

IGNACY KRASICKI



THE MOUSEIAD AND OTHER MOCK EPICS

TRANSLATED BY
CHARLES S. KRASZEWSKI

GLAGOSLAV PUBLICATIONS

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by Ignacy Krasicki

Translated from the Polish and introduced by
Charles S. Kraszewski

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CONTENTS

IGNACY KRASICKI:

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY POLAND'S... EVERYTHING 7

THE MOUSEIAD. 41

MONACHOMACHIA OR THE WAR OF THE MONKS. 97

ANTI-MONACHOMACHIA 129

THE CHOCIM WAR. 161

GLOSSARY 233

BIBLIOGRAPHY. 244

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR. 245



IGNACY KRASICKI

1735 – 1801

INTRODUCTION

IGNACY KRASICKI: EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

POLAND'S... EVERYTHING

Polish culture is studded with polymaths. From our own days counting backwards, we note Tadeusz Kantor, who revolutionised theatre while also being an important avant-garde painter, and then the giant shoulders he stood upon: Stanisław Wyspiański, dramatist, painter, poet and acolyte of Wagnerian total art, and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy), novelist, dramatist, painter, photographer, and scientist (who researched, on his own person, the effects of psychotropic narcotics on the artistic consciousness. In comparison with them, Ignacy Krasicki is 'merely' a writer. Yet, although he is rarely mentioned in the company of the magnates of the Polish pen, such as Adam Mickiewicz and Jan Kochanowski, he dominates the age in which he flourished like no other. Certainly, Mickiewicz, the national bard of Poland, introduced Romanticism, singlehandedly, to Poland, and created that immense metaphysical theatrical tradition known as Polish Monumental Drama, to which both Wyspiański and Kantor are indebted. Kochanowski, the greatest poet of Poland before Mickiewicz, and the only Renaissance poet of pan-European significance from the Slavic lands, invigorated the stale genre of the lament with his *Threnodies*, translated the Psalter, and created what is arguably the finest humanist tragedy on the Greek model written in the sixteenth century with his *Dismissal of the Grecian Envoys*. Yet neither of them incarnates their age as does Ignacy Krasicki (1735–1801). For this prince of the Church, who served as Primate of Poland from 1795 to 1801, friend and advisor of the last king of Poland and prized acquaintance of that collector of luminaries, Friedrich the Great of Prussia, excelled in all genres of literature typical to the Enlightenment. He is Poland's LaFontaine on account of his *Bajki i przypowieści* [Fables and Parables, 1779–1802], Poland's

Swift, due to his trenchant poetic *Satyry* [Satires, 1779], Poland's Voltaire and Diderot, as the creator of the peripatetic novel in Polish with his *Milołaja Doświadczynskiego Przypadki* [The Adventures of Mikołaj Doświadczynski, 1776, the name of whose hero, like Voltaire's 'Candide', is a *nomen omen*, deriving from the Polish word for 'experience' — *doświadczenie*], and Poland's Pope (*Alexander Pope*, that is; the younger son of a magnate clan, he entered the Church more from career concerns than, perhaps, vocation), in his marvellous mock-epics, which form the matter of the present translation. To this constellation of literary excellence we must add his contributions to the budding field of journalism, as a contributing editor to the *Monitor* (1772, much of the content of which were translations and adaptations from the *Spectator*), his work on a two-volume encyclopaedia, and — last but not least — sermons and homiletic writings. Considering the brilliance with which Krasicki excelled in every genre he attempted (save, perhaps, his works for the stage and the less than scintillating serious epic *Chocim War*, also included here), it is difficult to imagine the eighteenth century in Central Europe without him. While there are other important poets of the Neoclassical Age in Poland — Franciszek Karpiński, Adam Naruszewicz and Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz spring to mind — none of them embody the witty *esprit* of the Enlightenment Age as does Krasicki. And nowhere, in Krasicki's writings, is that gorgeously light touch and stinging wit more apparent, than in the mock epics the *Mouseiad* (1775), the *Monachomachia* (1778), and its seeming retraction, the *Anti-Monachomachia* (1780). The late great Slavist and comparatist Harold B. Segel is spot-on when he writes: 'the good bishop's mock-epic poems [...] are the most impressive examples of his literary gifts'.¹

KRASICKI'S MOCK EPICS

The *Mouseiad* [*Myszeidos*] is often spoken of in the context of the pseudo-Homeric *Batrachomyomachia* [War of the Frogs and Mice], a Hellenistic work dating from the fourth century BC, at

¹ Harold B. Segel, Review of Hoisington's translation of Mikołaj Doświadczynski, *The Slavic and East European Review*, 38/4 (Winter 1994): 705-706, p. 706.

the earliest, and since classical times ascribed to Homer. Krasicki himself makes a bow of courtesy in this direction in Canto III. But the personification of animals as exemplars of human foibles is an ancient tradition, stretching back to Aesop and through LaFontaine, and, as we mention above, Krasicki was no stranger to this sort of writing, master as he was of the animal fable.

To give just two short examples of this, from his *Fables and Parables*, we offer first ‘The Lamb and the Wolves’:

Who seeketh spoil is quick to rationalise.
Two wolves a straying lamb took by surprise:
‘You’ll eat me?’ cried the lamb, ‘and by what right?’
‘Thou’rt tasty, lost, and we’ve an appetite’.

Krasicki, born in the Royal Republic of Poland in 1735, would turn 60 when his nation was wiped off the map of Europe upon its partitioning between the Empires of Prussia, Russia and Austria. The first of these partitions, when Russia and Prussia carved away chunks of Poland in 1772, saw the See of Warmia, of which Krasicki was then the bishop, torn away from Poland and annexed to Prussia. Although Krasicki’s patriotism has been questioned from time to time — mainly due to his friendship with the King of Prussia, to whom, however, he never paid official homage — it is easy to see in these four simple lines his stinging assessment of the ‘might makes right’ policies which were to lead, eventually, to his nation’s disappearance from the political map of Europe, never more to figure on it until 1918.

The reasons for the weakening of the once strong Kingdom of Poland, which was the largest geographical entity in Europe during the Renaissance, and which waged several successful wars against both Muscovy and the Ottoman Empire, are various and murky, and a bit far afield for the introduction to a collection of literary texts. Suffice it to say that there are few black and white hats in history. One man’s compromise on behalf of a greater good is treason in the eyes of the idealist. For example, in 1792, a group of Polish nobles, including King Stanisław Poniatowski, rose up, with Russian help, against the reformers who sought to strengthen the nation against future manipulation by their Russian and German neighbours. This is the Targowica Confederacy, named from the city in which it was

first organised. Whatever their motives were in turning their weapons against the enlightened Four-Years' Diet of 1791 (which ratified the first modern Constitution in Europe, and the second in the world after the American), Krasicki leaves no doubt as to how he assesses those who act underhandedly, for their own benefit, in the second fable we offer, 'The Heron, the Fish, and the Crab':

A heron, as the story's told,
A little blind, and lame, and old,
Finding himself too slow to catch
His meal of fish, this plan did hatch:
He told the fish: 'I've heard something
Which for you has an evil ring.'
The fish swam up, and frightened, said:
'Speak: of what should we be afraid?'

