, participation in resistance movements, and contributions to the national cause. In addition to the new emphasis on the poet's social role as national figure, this new form of biography was distinguished by an unprecedented emphasis on the author's subjective experiences and feelings.⁴

The institutionalization of portrayals of Mickiewicz that attempt to convey his subjective experience mark an important turning point in the process of his canonization as Polish national poet. In their use of emotive language and free indirect discourse to portray Mickiewicz's subjective experiences and point of view, these biographies encourage Polish schoolchildren to identify with the poet as an embodiment of national culture. Subjectivity and subjective identification are central problems in the formation of national identity as heretofore defined (Renan 19–20; Weber 922–23; Seton-Watson 1; Eley 88; Hobsbawm 83–84), yet they remain one of the most understudied aspects of nationalism and nationhood. It is exclusively through subjective identification, and not any legitimate state power, that the Polish nation continued to exist in the minds of Poles who continued to fight for independence throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Polish national identity was cultivated and institutionalized in school curricula in part by encouraging schoolchildren to identify with Mickiewicz as a national symbol. My analysis concentrates on three of the most influential textbooks of literature published in each of the partitions in the early 1860s: Leśław Łukaszewicz's *Survey of the History of Polish Writing* published in the Prussian partition (expanded edition, Poznań, 1860); Julian Bartoszewicz's *History of Polish Literature Recounted in a Colloquial Manner* in the Russian partition (Warsaw, 1861); and the Bielowski, et al., *Polish Primer for Use in the Upper Classes of State Gymnasias* in the Austrian partition (Lviv [Lwów], 1862). I close with a discussion of Włodzimierz Spasowicz's "History of Polish Literature," which appeared in the first comprehensive history of Slavic literatures, Aleksandr Pypin's *Survey of the History of Slavic Literatures* (St. Petersburg, 1865). Together these texts give a representative picture of the general trends and major changes that took place in Polish literary history and the teaching of Polish literature in this period.

Leśław Łukaszewicz's *Survey of the History of Polish Writing* was one of the most important textbooks of Polish literature in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The first edition appeared in Cracow in 1836 and was amended and republished in twelve separate editions, growing from 95 pages in the first edition to 877 pages in 1866. Only the first, second, and fourth editions of Łukaszewicz's *Survey* (Cracow 1836, 1838, and 1851) were authored by Łukaszewicz himself. The expansion of Łukaszewicz's *Survey* involved a number of contributors with different literary sensibilities working under various censorship policies and educational mandates in

the three partitions of Poland, and many of these editions were used as official teaching texts. Like many authors of Polish textbooks of literature in the first half of the nineteenth century, Łukaszewicz was a Polish patriot and political activist whose literary activities were but one expression of his contribution to the national cause. After studying law and philosophy in Cracow, he served as an officer in the November uprising of 1830–1831, and was later arrested by Austrian authorities in 1842 for conspiratorial activities. Because most editions of his *Survey* differ significantly from previous ones, it is an excellent source for studying how the presentation of Polish romanticism changed over time.

The first edition of the *Survey* covers all writing in Polish; in addition to artistic literature, it includes historical and scholarly writing, medical and mathematical treatises, geographical studies, and Polish grammars. Unlike most narrative histories published later, it appears essentially as a list of names, works, and dates with no textual analysis, few examples, and limited biographical information about authors. Mickiewicz is presented as the “unquestioned representative” of contemporary Polish poetry, and for this reason his biography is one of the longest and most extensive in the book. It reads:

Adam Mickiewicz (Born 1798 in Lithuania; graduated from Vilnius University; was in the Crimea, Moscow, and Petersburg, then traveled in Italy, Germany and France). We can justly call him the conqueror of the Classicists and younger guiding star of his brothers. His genius brought to fruition what writers before him had attempted [to achieve]. Able to synthesize all [styles], he became a storehouse of those elements leading to the new world literature, without effacing his own particularity, his “I.” We mention here only *Grażyna* and *Wallenrod*, his greatest long poems of historical content. In other subjects he followed English and German cultures, or adorned [his writing] with flowers from the east. These include *Forefathers’ Eve* parts II and IV, *Farys*, *Sonnets*, etc. Over the past several years translations have appeared into German, French, English, Italian, Persian and apparently Russian. Translation of Byron, *Giaour*, Wrocl., 1835. (81)

