ADAM MICKIEWICZ

FOREFATHERS' EVE

TRANSLATED BY
CHARLES
S.KRASZEWSKI

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Cover art features a keystone from
the Wawel Castle in Kraków carved about 1390

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ADAM MICKIEWICZ

FOREFATHERS' EVE

Adam Mickiewicz

1798 – 1855

Introduction

Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) is the national poet of Poland. He was a born writer, successful in each and every genre he attempted. His lyric poems, collected in *Ballady i romanse* [*Ballads and Romances*, 1822] ushered the Romantic movement into Polish literature with the same élan as Wordsworth/Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* in the British Isles. His *Sonety miłosne* and *Sonety krymskie* [*Erotic* and *Crimean Sonnets*, 1826] form one of the most accomplished cycles in that demanding form since Petrarch. The great Italian is palpably present in many of the former, while the latter, short, descriptive works of jewel-like perfection, are matched only by DuBellay's Roman sonnets. One must wait until the twentieth century — the poems of Robinson Jeffers, and Albert Camus' *Noces* come to mind — for similarly evocative renderings of nature and history.

His narrative poems, *Konrad Wallenrod* (1828) and *Grażyna* (1823) reveal his sustained mastery of longer poetic genres, and his epic in twelve cantos, *Pan Tadeusz* (1834) is universally recognised as Poland's national epic, as well as the last Vergilian epic written in Europe. His quasi-Biblical *Księgi narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* [*Books of the Polish Nation and Polish Pilgrimage*, 1832] put the anglophone reader in mind of a more practicable William Blake. With their socially and politically-applied Christianity, Mickiewicz had an appreciable influence on the thought of his friend, Lammenais. Finally, his *Cours de littérature slave professé au Collége de France*, delivered during his exile in Paris, and published posthumously in 1860, is one of the first balanced and comprehensive accounts of the Slavic traditions in literature and culture to meet Western eyes.

Greatest of all his works, however, is *Dziady* [*Forefathers' Eve*], the monumental four-part drama begun in the early 1820s, and brought to a conclusion some ten years later. While based on contemporary Polish history — especially the oppression of Poles in the Russian Partition of the country — the work rises above national particularism to address general human themes, such as the interpenetration of the worlds of spirit and matter, the imperative of free will and the responsibilities enjoined thereby upon the individual, and the role of the individual in both the human

collective and the Communion of the Saints. Influenced by both Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Dante Alighieri, in *Forefathers' Eve* Mickiewicz succeeded in creating a truly universal work of literature that appeals to men and women of all nations, traditions, and times.

"Literature is news that STAYS news,"* said Ezra Pound. It is *Forefathers' Eve* that assures Mickiewicz a place in the ranks of the "great Europeans" like Goethe and Dante, Shakespeare and Eliot, among those described by Pound in *The Spirit of Romance*:

> All ages are contemporaneous. It is B.C., let us say, in Morocco. The Middle Ages are in Russia. The future stirs already in the minds of the few. This is especially true of literature, where the real time is independent of the apparent, and where many dead men are our grandchildren's contemporaries, while many of our contemporaries have been already gathered into Abraham's bosom, or some more fitting receptacle.**

To paraphrase George Steiner, the greatness of a book can also be measured by how often a mature culture returns to it, re-reads it, reinterprets it, and itself, in its light. The character of Gustaw/Konrad enjoys in Polish theatre the mythic stature of Hamlet in the English world. When an actor is cast in this role, he knows that he has "made it." But it's not just about aesthetics. Throughout its troubled history, Poland has looked to Mickiewicz and *Forefathers' Eve* to give expression to its yearnings and sorrow. The play was staged, and banned, under Soviet pressure, as late as 1968 for its perceived anti-Russian commentary, and the great anti-epic of the Solidarity movement, Stanisław Barańczak's *Sztuczne oddychanie* [*Artificial Respiration*, 1979] is a palpably bitter inversion of its great-souled hero.

Indeed, although as we shall see *Forefathers' Eve* is addressed to and appreciable by men and women of all times, the play springs from a very concrete time and place: the Lithuanian marches of the old Polish Republic, which in 1795 had been completely swallowed by the Russian Empire. It is only right that we shall concern ourselves first with Polish readings, and

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* Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 29.

** Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (New York: New Directions, 2005), p. 6.

re-readings, of the play. Still, it must be borne in mind what Albert Camus said about particularism and universalism in the context of the French-Algerian crisis of the mid-twentieth century:

> Some prefer the universal, to the detriment of the particular. Others, the particular to the detriment of the universal. But the two of them go together. In order to discover human society, it is necessary to go by way of national society. In order to preserve the national society, it must be considered from a universal perspective.*

And so we begin.

The National Context

Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* is the most important text of Polish Romanticism. Seen through the prism of what the Romantic period — indeed the entirety of the nineteenth century — means to Poland, it is not too much to say that *Forefathers' Eve* is the most important text of Polish literature, period. Part III — that segment of the four part dramatic epic that most speaks of, and to, the political and ontological aspirations of Poland — was composed in the early 1830s, a period known in Polish history as the Partitions. For various reasons, including the rather widespread and anarchic republicanism of the old Polish Kingdom, Poland, which during the Renaissance had been the largest territorial entity in Europe, had been whittled down progressively by three surrounding empires — Russia, Prussia, and Austria — until in 1795, it disappeared completely from the political map of the world.