 'Yesterday,
 I heard men say
That it's not really worth the fret
To fish with hook and line and net:
"Let's drain the pond, and when it dries,
We'll march right in and grab the prize".

The panic of the fish was great.
'I pity you in your sad state',
The heron sighed, 'Yet such a woe
Can be avoided — even so:
Not far from here's a bubbling creek.
There will you find the peace you seek.
Thus, even though the pond be dried,
You'll frolic yet in the brisk tide.'
'So take us there!' the fish implored.
The heron wavered, hedged, demurred;
At last, letting himself be swerved,
 Began to serve.

He picked them up, as if to bear them thence,
And ate each one behind the fence.

He thought to fool the crabs with the same news.
One of them, though, saw through the deadly ruse:
Perceiving that the heron schemed his wreck,
He acted swiftly, wrung the villain's neck.

A belly full, a strangled throat:
Traitors take note.

Is the *Mouseiad*, with its plot of a small nation — that of the mice and rats — fighting for its life against the overwhelming odds of larger states — that of the cats, and the reluctant human king Popiel — an allegory of Krasicki's homeland battling bullies abroad and traitors within? Opinion on this point has been divided since the poem first appeared in 1775. For example, whether or not the vicious cat king Mruczyśław is to be understood as the overbearing representative of Catherine the Great in Poland, Nikolai Repnin, is unascertainable today. As Krasicki's modern biographer, Tadeusz Dworak, points out, Krasicki subjected the *Mouseiad* to so many revisions, including alterations carried out after King Stanisław had had a chance to read and comment upon the work in manuscript, that it is impossible to find a key that would match all fictional characters, and events, with people and events contemporary to the poet.² In his monograph on the poet, Józef Tomasz Pokrzywniak cites Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski, a contemporary of the poet's, who states that while “originally written with a satirical aim in mind, the author later changed his mind and made of it a pure game, entertainment, a joke. In its present shape, the poem appears to Dmochowski to be “something rather pointless”³ [i.e. self-referential, not a comment upon any political reality — CSK].

Of course, the work as it is begs to be pulled apart as some sort of roman-à-clef. Considering the almost anarchic nature of the noble democracy then current in Poland — according to which no decision could be taken in Parliament, however grave, without universal agreement of all members (the so-called ‘golden freedom’ or *liberum*

2 Cf. his ‘Discussion on the Allegoric Nature of the *Mouseiad*’, Tadeusz Dworak, *Ignacy Krasicki* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1987), pp. 138–168.

3 Józef Tomasz Pokrzywniak, *Ignacy Krasicki* (Poznań: UWM, 2016), p. 68.

veto. A common catchword of the time was *Polska nierządem stoi* [Poland stands by lack of government]) — is it any wonder that Krasicki's depiction of the mice and rats' parliament in Canto II should be taken as a comment upon that Diet debating in Warsaw?

'So this is why I've called you here today:
That you might find some way out of this crisis.
I'm sure you sense what I don't need to say:
No time this, for broil 'twixt rats and mice is —
Your wits united must be put in play.
For should we fail — I shudder what the price is!
All rifts now heal, stifle all recrimination —
At least for now — toil together, for our nation!'

No vain words these, his call for unity;
For ages, both stirps of the rodent race,
Though kindred, would flare up in enmity
From time to time, injuring all estates
Unto the very loss of liberty.
Civil unrest undoes the proudest states!
Only non-rodent foes gain from such spats,
When rats quarrel with mice, and mice bicker with rats.

Furthermore, although the poet set his tale in the legendary age of Poland — the story of tyrant King Popiel devoured by mice in his stronghold at Lake Gopło, first related by the mediaeval chronicler Wincenty Kadłubek — is not the drunken dream of the despairing monarch something of a warning to his friend, Stanisław August, about the obligations imposed on him by the trust placed in him by the people?

Sunk deep in sleep, in dreams before his eyes
His poisoned forefathers, in sad parade
— The nation's glory once — gloomily rise,
In mourning now, who once had been arrayed
In victors' laurels. Popiel, in such wise
Pierced with remorse, and with terror half flayed

That barely he could rule his respiration,
Must now give ear to their dark denunciation.
(Canto X)

Still, as Dworak points out, referring to the conscious 'blurring' or 'erasure' of whatever allegory may have originally been intended, '[*The Mouseiad* is a] poem, which gives rise to a thousand conjectures, but does not allow for any precise interpretation'.⁴ What is most important is that the work does not suffer at all because of this. Rather, true to the eighteenth-century approach to literature, the work is a general comment on the failings and trials common to all humans. Just as in the case of the above-cited fables, in that whatever Polish particulars they may possess, they are understandable to all men to whom injustice and treason are repugnant, so it is with Krasicki's *Mouseiad*. Is it a warning to, or castigation of, the Poles? Sure. But even those who have hardly heard of Poland, to whom Polish history is unknown, can profit by its reading. Krasicki, like Swift and Voltaire and Pope, is a Great European if there ever was one.

Turning to the genre of the mock-epic, which came into full blossom in the so-called 'long' European eighteenth century, it can be most easily described in contrast to the serious epic, which it travesties. Where the epic is lengthy and written in the loftiest poetic style, the mock epic is short — the *Rape of the Lock* is made up of only five short cantos, and while the *Mouseiad* almost reaches the Vergilian twelve books, these too are succinct, and the poetry of the mock epic, far from being lofty, flashes with humour and puns and crisp couplets. Where it does strike an elevated tone, almost always, it does so for reasons of satire. For the epic to be an epic it must have a truly weighty theme. Virgil's *Aeneid* treats of the foundation of Rome; Milton's *Paradise Lost* (and *Regained*), chronicle salvation history. Krasicki's war of cats and mice — why, even the human actors, when urged by King Popiel to set off as a force allied to the cats, rebel in shock at their sovereign's wishes. *Make war against mice? Are you serious?* If the theme of the *Mouseiad*, within the fictional frame of the narrative, is important, it is only so from the perspective of... mice and rats. And here, perhaps, is Krasicki's greatest coup (though none to welcome to Polish ears): greatness and

4 Dworak, p. 152.

tragedy are relative. What is a matter of immense significance to us, may seem a minor squabble, an insignificant event in the stream of time, from the perspective of others, or of the ages. Finally, to give one more characteristic of the epic for comparison, we may point out the traditional dual plane of action. In Homer's epics, and that of Virgil — and that of Vyasa in India, for that matter — the trials and triumphs of man on earth are of note to the immortals in the skies, who not only look down upon the action taking place on the human plane, they also enter into the broils as well, on this side or that. In the *Mouseiad*, God is — of course! — entirely absent, as unconcerned about the rat-cat squabble as Voltaire's sultan is about the rats on the ship he sends to Egypt on a trade mission. The 'supernatural' plane is represented by a comic witch, and the traditional journey of the epic hero into the world of wonders is here undertaken by the rat king Gryzomir, who, perforce, sails panicked through the skies, hanging on for dear life behind the hag on her broom. Which, when he comes back down to earth, impresses no one, really; his brother's only response to it is an uneasiness about the murine monarch's seemingly unnatural desire to ally himself with... the bats.