In this brief account, Łukaszewicz draws particular attention to Mickiewicz’s historical works, presumably for their attention to national themes, and completely ignores his lyrics and ballads. This account would become the standard version of Mickiewicz’s biography in subsequent editions of Łukaszewicz’s *Survey* for the next twenty-five years, being reproduced verbatim or with minor changes until the two 1860 Poznań editions (the standard and expanded) introduced a new version of Mickiewicz’s biography with significant changes in both quality and quantity.⁵

The 1860 expanded edition of Łukaszewicz’s *Survey* was amended by Teofil Kiliński (1801–1863), a priest who had fought as a rank and file soldier in the Polish uprising of 1830–1831 and who spent most of his career teaching at his alma mater, Mary Magdalene Gymnasium in Poznań (*PSB* 12: 455). In this edition, Mickiewicz’s biography has been expanded to

cover six pages, and now includes extensive information about his upbringing in Nowogródek, early evidence of his “unprecedented talent,” his close friendships with Edward Odyniec, Stefan Garczyński, Adolf Januszkiewicz, and Henryk Rzewuski (among others), his studies at Vilnius University, involvement in secret societies, exile in Russia, and his attendance at Goethe’s eightieth birthday party in Weimar. It also mentions some of the more sensitive moments in the poet’s life, such as his religious crisis and thoughts of suicide, his marriage to Celina Szymanowska and her subsequent mental illness, the birth of their six children, his participation in the Towiański circle, his Slavic lectures and eventual dismissal from the Collège de France, his organization of a legion in Turkey, and his death in Constantinople (530–35).⁶

In this revised version of the biography, the new details of Mickiewicz’s personal life are conveyed in a more colloquial tone. Mickiewicz is often referred to simply as “Adam,” especially when the biographer discusses his domestic and intimate relationships or mental state: “his parents . . . gave Adam the best education” (530); “at this point there occurred a major change in Adam’s thinking [*umysł*]—he became a believer and religious” (531); “unrequited love dating from his university years had a considerable influence on the romantic direction of Adam[’s poetry]” (533–34). In several cases the first person plural is employed or implied, which functions to include the reader in the situations described in the text: “After finishing his university studies, [Mickiewicz] accepted a post as professor of Polish literature and Latin in Kowno. We see him next embroiled in the Philareth affair in Wilno . . .” (530). In another instance Kiliński refers to Mickiewicz and Garczyński as “our poets” [*nasi poeci*] (530). When recounting the story of Mickiewicz’s marriage, Kiliński imports a direct quotation from Lucjan Siemieński into his text:

His [Mickiewicz’s] friends dragged him to Paris and put it into his head to get married. “It so happened that one of his acquaintances came to Paris from St. Petersburg. Mickiewicz began to ask him about various people, among others about the family of the famous pianist Szymanowska. From him he found out that Celinka, who had been a small girl in Petersburg, [during Mickiewicz’s exile in Russia] had grown into a beautiful woman. ‘I would be prepared to marry her if she were here,’ said the poet indifferently, blowing out a cloud of smoke. Those words, clearly spoken at a lighthearted moment, were to bring a result beyond expectation. Miss Celina suddenly turned up in Paris. Mickiewicz did not go back on his word and married her in 1834.” (531)

The embedding of Mickiewicz’s purported statement (“I would be prepared to marry her if she were here”) in the form of a direct quotation in Siemieński’s text, which is then embedded in Kiliński’s text, transforms Mickiewicz’s words from anecdote into historical fact by representing them in the new context of literary history. In a similar fashion, descriptions of Mickiewicz’s manner (“said the poet indifferently, blowing out a cloud of

smoke”) serve to convey an intended meaning on the part of the poet (i.e., that he was not serious about wanting to marry Celina) through the narrator.

Mickiewicz’s thoughts receive even greater emphasis and combine with an accentuation on his personal sufferings in the account of the circumstances of his death. The reader learns that after Celina’s death in the beginning of 1855, Mickiewicz was left to raise six small children. He then left for Turkey “outfitted with camping equipment,” and after spending several weeks living on “the provisions of a common soldier,” he became “morally vexed” by “the public matters for which he had come, and which appeared in a much different light from how he had seen them from afar” (533). He fell ill, yet it was not until he started experiencing “the most violent pains” that Polish doctors told him that his life was in danger. Not having the strength to write down his final wishes, he received the last sacrament, “and at around ten in the evening on the 28th day of November 1855 left the living.” His death was followed by memorial services “everywhere in the country and abroad” to honor the great national poet, and “according to the last wishes of the deceased, his remains were transported from Istanbul to Paris and buried next to his wife at Montmorency cemetery” (533). The emphasis on Mickiewicz’s hardship, disenchantment, and pain invites the reader to empathize with the poet during his final days. The recording of the precise hour of his death and mention of memorial services “everywhere” render the poet’s death an important factor in his literary canonization. The fact that Mickiewicz’s dying wish was to be buried next to his wife would be conveniently dropped from the written record after his body was exhumed, shipped to Cracow, and enshrined in Wawel Cathedral in 1890.

The biographies of Stowacki and Krasiński appear in expanded form in this edition as well, and the two writers are presented along with Mickiewicz as the triad of romantic national poets.⁷ As in the case of Mickiewicz, events and personal relationships from Stowacki’s and Krasiński’s lives (such as their upbringing, family, studies, friends, travels, political involvement, and death) are recounted in a familiar and often anecdotal tone. Although each of these writers is now called a “national *wieszcz*,” Mickiewicz is ranked higher than the other two as a “powerful poetic genius” who has earned a top place among the world’s leading poets (533). This hierarchy is regularly reiterated: in Krasiński’s biography, for example, we read that Krasiński “belongs to poets of the first rank and to the national geniuses. Although not of such vast dimensions as Mickiewicz Adam [sic], he is equal to Juliusz Stowacki and stands higher than Bohdan Zaleski” (535). Likewise, the biography of each *wieszcz* mentions the poet’s relationship to the other two, thereby reiterating the construct of the romantic triad for the reader. Both Mickiewicz’s and Krasiński’s biographies mention their first meeting and subsequent travels though Switzer-

land, during which Mickiewicz was “enchanted by his [Kraśiński’s] piano playing” (531, 536). Słowacki’s relationship to the other two poets is presented as almost exclusively literary: “Only Kraśiński befriended him [Słowacki] and highly valued his works, and that friendly contact was not broken despite [their] contradictory ideas about the national spirit. Mickiewicz always criticized Słowacki for his negative and less than religious direction, and did not even mention him in his Slavic lectures” (589). In Kraśiński’s biography, we read that Kraśiński was not as influential as the other two poets because he did not participate as openly in literary life and speak to the national theme as consistently; nevertheless, “the national idea shines through in his writing” (535).

Taken together, the biographies of Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Kraśiński form a narrative whole, with each poet representing one of the cornerstones of the Polish romantic *Weltanschauung* in a mutually dependent trinity: Mickiewicz as the positive voice of history, Słowacki as the voice of the “demonic” dark side of the fate of the Polish nation, and Kraśiński the voice of Polish Catholicism. Kiliński remarks that “the cruelty of fate is most often the primary organic thought of his [Słowacki’s] works. There is something demonic in the spirit as well as the poetry of Słowacki” (588). This view would set the tone for the presentation of the “demonic Słowacki” in the positivist period. Concerning Kraśiński he writes, “Kraśiński considered the suffering of a people, just as [the suffering] of a single person, to be a source of purification and service, and for this reason he condemned Pancracy’s efforts [in his *Undivine Comedy*]. He viewed the greatness of his people [to be] the powerful faith of their forefathers and awaited salvation through a similar faith” (535). Significantly, each biography makes explicit mention of the poet’s whereabouts during the November uprising of 1830–1831: Kiliński writes that Mickiewicz was in Poznań, Słowacki in Warsaw, and Kraśiński somewhere touring in Italy. As national poets, their connection to this event (or implied connection where none exists) is of the utmost importance, with the repeated mention of the uprising serving to drive home the fact that it is the shared experience of this event that unites the nation.