As we note above, Krasicki's writing is universal. People of all national and ethnic backgrounds, of all eras, one would like to say, can enjoy the *Mouseiad* for passages such as this, from Canto III:

It's not long till Popiel's court comes to know
How many cats in battle met their doom.
The chaos and despair steadily grow
As anguished dames by turns wax wroth and swoon.
As fur in rage, now hair is torn in woe;
As blood in streams, now tears and sighs — monsoons!
The keeners' choir by Princess Duchna's led,
For Filuś, ah, sweet Filuś! Filuś the cat is dead!

Filuś delightful! Filuś kind and good!
Filuś who on each couch and bed would laze!
Filuś of graceful ballerino's foot!
Filuś who never fasted all his days!
Filuś abhorred of all the jealous brood
For how, and on whose breast, he snugly lay!

But now all that is past, the sun has set
On faithful Filuś; Duchna has no one to pet.

Eyes that were bright now of their light are spent;
She weeps, as does the court in sympathy.
Nought can console her — and so all lament
Poor Filuś, praising him most mournfully,
Including more than one tear-sodden gent
(Who sobs and weeps to mask authentic glee)
All wring their hands, dig furrows with their knees,
Preparing for the day of the cat's obsequies.

There is nothing particularly Polish, or even eighteenth-century, in these lines. We all know someone who takes trifles a bit too seriously, and those who play along with that person's whims. Perhaps Krasicki even has us look in the mirror here? Such, as he is to put it in the *Anti-monachomachia*, is the satirist's task: to poke fun in general, 'teaching sweetly', without the meanness of pasquilles, directed at named individuals. There, in Canto III, he writes:

The weapons of wit can be harmful, snide,
But helpful too, when they're necessary.
Behind the jokes, salubrious warnings hide,
And he, who opts to employ them boldly
Deserves not to be harshly vilified,
Oppressed and insulted vengefully!
Cast off your frenzy, still your mournful moans!
You too are men: Will you cast the first stones?

And so, in Canto IV of the *Mouseiad*, Krasicki — chronically in debt — fires off a salvo against usurers, without even hinting at the fact that he might actually have some real person in mind. Speaking of the bursting granaries to which the routed mice repair after their thrashing in battle by the cats, he describes them as the property of just such a miser:

A usurer, for forty years there breeds
Lucre and gallstones (with his flinty heart),

Having usurped the land with dodgy deeds,
Grown rich on toil in which he took no part.
Believing in no God, he worships greed
And raises stinginess into an art.
The heartless dastard, wasted thin with bile,
Is but the guardian of his unused, useless pile.

Whether or not Krasicki was letting off some steam here, it is one of the few times that the satire takes a bitter, and serious, turn. But in general, the stereotypes he satirises in his mock epics are benign ones. Just as no one would dare suggest that all women are as flighty and moved by trivialities as Princess Duchna described above, after the death of her pet cat, so the satirical depictions of the monks in the *Monachomachia* derive from the stock, sardonic characterisations of religious life in Europe, which no one — and certainly not a Catholic prelate, however ‘enlightened’ — would suggest is endemic to all tonsured, cowled, and wimpled souls.

Curiously enough, what seems outlandish to our ears — a brawl of monks — is not as freakish as it first appears. During Krasicki’s own lifetime, in the reign of August III the Saxon, who proceeded Stanisław Poniatowski on the throne, a quarrel erupted between the Polish and Prussian reformed Franciscans concerning the monastery in Dybów near Toruń. It was referred all the way to Rome, which decided in favour of the Polish monks. However, the Prussians, refusing to acknowledge the decree, ‘refused to give over the monastery, appealing to Rome anew. The Polish monks on the other hand, determining to take the monastery by violence if necessary, processed out of Toruń carrying a cross at their head [...] and leading a train of lay people outfitted with clubs ready for the attack and hatchets to chop through the cloister doors...’ It ended in minor bloodshed.⁵

Now, the monks we come across in *Monachomachia* are fond of tippling. Invited to have a swig of the needful, Krasicki’s scholarly monk reacts as if he’d just been led through a closely-argued syllogism:

O! Rarely met with, gift of eloquence!
Who can resist Thy overmastering pow’r?

5 Dworak, p. 181, citing Jędrzej Kitowicz.

To such urgings, the Don had no defence.
Lifting the cup (in the sweat of his brow)
He swigged it down — to replenish his strengths;
Then, to make sure they'd not be flagging now
(The monks were hanging on his every word),
He took a second draught, and (just in case) a third.

They are lazy, good-for-nothing, parasites. The hubbub in the cloister, elicited by the spiteful Hag of Discord, penetrates the innermost chambers of the order, where:

Father Hilary, awakened by the sound,
Bearishly vexed, grumbled, 'What's going on!?'
The Prior, too, blinking from bed of down,
For the first time in years beheld the dawn.
The thickest cushion availed not to drown
The frightful din; so soon the cloister Don
— Damning too-healthy ears — in angry haste
Left book and bed, and into refectory raced.

This theme, along with that of their fondness for drink, most characterises the monks in Krasicki's poem. In Canto II of the *Mouseiad*, the rat-king Gryzomir's court is centred in the main hall of a monastery. Intended by its founder for a library, it has been converted into an opulent larder. In the *Monachomachia*, here too books are forgotten things. Challenged to a dispute by a rival order, Krasicki's heroes must set out on a heroic quest (another epic characteristic!) in search of that strange implement:

'Thus, we must hit the books. Now, ancient lore,
Passed down by generations of our kind,
Declares that, somewhere, we've a hefty store
Of books, patiently waiting for the time
Someone shall crack them open. It's been more
Than thirty years since Alphonse had a mind
To broach the — what d'you call it? — library
Up in the rafters; it's high time we go and see

‘What’s to be found there; perhaps something of use?
Even the slightest bucklers can protect.’
He spoke, but all fell silent. Each refused
To undertake the hazards of the trek;
Each had a fitting, readymade excuse
To shun the deed. At last the monks elect
Two gentle, backward souls to search the nooks
And crannies for those fabled creatures known as — books.

This is all good fun. The closest that Krasicki comes to a rationalist — nearly Protestant — scathing of the cloistered orders is when he mocks them for being superstitious. On the very day when the envoys of the challenging abbey are to appear at his monastery’s door, Fr Raymund, hastening to the cloister gate to gossip with the locale *devotes*, stumbles and falls to the ground. This, as he explains to his friend Fr Rafał, bending over him in concern, is a bad sign:

‘Alas, my friend! In misfortune begun,
Unlucky will unfold this fatal day!
“The first step sets the paths the planets run”
Is what I’ve heard the wisest prophets say.
Nothing can change what Destiny has spun —
I rose, I ran, I fell — and here I lay!
An evil sign — catastrophe awaits!
Today’s no day for gossip at the dear cloister gates!’