Similar developments in the composition of Mickiewicz’s biography are evident in the 1861 *History of Polish Literature Recounted in a Colloquial Manner* by Julian Bartoszewicz, a teacher of Latin and Polish in Warsaw. Bartoszewicz’s is the first textbook of literature published in the Russian partition of Poland to present the triad of Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Kraśiński as the leading figures of Polish romanticism.⁸ As the title indicates, this work distinguishes itself stylistically from its predecessors by employing a conversational style. Bartoszewicz’s 644-page *History* enjoyed both popular and academic success, and was republished in an expanded

edition in Cracow in 1877. In his introduction, Bartoszewicz appeals directly to his primary audience, the children of Poland:

I thought for a long time, my dear children, with what kind of token of my sincere connection to you I should consolidate the memory of those relationships and feelings that have bound us all together forever. And of course the thought immediately occurred to me to write a book for you. And in the first place I thought about history . . . it seemed to me that the history of Polish literature, which you are about to begin studying, would be on my part the most appropriate gift for you. . . . Thank God a hundred-fold, my children, that he blessed you with a good mother of old Polish virtue. The pure apotheosis of poetry in life, she guarded your holy and pure hearts from error, showed you the path to merit in suffering and in fulfilling Christian duties. . . . Perhaps you will later read [this book] with your mother from time to time, and remember your old friend. How sincerely glad I will be about this, how I foresee every such moment! ([i–ii])

In an effort to bridge the narrative distance between himself and the reader, Bartoszewicz assumes the narrative stance of an “old friend” bound to the children of Poland forever through “memories of . . . relationships and feelings.” Yet such memories of events that bind the nation do not exist in the minds of children, and must be created through the “gift” he shares with them — Polish literature. Sparing no appeal to emotions, Bartoszewicz makes reference to the reader’s mother — a stereotypical Polish mother who in his formulation has already shown her children “the path to merit in suffering and in fulfilling Christian duties.” Moreover, Bartoszewicz presents his *History* as much more than a school text: it is a book to be read with one’s mother — “the pure apotheosis of poetry in life” — with the intention of making Polish literature personally relevant to its readers.

Bartoszewicz’s enthusiasm for his subject and inflated emotional register is maintained throughout the *History*, reaching new heights in his treatment of Mickiewicz. Like Kiliński, Bartoszewicz employs similar strategies for constructing intimacy between the poet and the reader. He refers to Mickiewicz by first name only, especially when conveying “Adam’s” intentions and thoughts:

[Mickiewicz’s] second stay in Rome greatly transformed the imagination of our *wieszcz*; God’s grace clearly shone upon him — from a pseudo-philosopher he became a true believer. His conversations with deeply religious people occasioned such an outcome. And the talent of the *wieszcz* matured. . . . Adam recalled his own family legends. . . . The ideal of “Soplica” [the family name of the title character in Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz*] was formed; from this the *wieszcz* created the wonderful poem about Pan Tadeusz in which he described the last noble foray in Lithuania. (535)

The details of Mickiewicz’s religious crisis aside, this presentation of his (assumed) inner thoughts (“Adam recalled his own family legends”) not only gives the reader a more intimate knowledge of the poet, but also places *Pan Tadeusz* in the realm of Mickiewicz’s personal experience. Like Kiliński, Bartoszewicz uses the term “our *wieszcz*” on many occasions,

thereby initiating readers into a collective with Mickiewicz as its poet-prophet. Bartoszewicz attempts to evoke sympathy for the poet by emphasizing Mickiewicz's persecution: in one instance he states that people "laughed at him in Warsaw" (503) for his innovative style; later he was reportedly fired from his position at Collège de France "because Louis Philippe disapproved of Mickiewicz's constant praise of Napoleon Bonaparte" (536). His marriage to Celina, who is often demonized in biographical accounts of this period, is presented as marking the end of his literary career: "In 1834 he married Miss Celina Szymanowska, the daughter of a famous painter in Europe. He had met her as a child in Petersburg and hence she willingly joined him. From this point on, the *wieszcz's* muse grew silent forever" (535).

Unlike previous textbooks that include an isolated paragraph on Mickiewicz, Bartoszewicz's book mentions Mickiewicz literally hundreds of times. For Bartoszewicz, all roads lead to Mickiewicz: his discussion of Brodziński leads to a discussion of Mickiewicz, as do his discussions of Zan, Odyniec, Chodźko, Krasiński, Stowacki, and the poets of the Ukrainian school. The entire last section in his periodization of Polish literature is entitled "The Period of Mickiewicz" [*okres Mickiewicza*] (501–644). Mickiewicz is now listed among the poetic geniuses of world literature, such as Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Schiller (508). Just as Kiliński mentions Mickiewicz's acquaintance with Goethe (however tenuous) as a way of demonstrating Mickiewicz's importance, Bartoszewicz cites Pushkin as one of Mickiewicz's many admirers: "Pushkin paid him a glorious public tribute, and he was the greatest Russian poet" (509).

An important source for both Kiliński's and Bartoszewicz's depictions of Mickiewicz was Lucjan Siemieński's 1855 obituary, "Adam Mickiewicz: Posthumous Recollections."⁹ In addition to his work as an editor, literary critic, translator, and poet, Siemieński was a distinguished insurrectionist who was wounded and subsequently imprisoned in Russia several times beginning in 1831. He was also a contemporary of Mickiewicz and had personal contacts with him. Excerpts from Siemieński's text were republished in the first official textbook of Polish literature used in Galicia, the four-volume *Polish Primer for Use in the Upper Classes in State Gymnasia*, which appeared in Lviv between 1853 and 1867. The third volume, published in 1862, opens with a six-page biography of Mickiewicz, with Siemieński listed as its author. The text reflects a careful editing job of Siemieński's biographical sketch, with individual sentences or words being omitted in order to excise certain parts or features of the poet's life. The most obvious omissions include all references to Mickiewicz's romantic interests and to women in general (including Maryla Wereszczakówna, Zinaida Volkonskaia, and most mentions of his wife). Other omissions include his involvement in the Philareth affair and the Towiański circle, his friendship with

Tomasz Zan (and references to him in *Forefathers' Eve III*), his relationships with Russians (Aleksandr Pushkin in particular), and the November uprising. These omissions were likely made for political reasons, or because certain material was deemed inappropriate for schoolchildren.

What remains intact from the original are sections describing the poet's subjective experience. One such fragment gives a detailed account of the source of inspiration for Mickiewicz's first poem:

A fire broke out in Nowogródek. This destructive element in the dark night, beautiful in its very horror, the turmoil of the rescuers, the cries of women, and that group of sad victims sitting on a pile of charred remains, upon which the morning sun shed its light so serenely and cheerfully as if no misfortune had occurred—all of this awakened the young fantasy so that it had to flow out in a versified description of that event. This was his first effort; it is unfortunate that it is unknown. (1)

Given the fact that the said poetic response did not survive, this account provides an incredible amount of detail about Mickiewicz's experience—unknowable detail in fact—through a conflation of the narrator's point of view with that of Mickiewicz. In his employment of free indirect discourse, Siemieński replaces Mickiewicz's lost poem with his own poetic description of the contradictory “dark night, beautiful in its very terror,” “sad victims,” and “serene and cheerful sun,” thereby recreating the experience of the *wieszcz* for the reader.

As in other textbooks of literature from this period, Siemieński's account refers to Mickiewicz as “Adam” and “our poet.” As indicated in the previous example, Mickiewicz's mental and emotional states are emphasized and foregrounded. For example, when describing the young Mickiewicz during the Napoleonic wars, Siemieński notes that “the specter of military glory began to pester him while awake and in his sleep” (1). He “plunged into his university studies with ardor” (2); he was witness to the battle between the classicists and romantics, which “found its way into his fiery soul, expanded the boundaries of his imagination, created in him a completely new feeling” (2). Siemieński describes how an “ever stronger inspiration awakened in him” during his walks in the Kowno countryside; although this new version of the text omits the source of his inspiration (Maryla Wereszczakówna), the report of his internal state remains intact. In Russia, after his travels to the Crimea, Mickiewicz moved to Moscow where he “felt a strong sense of suffering in his breast” (4). Siemieński goes into particular detail describing Mickiewicz's improvisations in Russian literary salons: he describes a particular evening, Christmas Eve, 1828 (i.e., Mickiewicz's birthday), when “some virtuoso was playing the piano” and Mickiewicz was asked to improvise on the theme of Samuel Zborowski (a sixteenth-century magnate and later the subject of Słowacki's drama by the same title). Mickiewicz's improvisation took on the proportions of “a Shakespearean drama.” Siemieński states, “it must have been a marvelous scene [*cudna miata byé tam*

scena] . . . the *wieszcz* was so taken away with excitement that his physical strength did not match his power of inspiration—he fainted” (5). In Siemieński’s comment on how it “must have been”—a grammatical structure that appears frequently in his original text—he imagines and recreates what these actual experiences “must have been like” for Mickiewicz.