Quite un-Christian, and irrational, the faith that the monk places in astrology and predestination: Diderot’s *grand rouleau d’en haut*. But is the satire here directed at the superstition of the monk (which appears only here, for comic effect), or his old-womanish interest in chewing the local fat at the cloister gate (when perhaps he should be at his books, or in the chancel stalls singing the hours? No *ora et labora* type he!) No, Krasicki is far from suggesting that all monks are like this; no more than he would suggest that every comely woman with a prayerbook is a religious hypocrite, such as he — seems to — characterise the Vicegerent’s wife in Canto IV:

Now, she'd a figure full of grace; her eyes,
Half-closed in prayer, at times would flash with flame;
A fetching lisp (although her words were pious),
Dressed modestly (yet such a minxy frame
Reveals itself to each who barely tries
His fancy) in short: she'd mastered the game.
The while she fingered her beads, piously humming,
Hyacinth mused of a different second coming.

'Twas not with thin romances that she fed her
Sweet intellect, not vampire, ghoul, nor wraith;
She read Erasmus, discoursed on d'Agreda
(Her Gothic was pure, of the Age of Faith.)
To hear her scourge sin, you'd have thought her dead, or
Cold to delight, but then, in the next breath,
You caught a... soupçon... of impropriety;
The way she teased, she'd slay a man with piety.

Krasicki is a satirist, but not a scornful mocker. If he deals some smarting blows, they are not directed at women, or monks, or religious life per se (as the righteously incensed monks of the *Anti-monachomachia* would label the author of the *Monachomachia*), but rather at the abuses of the same. And again we are reminded of the *Fables*, so similar in tone, and purpose, to these mock epics. Take 'The Pharisee', for example:

The maid her mistress piqued exactly when
That pious woman's prayers were at an end.
Spinning round, in anger her features set,
And finishing her plea: 'Forgive our debts
As we *our* debtors,' she thumped, walloped, beat.
Lord, may Thy justice ever be as meet.

Writing in the *Slavic and East European Review*, Wanda Dźwigła notes:

Granted, Krasicki fought persistently to bring Enlightenment thought to Polish society. Yet to search for deeper similarities, especially in the religious views of Voltaire and Krasicki, would

be misleading. The Polish poet's satires were never as malicious nor as devastating as were Voltaire's attacks on established institutions in France. Moreover, the purpose of *Monachomachia* was to attack scholasticism and satirise the superstitions, ignorance, gluttony, drunkenness and laziness which prevailed in those religious orders in Poland which had not experienced the influence of Enlightenment thought. Krasicki's satire was witty, not insulting or brutal, nor was it as harsh and sarcastic as Voltaire's attacks on the Church. And most significantly, Krasicki's mockery was designed to improve the clergy, while Voltaire's attacks were designed to destroy the clergy.⁶

But people of his time — and some time after — were not willing to see things this way. According to Dmochowski, *Monachomachia* first saw the light of day in Sans-Souci, where 'Friedrich II gave the author that same apartment in the Sans-Souci palace in which Voltaire had stayed, telling him that in such a place he ought to feel inspired, and write something beautiful'.⁷ This was enough to raise a red flag for Stanisław Tarnowski. Writing over one hundred years after the original publication of the *War of the Monks*, he considered the satirical poem as little less than an act of treason:

There are two reasons why we can't quite hold [*Monachomachia*] in respect. First of all, it cannot be doubted that, if there were bad monasteries, backward monasteries, lazy and full of drunkenness, it was the bishop's job to punish and reform them — but not to mock them. And if it wasn't proper for the bishop to stand on the side of the *philosophes* against the regular orders, all the more so was it not proper for a Pole, after the partitions, to do anything to please and delight old Friedrich.⁸

It was in answer to such criticism — in belated answer, for published four years after the first poem — that Krasicki brought out his

6 Wanda Dzwigala, 'Voltaire and the Polish Enlightenment: Religious Responses', *The Slavic and East European Review* 81/1 (January 2003):70-87, p. 77.

7 Quoted by Pokrzywnia, p. 69.

8 Tarnowski, vol. III, p. 266.

‘retraction’ of the work, the humorously entitled *Anti-Monachomachia*. That he was not over-troubled by the attacks on his person following the *War of the Monks* can be seen in the general tenor of the retraction:

Sloth had no place in this monastery
Wherein she tried to sow her tragic seed;
Here was the pattern of integrity —
A cloister wide-famed for heroic deed,
The choice of all who sought true sanctity,
A granary of faith, where all did feed.
Blessed exemplar! Too feeble is my song
To hymn your praise aright, O fortress true, and strong!

Methinks the poet doth protest too much. As Czesław Miłosz puts it, ‘he seemingly retracts his insinuations, but is even more malicious in his irony’.⁹ Indeed, if the foibles of the monks in *Monachomachia* are grotesque, unbelievable, so the virtues of the monks presented in *Anti-Monachomachia* are just as transparently comic. In the new work, Krasicki does little more than assert, as above, the piety and wisdom and goodness of the tonsured brethren — many of whom are the same, or at least share the same names — as the monks in the previous work, and the careful reader is quick to realise that this too is part of his comic strategy. It is a false retraction, because he has nothing to retract. The over exaggerated vices of *Monachomachia* find a bookending over-exaggeration of virtue in *Anti-Monachomachia*, and in this Krasicki’s deep humanism shines forth. Nor here, nor there is the truth of humanity in general, or religious life in particular, but in the grey, human shades that lie between them. It is an eminently rational argument, *philosophes* or no *philosophes*. As Dworak puts it:

The praise [heaped on the cloister in this work] doesn’t come off as all that convincing. Firstly, because this ideal of a monastery must arouse suspicion — no such monastery was known of in Poland. Secondly, we have here a simple rhetorical contradiction of the opinion expressed in the *Monachomachia*.

9 Czesław Miłosz, *History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley: California, 1983), p. 178.

The caricature of a monastery there is contrasted with a monastery-Utopia here, as if the poet were asking: judge for yourselves which of the two is closer to the truth.¹⁰

There is great, subtle, comedy in the *Anti-Monachomachia*. If it has one flaw, it is that it cannot be properly understood unless one reads it in tandem with the earlier work. Unless one has already met Brother Hyacinth,

Of cloistered sisters the great favourite
(Excepting Rafał), slim, of great beauty,
His cowl — ah, wanton winds toyed with it
As through the sacred halls on dancer's foot he
Glided;

and read through the tantalising scene in Canto IV of *Monachomachia* where Hyacinth, adverse to all fisticuffs, is closeted with the flirty wife of the Vicegerent, one misses the joke entirely in Canto IV of the *Anti-Monachomachia*, where his penchant for dallying with the fair sex — which we have just witnessed! — is overthrown with the simple denial of his being interested in anything other than books. Speaking of the Vicegerent's wife, who sometimes receives the prior, chastely accompanied by another monk, on visits, the poet states:

Hyacinth of such favour never tasted.
No one frequented her, except the prior,
But whether he did or no, he always fasted.
And if he took along with him some friar,
Such visits Hyacinth would deem as wasted.
For vain and vulgar, earthly, he thought all
Corporal delight; he tended book, not bottle.