Even in its abbreviated form, Siemieński’s biographical account of Mickiewicz in the 1862 *Polish Primer* approaches hagiography. In addition to the numerous references to the strength of Mickiewicz’s religious faith, Siemieński presents the young Mickiewicz as one predestined to become a national poet: all of Mickiewicz’s experiences from birth to death are presented as evidence of his divine calling. On the first page, Siemieński explains that Mickiewicz never took up arms for the national cause because “that was not his occupation; Providence had another destiny in store for him, [one] in which he would have no equal” (1). When describing Mickiewicz’s talent for improvisation, Siemieński remarks that it was fueled by “divine inspiration” (5). In her discussion of the presentation of Mickiewicz at the end of the nineteenth century in the popular *Illustrated Weekly*, Beth Holmgren describes a similar phenomenon—an “admixture of homage and patronage . . . [that] transformed the image of the artist in the *Illustrated Weekly* from transcendent *wieszcz* into what I term the patronized saint” (165).

Włodzimierz Spasowicz’s “Survey of the History of Polish Literature,” which appeared in Aleksandr Pypin’s *Survey of the History of Slavic Literatures*, likewise reflects these trends. A graduate of St. Petersburg University in law, Spasowicz worked as a professor in St. Petersburg and had contacts with the Polish emigration. His literary activities as co-founder of the St. Petersburg journal, *Słowo*, editor of the Warsaw journal, *Ateneum*, and his trilateralist political stance made him an important figure in the development of Polish and Russian cultural ties (*Nowy Korbut* 573).¹⁰ A major difference between Pypin and Spasowicz’s *History* and the others discussed above is that it was written and published in Russian. As the first comprehensive history of Slavic literatures, it contains individual chapters on Bulgarian, Serbian, Czech, Polish, and Russian literatures, plus a twelve-page chapter on the little known Lusatian literature. The only chapter not authored by Pypin is Spasowicz’s chapter on Polish literature, which is also the longest and most extensive in the book (covering 131 pages, compared to seventy-one pages dedicated to Russian literature, thirty-five of which discuss Ukrainian-Ruthenian literature).¹¹ Writing in 1898, the literary historian Semen Vengerov remarks that Pypin’s *History*

represents the only thorough account of the thousand-year course of the history of the literature of the western and southern Slavs published to date. It is extremely remarkable not only as a collection of studies on the spiritual life of Slavdom, but also for its genuinely scientific method. At that time [i.e., in 1865] a significant part of our Slavists who readily called them-

selves *Slavo*-philes in theory, in practice delved into *Russo*-philism and latched one-sidedly onto all of Slavdom as if all Slavs shared a single faith and adhered to a “common Slavic” (actually Byzantine) world view. Pypin [by contrast] shows the greatest of respect and complete tolerance for the spiritual makeup of each of the separate Slavic nationalities. He appears as a decided opponent of the absorption of one nationality by another, and holds to the ideal of the development of world culture and national individualities at the same time. (893)

Another important feature that distinguishes Spasowicz’s presentation of Polish romanticism from those in previous histories is the new vantage point provided by the 1863 Polish uprising, the brutal suppression of which brought revolutionary romanticism to its end as an aesthetic and political program. In other words, for Spasowicz romanticism is a closed (as opposed to a productive) literary movement. His treatment of Polish romanticism, subtitled “the period of Lelewel and Mickiewicz,” covers thirty-seven pages—more than the entire section on Russian literature. According to Spasowicz, Polish romanticism issued from two main sources: the literature of the folk, and “the fresh legends of a great past that had just fallen into its grave”—i.e., the historical past before the final partition of Poland in 1795. In Spasowicz’s view, the appearance of early romantic writing in Polish literature was spontaneous: “suddenly,” “all at once” the poets Zaleski, Goszczyński, an entire group of Ukrainian poets, and “Mickiewicz with his Lithuanians” appeared on the literary scene, and their early “childlike experiments” of ballads and imitations of European romantics marked the beginning of romanticism in Poland (458).

The greater part of Spasowicz’s discussion of Polish romanticism (thirty pages out of thirty-seven) is dedicated to romanticism before 1830; his discussion of romanticism after the uprising of 1830–1831, with its explicitly political message and messianic overtones, is comparatively brief and cursory, reflecting stricter censorship policies in the Russian partition after the uprising of 1863. Two of the main representatives of romanticism in its second phase, Słowacki and Krasiński, are once again relegated to the background: their biographies cover only a paragraph each and include little more than their publishing histories. Their contribution to Polish literature is summarized in one line: “The group of talented poets composed of Mickiewicz, Zaleski, and Goszczyński was joined by new [poets], among whom Krasiński and Słowacki occupied the first place” (487). Mickiewicz, meanwhile, is given greater emphasis than ever before as “the leading representative of nineteenth-century Polish poetry” (473).