So, which is it? Monks are lazy, drunken, hypocritical womanisers? Or pious, studious celibate heroes of the cloistered life? The truth, again, lies somewhere between the two extremes. And, as Krasicki points out to his detractors in the *Anti-Monachomachia*, the very point of

¹⁰ Dworak, p. 202.

satire, like the comedy of humours so popularised by Ben Jonson and Molière, is to paint an impersonal, but striking portrait of a human vice. If any individual feel the lash across his or her back, it can only be because they see themselves, like it or not, in the personified trait. As we see in the conversation between the monastery librarian and Father Honoratus, when the latter is moved to the core by what he takes to be a personal attack upon himself, and monastic life in general:

‘But he attacked me!’ ‘Mere coincidence!’
‘Coincidence? He mocked my advanced years!’
‘In person? I suppose there’s a slight chance.
But had he you in mind? That’s far from clear.
How have we been defamed, good Father, since
What he expressed — It didn’t happen here!
Such witty sallies no man ever minds
Unless... within himself, a grain of truth he finds.

‘Mere hazard, that he chanced to use your name.
His Honoratus isn’t him we know.
Are you as stubborn as an ass gone lame?
Which brother finds in you a bitter foe?
Who calls you lazy? Who has ever blamed
You for a drunk, to books and matins slow?
You’re good! You’re wise! Prone to divine afflatus!
That screed’s nothing to do with our Honoratus!’

Whether or not, as the poet states, tongue in cheek, the *Monachomachia* should have been better hidden, so that the Hag of Discord should not find it,¹¹ and pervert its meaning to her own nefarious ends, it is certainly true that those who are scandalised by its lecture are being led astray by something that is not to be found in the poetry itself. Witness the scene in Father Gaudenty’s cell, where the otherwise peaceful (!)

11 Before he had the chance to bring it out in Warsaw himself, a copy of the text, obtained who knows where, was rumoured to be on the presses at Königsberg. Krasicki swiftly wrote to the authorities there, ascribing the authorship to his secretary, and demanding that any copies already printed be confiscated. See Dworak, p. 173 *ff.*

monk is aroused to battle by the Hag of Discord, appearing to him in the guise of Religion:

‘You sleep, my knight, while all the rest are waking?
You’re at your ease, while all your brothers weep?
Are you so lazy, selfishly forsaking
Me, and the common weal, in languorous sleep?
Arise! Your mother’s heart would you be breaking?
Ingrate, her honour thus to rate so cheap!
Arise and help, if you’ve a beating heart!
If you’re no bastard child, arise! And do your part!’

Had she not vanished as quick as she came,
She’d’ve caught herself a smart blow on the ear,
So quick the kindling of his soul took flame,
And he leapt from his cot, anger and fear
Racing with pity through his every vein,
So zealous to avenge his order dear.
But out the window, up into the sky
The peevish hag flew, sounding the dire battlecry.

Here we have one of the most brilliant epic mirrorings in the mock epics of Ignacy Krasicki. Those familiar with Virgil’s *Aeneid* immediately recognise the allusion to that scene when Turnus is approached by the Fury, who first seeks to convince him, in the guise of a familiar, pious woman from the temple, to rise up in arms against the newcomers from Troy. But then, when he responds — quite rationally — that he’ll take what she says under consideration, but won’t rush off to act before he determines what is best for him and his nation, she uncovers her true self, plunges a firebrand into his breast, and effectively possesses him with the misguided rage against Aeneas that will lead him to his death. Had he remained in possession of his faculties, most likely, there would have been no war over Lavinia. Here too, the fury over *Monachomachia* is shown as an artificial thing — a suspension of reason in those who indulge in it. It is an elegant little allusion, and meaningful. Krasicki does not deserve the belittling he receives at the hands of Stanisław Tarnowski, who sums up the genre of the eighteenth-century mock epic, including

the *Mouseiad*, *Monachomachia*, and *Anti-Monachomachia*, in such deprecating terms:

In just such times when poetic creativity had begun to dry up in Europe, it was natural that such a false and tasteless genre should begin to take root. People, who hadn't the requisite talent to compose truly heroic epics, promised themselves fame, success, adulation or money via the composition of parodies, aping heroic forms, in which they consciously set the most trivial and comical themes. The resulting contradiction, unbearable to us, was intended to have a comic effect, and indeed, as it was, it pleased the readers of the time.¹²

It has been said that one needs to be an adult in order to appreciate the literature of the Enlightenment period. Perhaps one must also retain enough of the playful attitude of the child, or, maybe, certain eras produce people who are *too* mature, like Tarnowski, to appreciate the innocuous rough-and-tumble game of satire. At any rate, I feel confident that, whatever the tastes of Europeans circa 1905 may have been, in the subsequent 100+ years that have passed since Tarnowski brought out his great *History of Polish Literature*, we have regained enough of our youth, or our humour, to find mock-epics such as Krasicki's three great comedies more than bearable.

In his book on Krasicki, the French scholar Paul Cazin notes: 'The *Mouseiad* is still read today. Its style retains its charm. Never before had the Polish muse expressed herself with such limpidity and ease, with so elegant a simplicity'.¹³ One agrees wholeheartedly with this statement. Nowhere else, save perhaps in the *Fables and Parables*, is Krasicki's witty, light and comic poetic genius on such evident display as it is in the three mock-epics. He is on firm ground here. It is only when he feels the need to try his strengths at the straight, serious, Virgilian epic, that he comes up short.

12 Tarnowski, vol. III, p. 265.

13 Paul Cazin, *Le prince-évêque de Varmie, Ignace Krasicki* (Paris: Bibliothèque polonaise, 1940), p. 106.

The *Chocim War* (1780) is Ignacy Krasicki's one attempt at the serious epic. It is not the only Polish epic on the topic of the defence of Chocim against the Ottoman Turks in 1621. As a matter of fact, when the title *Wojna chocimska* is brought up in discussions amongst Poles, it is not Krasicki's work that springs to mind, but rather the much earlier *Transakcja Wojna Chocimskiej* of Wacław Potocki, published in 1670. In his critical overview of Krasicki's works, Tadeusz Dworak places the *Chocim War* amongst the *utwory mniejszego znaczenia* ('works of lesser significance') of the poet.¹⁴

The fact that two full-length epics have been written about the Chocim conflict is not as surprising as the fact that any should have been written at all. Although often described as a Polish victory, the three-week-long siege of Chocim was more of a stalemate than a ringing success of Polish arms. While it did avenge the Polish rout at the battle of Cecora — referenced by Krasicki — and firm up the southeastern border of the Polish Commonwealth, negating Ottoman pretensions to the subjugation of Poland and enjoining upon the Porte a policy of peaceful relations with Poland through the border-areas of Moldova it controlled, the Chocim battle really only reaffirmed the *status quo ante bellum*. Now, I do not wish to diminish the heroism or sacrifice of the Poles and their allies battling at Chocim. I am speaking here purely from a literary perspective. For, if one wishes to have a go at the composition of a serious, national, military epic, why choose Chocim and not the truly heroic, indisputably victorious, lifting of the siege of Vienna by Jan III Sobieski? The routing of the Turks at Vienna by the Polish hussars under the command of King Jan is perhaps the most significant, greatest pan-European triumph of Polish arms that ever was. To employ a risky metaphor, which will probably anger some and certainly date me, why ask the thrice-divorced, overweight welfare mother next door out on a date, when Brigitte Bardot has been dropping hints right and left, begging your friends and acquaintances for your phone number? As far as Potocki is concerned, the Lifting of the Siege at Vienna — an epic victory of the same significance for European culture as that of Charles Martel at Poitiers — was still thirteen years in the offing when he decided to write his epic. But

14 See Dworak, pp. 460–479.

Krasicki? It was almost a full century after the fact when, as part of his propaganda battle to swing the Russian Empire into an alliance against the Turks, King Stanisław August commissioned the epic from his friend, the poet-bishop.¹⁵ Was the choice of theme determined by the King? If so, that would let Krasicki — who makes a courteous nod in the direction of Sobieski's future glories in the epic — off the hook. If not, well, the mind is boggled. Sobieski and Vienna had to wait another one hundred years before a writer took the story in hand — until 1878, when the novelist Józef Ignacy Kraszewski brought out his *Pamiętnik Mrocza* [Diary of Mroczek].

Krasicki's *Chocim War* is not a masterpiece. It comes off poorly even in comparison with Potocki's work. Tarnowski calls it Krasicki's 'weakest' poetic work; that may be so, but it is still eminently readable, and as a work of Krasicki's pen, it simply cannot be ignored. However, it is difficult not to agree, at least partially, with the Cracovian critic's assessment of the work, that in it, Krasicki shows no 'creative fantasy; his characters are neither fleshed out nor alive, nor does the poem have any vibrant epic action,' or that the scenes when the guardian angel of Poland appears before the throne of the Almighty in order to beg His protection for the Poles was 'well thought-out, but needed the genius of a Milton' — which, we are to understand, Krasicki did not possess. He then proceeds to a brave attempt at saying something nice about a poet he admires, in the end, but all he can come up with is surely the greatest left-handed compliment ever offered a writer by a critic:

In general, one can say about the poem that it is cool, horizontal, but honest. It's not capable of firing anyone with enthusiasm. Even its contemporaries though it weak, but it contains no great errors of composition, nor grand tonal disharmonies, or improbabilities. Its one error, and it is a cardinal error in a narrative poem, arising in this case from the author's innate lack of imagination, is that his figures have no life of their own, his scenes no movement; nothing stands out or strikes the reader, nothing speaks to his imagination or his feelings; everything is uniformly colourless and correct, pale and cloying. The entirety of the poem gives one the impression of something created by a

15 Dworak, p. 460.

man who had no talent whatsoever, but was a reasonable man nonetheless; a person who could create nothing grand, but was able to fulfil his task in such a way that he comes away from it without having become a laughingstock.¹⁶

Well.

Tarnowski goes on to compare Krasicki's *Chocim War* with that of Potocki — to the latter's advantage — but there's no need to continue. It is enough to say that the *Chocim War* is an interesting text, as a serious epic, in comparison with the mock-epic masterpieces such as the *Mouseiad* and the *Monachomachia*, which is the very reason we include it in our book. Granted, such a work seems not 'innate' to Krasicki, whose genius is comic, not tragic, a biting wit, not given to flights of the sublime. Harold Lloyd and Stan Laurel are geniuses in their own genres — but no one would ever think of casting them as Hamlet. That said, just as Virgil's *Aeneid*, no less a work commissioned for purposes of propaganda, tells us how the Romans wished to be thought of, so in Krasicki's *Chocim War* may we find an interesting mirror for how the Poland of his age — and perhaps not only — wished to present itself to the world at large.

Above all then is the trope of 'Poland, the bulwark of Christianity'. Because of its once great size (at its height, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea), Catholic Poland was in constant contact, and frequent conflict, with the Islamic empire of the Ottoman Turks. The idea of Poland as the bastion of Christian Europe, protecting Christendom from the expansionist onslaught of the Turks, is an old one. Perhaps the greatest expression of this idea is to be found in the poems of the seventeenth-century neo-Latin poet, Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, known and widely-read throughout Latin Europe as Sarbievius. In his poetry, the Jesuit often castigates the quarrelling nations of Europe, especially those

16 Tarnowski, vol. III, pp. 336, 337, 338. Dmochowski was a little more understanding in this regard. Although he considered the *Chocim War* 'rather a bit of history written in verse [than an epic in its own right], with a few fictional passages as decoration', he still applauded the effort: 'To fall short in a great endeavour is not without its glory. The genius of man has striven for three thousand years now to create that "divine work", with only three succeeding: Homer, Vergil and Tasso.' Cited in Pokrzywniak, p. 69.

who have fallen out in armed conflict over the Catholic/Protestant divide, chastising them like some modern Lysistrata for being brothers worshipping at the same altar who still will not unite their strengths against the true threat: the Muslim Turk. The threat posed by the Ottomans is enunciated by Krasicki in Canto I of his epic, where the Sultan, determined upon 'exterminating' the Christian nations, is encouraged by his advisors to:

Spread wide throughout the world [Muhammed's] holy writ.
In slavery we shall the stubborn yoke;
While to the pliable we shall mercy show.
The farthest lands shall know our victory;
All men shall hear our all-triumphant cries,
And Rome, that once held pride of place before
All nations, shall now kneel to Istanbul.

The significance of Chocim, then, is in this trope of 'Poland, Bulwark of Christendom', as the nearby city of Kamieniec in the Ukraine is described thus:

This is the fatal flaw in the bold pagan's
Plans: this fortress of the fatherland, redoubt
Of Christendom.

And so, not conquest, not even elimination of a threat, is what the Poles are after, but showing to the world again that they are the defensive walls of Europe, behind which the Christian nations can sleep securely. It is almost as if Krasicki *opts* for Chocim over Vienna here. For the latter exploit, while saving Vienna from the Turkish yoke and bringing Islamic expansionism to a halt, did not remove the threat, it only set it in abeyance. It would be false, therefore, to overemphasise the Polish victory at the foot of the Kahlenberg. Chocim, on the other hand, delivers a more modest, but all the more realistic and secure promise. The Turks aren't going anywhere, Krasicki seems to suggest. The threat will always be there. But Poland will always remain what it always has been: the firm breastwork against which the Turkish flood will beat in vain, always to recede.