Spasowicz’s discussion of Mickiewicz covers nearly twelve pages (476–87) and includes many instances emphasizing Mickiewicz’s thoughts and feelings. In describing the young poet’s reaction to Napoleon’s march on Russia in 1812, Spasowicz writes that “this event blinded the ardent youth as a radiant vision and remained forever engraved in his memory. The Polish legions marched with Napoleon[’s army], the white eagles alongside

the gold eagles of the first empire, and both of these representations became intricately linked in Mickiewicz's soul" (477). In contrast to the 1862 *Polish Primer*, Spasowicz's text underscores the role of Maryla Wereszczakówna and his unrequited love for her as the primary source of inspiration for his early work: "the love for a woman that was not mutual gave Mickiewicz the initial impetus for [his] original creation" (478). Spasowicz continues,

It was then that the primary feature of Mickiewicz's psychological qualities was revealed — a rare, masculine sensitivity, making him capable of feeling joy and grief incomparably stronger than others. His enthusiasm for every grand idea was ardent, strong, shaking all [of his] nerves, tensing all the muscles of the will — an eagle's flight of genius, directed by faith in achieving even the unattainable and the impossible. (479)

Here, Mickiewicz's uniqueness is described in purely subjective, unverifiable terms: he is capable of feeling emotions "incomparably stronger than others."

As a text written explicitly for a Russian audience, Spasowicz's "Survey of the History of Polish Literature" places a strong emphasis on Russo-Polish ties. His presentation of Mickiewicz's Russian exile emphasizes the friendly reception and assistance he received from Russians during his nearly five-year stay. According to Spasowicz, this experience made Mickiewicz no less than "the link" between Polish and Russian literatures (483, 487). He writes of Mickiewicz's friendship with Pushkin (483), underscoring this relationship a second time in a casual reference embedded in a description of Mickiewicz's inspiration:

Mickiewicz did not know how to control his inspiration; in those moments when, in the words of his friend Pushkin "the quick coldness of inspiration raised the hairs on his forehead," Mickiewicz addressed the prophetic Pythias, the ancient *sacer vates*, burning with a divine flame. Crushed with grief, he would fall to the ground in despair, approaching madness. . . . Mickiewicz's despair had an active quality: it was not expressed in passive yearning, but burst out in the howling wail of a wounded man in protest, with a thirst for vengeance, the shout of a warrior who does not surrender even in the moment of death. Suffering has never been more fruitful, more productive. . . . miraculous works flowed out of [this] most pained heart, works distinguished by a freshness and directness of feeling not to be imitated. (479–80)

Again, references to Mickiewicz's tortured emotional states — his "grief," "despair," and "suffering" (but productive suffering), not to mention his "divine flame" — are central to the description. Like other literary historians of the period, Spasowicz describes Mickiewicz's development as a writer in national terms: "one deep feeling reigned undivided in the poet's soul — a connection to his native land, to the society in which he grew up. These feelings inspired Mickiewicz's three greatest works: *Konrad Wallenrod*, part three of *Forefathers' Eve*, and *Pan Tadeusz*" (482).

Spasowicz emphasizes not only Mickiewicz's suffering and emotional

turmoil, but that of other major writers as well. When discussing Kazimierz Brodziński, for example, he writes that he “suffered excessively in early childhood from a mean stepmother who did not love him” (459). In his discussion of Antoni Malczewski, he states, “Malczewski was what is called a ‘pantywaist’ [*beloruchka*], tender and beautiful like a woman; nervous and overly sensitive to the highest degree, suffering painfully from every setback, he constantly brooded on the bitter fallout of unsatisfied desires in his soul” (462). Spasowicz’s account of the historian Joachim Lelewel, whose contribution is given an almost equal weight to that of Mickiewicz, reveals many intimate biographical details and delves into the depths of his character. The reader learns that “in practical matters he [Lelewel] was a most unresourceful person and an eccentric” (474). He was elected as a deputy of the ill-fated Sejm of 1829 and served during the entire rebellion until he was forced to emigrate, to “live out the miserable and bitter existence of a wanderer without money, without the very books, notes and extracts on which he had spent so much effort” (476). Spasowicz remarks that Lelewel spent twenty-nine years of “frightful, yet self-willed destitution,” sometimes depriving himself of “firewood and a hot meal in order to acquire a certain book or atlas” (476). That Spasowicz dedicates so much of his history of Polish literature to a historian only underscores the connection between literature and history, one of the most distinctive features of Polish literature under the partitions.¹²

The examples from these four texts demonstrate a number of additional phenomena in nineteenth-century Polish literary development, the formation of the Mickiewicz cult among them. What is new and significant about the subjective turn in literary biography in the early 1860s is that it isolates the development of a specific phenomenon within a historical moment, thereby shedding light on the relationship between canon building and nation building in this period. It is no accident that the change in presentation of literary biography occurred precisely during the transition from romanticism to positivism, and exhibited the influence of both movements: the romantic topos of the conflation of art and life, and the employment of narrative devices from realist prose fiction in historical narration. Textbook authors encouraged readers to identify with literary figures as they would with heroes in a novel, and to perceive their subjective experiences as objective, knowable truths. The simultaneous appearance of such portrayals in each of the partitions of Poland served to unite millions of people living under different political systems and censorship policies through the creation (or to use Hobsbawm’s term, the “invention”) of a unified literary tradition. This development demonstrates that the popularization of Mickiewicz as a familiar figure in educational curricula played a decisive role in his widespread acceptance as a national *wieszcz*.

NOTES

- 1 The first critics to discuss Mickiewicz as a national poet in print were Franciszek Grzymata in his 1823 article, "The Poetry of Adam Mickiewicz," and Franciszek Salezy Dmochowski in his 1825 "Remarks on the Present Condition, Spirit, and Tendency of Polish Poetry."
- 2 This and all subsequent translations are mine.
- 3 For a discussion of the respective state education policies in the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian partitions of Poland, see Stowiński and Kulka.
- 4 While a number of biographies published earlier emphasize the writer's subjective experience (see, for instance, Roman Koropecy's discussion of Antoni Matecki's 1842 biographical sketch, "O życiu i pisamach Mickiewicza," 101), such accounts did not appear in school texts until the 1860s.
- 5 This version of the biography appears verbatim in the 1838 and 1848 editions, and with slight changes in the 1851, 1858, and 1859 editions. Due to censorship policies, the 1856 Warsaw edition contains no mention of Mickiewicz, whereas the 1861 Warsaw edition reinstates him with a slightly expanded version of this text.
- 6 This new content indicates that Kiliński used as sources Antoni Edward Odyniec's reminiscences of Mickiewicz (from *Letters from Travels* [*Listy z podróży*], which first appeared in Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki's 1858 "Wspomnienie o życiu Adama Mickiewicza") and Lucjan Siemieński's 1855 obituary of Mickiewicz.
- 7 Norwid is absent from both 1860 editions. Although he is mentioned in several Polish literary histories from the 1840s (such as Łukaszewicz [1848], ed. Kalinka and Mułkowski, 181–84), Norwid would remain an obscure figure until his rediscovery by Zenon [Miriam] Przesmicki at the turn of the century in the pages of *Chimera*.
- 8 In addition to the three *wieszcz*e, Bartoszewicz discusses Poł, Chodźko, Odyniec, Korsak, Gorecki, Massalski, and representatives of the Ukrainian school—Zaleski, Goszczyński, Grabowski, and Padura.
- 9 The obituary appeared serially in the Cracow journal, *Czas* (of which Siemieński was chief editor at the time), and was republished a year later as a forty-two page pamphlet under the same title. In Roman Koropecy's doctoral dissertation tracing the genesis, development, and intertextual connections between the major biographies of Mickiewicz in the nineteenth century, he calls Siemieński's biographical account an "idealized" version of the poet's life that represents "a rather fantastic effort in reinterpreting Mickiewicz in the spirit of conservative Catholicism" (141).
- 10 According to Norman Davies, the ideology of triloalism held that "the best interests of the Polish nation could only be maintained by fostering harmonious relations between all three partitioning powers" (33).
- 11 Czech literature follows in length with a chapter covering 104 pages, followed by Serbian (78 pages), Russian (71 pages), and Bulgarian literature (40 pages).
- 12 See Janion and Żmigrodzka, also Markiewicz, for comprehensive bibliographies of the vast literature on this topic.

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