To best understand Krasicki's *Chocim War*, the proper context for the work is not the Virgilian epic tradition, but rather that of the

chanson de geste, of which the mediaeval *Chanson de Roland* is the flagship. In that patriotic retelling of the fateful retreat of Charlemagne through the Spanish Pyrenees, the battle of the Christian French and the ‘pagan’ Moors is shown in garish contrast. Near the end of laisse LXXIX, we read the bald statement that sounds like a battlecry: *Païen unt tort e chrétiens unt dreit!* ‘The Pagans are wrong, and the Christians are right!’ You can’t get a much clearer idea of the poet’s opinion than that. In the *Chanson de Roland* there is no middle ground, no subtle shading, no consideration of the ‘other’ as a human being such as we find in the near-contemporary *Cantar de mio Cid*, in which Christians are sometimes shown as the fiercest enemies of the most Catholic hero Ruy Díaz, and at least one Muslim — Abengalbón — is painted in noble, heroic colours, as a friend and supporter of the Cid. For the author of the *Chanson de Roland*, the Muslims are always *félons* and *traitres*. Similarly, in Krasicki’s work, the fundamental difference between Christian Pole and Muslim Turk can be seen even in their motivation: ‘The infidels with wildness brave, the Poles / By honour urged, emboldened by virtue’, he describes the fight in Canto V. Nothing changes in this regard by Canto XI, near the end of the work: ‘On this side Faith made warriors strong; on that: / A spiteful hatred made the faithless bold’. Examples of Krasicki’s description of Islam as a barbarous, ‘faithless’ creed might be multiplied at will. Suffice it to say that, however true it may have been of him that he ‘believed natural religion to be in accord with that most human of attributes, Reason [and that] he had words of praise for all religions’,¹⁷ that is certainly not the case here! Indeed, ‘Truly, in the *Chocim War* Krasicki concentrates his Christian worldview to a maximum degree, in comparison to the rest of this works.’¹⁸

Likewise, the Poles are shown as loyal, obeying the rulers that God has set over them, out of love. In Canto V, the poet interjects:

Our fathers always were eager to show
The love they bore the ruling dynasty;
Though equal to his majesty in law,
Poles always cherish the blood of their kings.

17 Miłosz, p. 176.

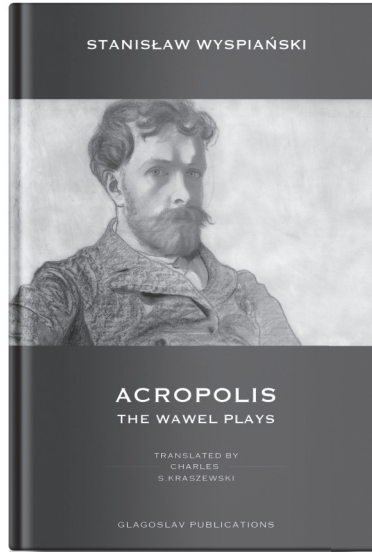
18 Dworak, p. 468.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Charles S. Kraszewski (b. 1962) is a poet and translator. He is the author of three volumes of original verse (*Diet of Nails; Beast; Chanameed*). Several of his translations of Polish and Czech literature have been published by Glagoslav, among which may be found: Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* (2016) and *Sonnets* (2018), Zygmunt Krasiński's *Dramatic Works* (2018), four plays of Juliusz Słowacki (2018), Stanisław Wyspiański's *Acropolis: the Wawel Plays* (2017) and the complete poems and theatrical works of Tytus Czyżewski (*A Burglar of the Better Sort*, 2019). His translations of the poetry of T.S. Eliot, Robinson Jeffers, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti into Polish have appeared in the Wrocław monthly *Odra*. Recently, his English version of Jan Kochanowski's *Dismissal of the Grecian Envoys* was produced at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London, under the direction of James Wallace. He is a member of the Union of Polish Writers Abroad (London) and of the Association of Polish Writers (SPP, Kraków).

Acropolis – The Wawel Plays

by Stanisław Wyspiański

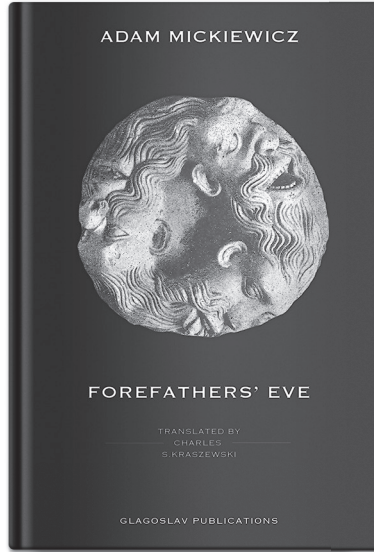


Stanisław Wyspiański (1869-1907) achieved worldwide fame, both as a painter, and Poland's greatest dramatist of the first half of the twentieth century. *Acropolis: the Wawel Plays*, brings together four of Wyspiański's most important dramatic works in a new English translation by Charles S. Kraszewski. All of the plays centre on Wawel Hill: the legendary seat of royal and ecclesiastical power in the poet's native city, the ancient capital of Poland. In these plays, Wyspiański explores the foundational myths of his nation: that of the self-sacrificial Wanda, and the struggle between King Bolesław the Bold and Bishop Stanisław Szczepanowski. In the eponymous play which brings the cycle to an end, Wyspiański carefully considers the value of myth to a nation without political autonomy, soaring in thought into an apocalyptic vision of the future. Richly illustrated with the poet's artwork, *Acropolis: the Wawel Plays* also contains Wyspiański's architectural proposal for the renovation of Wawel Hill, and a detailed critical introduction by the translator. In its plaited presentation of *Bolesław the Bold* and *Skalka*, the translation offers, for the first time, the two plays in the unified, composite format that the poet intended, but was prevented from carrying out by his untimely death.

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Forefathers' Eve

by Adam Mickiewicz



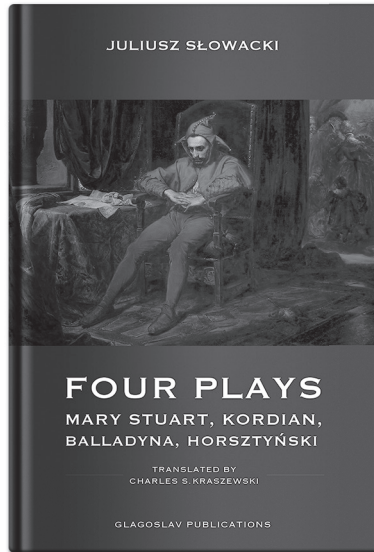
Forefathers' Eve [*Dziady*] is a four-part dramatic work begun circa 1820 and completed in 1832 – with Part I published only after the poet's death, in 1860. The drama's title refers to *Dziady*, an ancient Slavic and Lithuanian feast commemorating the dead. This is the grand work of Polish literature, and it is one that elevates Mickiewicz to a position among the “great Europeans” such as Dante and Goethe.

With its Christian background of the Communion of the Saints, revenant spirits, and the interpenetration of the worlds of time and eternity, *Forefathers' Eve* speaks to men and women of all times and places. While it is a truly Polish work – Polish actors covet the role of Gustaw/Konrad in the same way that Anglophone actors covet that of Hamlet – it is one of the most universal works of literature written during the nineteenth century. It has been compared to Goethe's *Faust* – and rightfully so...

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Four Plays:

Mary Stuart, Kordian, Balladyna, Horsztyński



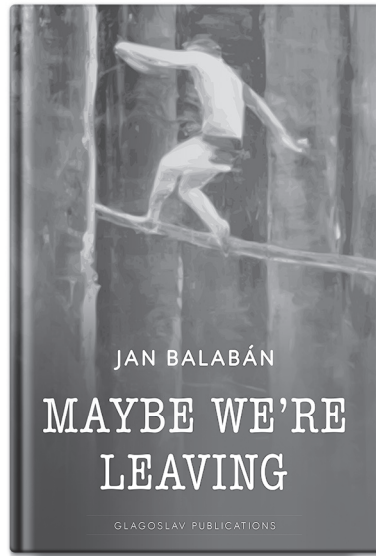
The dramas in Glagoslav's edition of *Four Plays* include some of the poet's greatest dramatic works, all written before age twenty-five: *Mary Stuart*, *Balladyna* and *Horsztyński* weave carefully crafted motifs from *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in astoundingly original works, and *Kordian* — Słowacki's riposte to Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, constitutes the final word in the revolutionary period of Polish Romanticism.

Translated into English by Charles S. Kraszewski, the *Four Plays* of Juliusz Słowacki will be of interest to aficionados of Polish Romanticism, Shakespeare, and theatre in general.

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Maybe We're Leaving

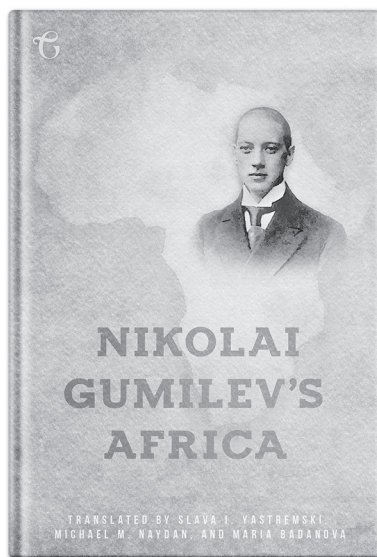
by Jan Balaban



A young boy from the housing estates comes across a copse of old oaks to which he can escape, as to an oasis of calm. Although he may forget about it once he becomes an adult and “puts aside the things of childhood,” it will remain a locus of balance, decades later, for a single mother struggling with the difficulties of raising the child she loves. A husband, on the lip of an ugly divorce, drives across town in the middle of the night to rescue his wife, abandoned by her lover, and then — as she falls asleep in the car — takes the long way home, to prolong a moment such as he has not experienced in years. An elderly doctor, self-diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease, makes use of the few precious moments of consciousness granted him each morning to pass on to his grandson what he has learned about life and living responsibly. Loss, and permanence, the ephemeral and the eternal, are common themes of Jan Balabán’s collection of short stories *Maybe We’re Leaving*, presented here in the English translation of Charles S. Kraszewski. With psychological insight that rivals the great novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky, the twenty-one linked narratives that make up the collection present us with everyday people, with everyday problems — and teach us to love and respect the former, and bear the latter.

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Nikolai Gumilev's Africa



Gumilev holds a unique position in the history of Russian poetry as a result of his profound involvement with Africa. He extensively wrote both poetry and prose on the culture of the continent in general and on Ethiopia (Abyssinia, as it was called in Gumilev's time) in particular. During his abbreviated lifetime Gumilev made four trips to Northern and Eastern Africa, the most extensive of which was a 1913 expedition to Abyssinia undertaken on assignment from the St. Petersburg Imperial Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography. During that trip Gumilev collected Ethiopian folklore and ethnographic objects, which, upon his return to St. Petersburg, he deposited at the Museum. He and his assistant Nikolai Sverchkov also made more than 200 photographs that offer a unique picture of the African country in the early part of the century.

This volume collects all of Gumilev's poetry and prose written about Africa for the first time as well as a number of the photographs that he and Nikolai Sverchkov took during their trip that give a fascinating view of that part of the world in the early twentieth century.

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International brigades of mice and rats join forces to defend the rodents of Poland, threatened with extermination at the paws of cats favoured by the ancient ruler King Popiel, a sybaritic, cowardly ruler... The Hag of Discord incites a vicious rivalry between monastic orders, which only the good monks' common devotion to... fortified spirits... is able to allay... The present translation of the mock epics of Poland's greatest figure of the Enlightenment, Ignacy Krasicki, brings together the *Mouseiad*, the *Monachomachia*, and the *Anti-monachomachia* — a tongue-in-cheek 'retraction' of the former work by the author, criticised for so roundly (and effectively) satirising the faults of the Church, of which he himself was a prince. Krasicki towers over all forms of eighteenth-century literature in Poland like Voltaire, Swift, Pope, and LaFontaine all rolled into one. While his fables constitute his most well-known works of poetry, in the words of American comparatist Harold Segel, 'the good bishop's mock-epic poems [...] are the most impressive examples of his literary gifts.' This English translation by Charles S. Kraszewski is rounded off by one of Krasicki's lesser-known works, *The Chocim War*, the poet's only foray into the genre of the serious, Vergilian epic.

Ignacy Krasicki (1735–1801) entered the Church as the younger son of a noble Polish family. His talents, and ambitions, eventually led him through the bishopric of Warmia in North-Western Poland to the See of Gniezno, where he reigned as Primate of Poland from 1795 until his death. He was a friend to the last king of Poland, Stanisław August Poniatowski, at whose coronation in Warsaw he delivered the homily. When, due to the partitions of Poland, the diocese of Warmia found itself within the borders of the Prussian Empire, Krasicki's friendship was cultivated by the Prussian King Friedrich II. Krasicki is said to have written the *Monachomachia* at the palace of Sans-Souci. Krasicki dominates the eighteenth century in Poland like no one else. He was creative in all literary genres, but especially excelled in verse satires (*Satyry*, 1778-1779) and fables (*Bajki i przypowieści*, 1776-1778). His mock epics, the *Mouseiad* (*Myszeis*, 1775), *Monachomachia* (1778) and *Anti-Monachomachia* (1778) are among the finest of the genre ever written. Krasicki introduced the Candide-like picaresque novel to Poland with his *Mikołaja Doświadczyńskiego Przypadki* (*Adventures of Mikołaj Doświadczyński*, 1776); he also tried his hand at the serious epic, composing his *Chocim War* (*Wojna chocimska*) in 1780.