It was not always thus. Since its baptism in 965, Poland had been a significant player in the politics that shaped the modern European continent. It cooperated with the eastern politics of the Holy Roman Empire, while never being subsumed into it, and constituted what some even now fondly refer to as the "bulwark of Christianity" in the east. It played a major role in the expansion of Christendom into the northeast (converting the last pagan people of the continent, the Lithuanians, in the late Middle Ages), and consistently beat back the territorial pretensions of

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* Albert Camus, *Actuelles III: chroniques algériennes 1939-1958* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 20.

the Islamic Ottoman Empire in the south-east. In 1683, it was a Polish army, under King Jan III Sobieski, that turned the tide at the siege of Vienna, and defeated a Turkish army whose threat to Christian Europe was the most serious since that overcome eight centuries earlier by Charles Martel at Poitiers. Gustaw, in Part IV, reminisces about reenacting this battle with his childhood friends. The Polish kingdom successfully addressed challenges from Christians as well: subduing the German Teutonic Knights in Pomerania, and keeping the rising power of Muscovy in check. At one point, Poland occupied Moscow and imposed its own candidate upon the Tsarist throne. (The national Russian holiday of November 4, "Unity Day," celebrates the expulsion of the Polish troops from Moscow in 1612, which brought the "Time of Troubles" to an end).

Whether, or how much of the blame for Poland's shipwreck may be lain on the Poles themselves, the subjugation of this once fairly powerful nation to the Germans and Russians was a shock to the national consciousness. Germanisation and Russification, of varying insistence and intensity, added to the humiliation, and stiffened the national resolve to remain Polish, in spite of it all. At a time when the nation was deprived of political autonomy, the role of the poet took on a special eloquence. Paraphrasing Percy Bysshe Shelley, in the Poland of the Partitions, the poet became the acknowledged legislator of the people. Poles of all three partitions looked to Adam Mickiewicz (especially) and his colleagues Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński — the so-called *trzech wieszczy* ["three bards"] for aid, not only in the perpetuation of the national language and literary traditions, but also for guidance in political and metaphysical matters.

The Partitions would last over a century: from 1795 until the reestablishment of the Republic of Poland following World War I in 1918. During that time, a number of writers, such as the historical novelists Józef Ignacy Kraszewski and Henryk Sienkiewicz, painters like Jan Matejko and Artur Grottger, musicians like Frédéric Chopin and Henryk Moniuszko, would keep the national traditions alive in times that otherwise did not bode well for the continuing viability of the Polish consciousness. To understand the seriousness of the threat one need only glance across the southern border into Bohemia. Germanisation had progressed so far in the Czech lands since the battle of Bilá Hora (1620), that knowledge of Czech had well-nigh completely disappeared from the educated classes by the time of the *národní obrození* [national revival] of the Romantic Age. Three hundred years on from their national catastrophe, the Czech

romantic poets had to reconstruct their national tongue from the speech of the peasantry, with a heavy infusion of Polish and Russian loan-words.

Yet although all of the above-mentioned Polish artists were respected and heeded by their compatriots, none of them approached the authority of Mickiewicz, and among Mickiewicz's writings, none was more important in this context than *Forefathers' Eve.* No work of literature or art was more readily acknowledged as an outpouring of the suffering, patriotic Polish soul than Scene II of Act III, the so-called Great Improvisation. As we shall see when we come to discuss Part III, the Great Improvisation is the epitome of the nationalist strain of Polish Romanticism. The shaman-like hero, Konrad, imprisoned by the Russians, launches into an inspired accusation of God Himself for the situation in which innocent Poland finds herself. Half Job, half Manfred, Konrad's great soliloquy is the touchstone against which all thoughts of independence and political autonomy are proven.

As is the case with all foundational texts, the manner in which *Forefathers' Eve* in general, and the Improvisation* in particular, are understood, coopted, and exploited, is directly relatable to the character of the period in question, or the temper of the group or individual receptor. This was already noted, with perspicacity, in 1905 by Stanisław Tarnowski, rector of the University of Kraków:

> What is this? "Blasphemy, impiety, challenging God," said these; "The sense of one's power, the consciousness of one's genius, extended to the very last boundaries of boldness and pride," said others, who adored the openness and limitless daring of greatness; still others saw in the Improvisation its patriotic side alone, and in the poet, such an avenger of the fatherland as fears not even God Almighty, and calls Him before his own judgment bench [...] Everyone made of the Improvisation something of their own; they stretched it to cover their own impressions and thoughts,

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* The soliloquy is called an Improvisation, because Mickiewicz was modelling it on the popularity of improvised poetic performances popular in XVIIIth-XIXth century Europe. As Wacław Borowski points out, even the varied metre of the Great Improvisation, as well as its tone, which alternates between tight, inspired poetry and looser, more prosaic lines, indicates the conscious shaping of the soliloquy on that model. Cf Borowski, *O poezji Mickiewicza* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1958), vol. II, p. 113.

> suggesting, imposing their own ideas upon it; everyone saw in it what they wanted to see; everyone had his own Improvisation.*

Thus Tarnowski, writing with the *sang-froid* and objectivism of a conservative in the generally calm Austro-Hungarian city of Kraków, in that Partition which accorded Poles the most autonomy. It is worthwhile to note Tarnowski's even-handed assessment of the reception history of *Forefathers' Eve*. What he writes of Poles in the nineteenth century, can also be applied to Poles of the twentieth, whose political situation, until 1989, was not dissimilar to that of their ancestors during the Partitions. For after the short-lived honeymoon of virtual peace, stretching from the end of the First World War in 1918 until the outbreak of the Second (on Polish territory) in 1939, Poland was once more to be partitioned: this time, on September 17, 1939, between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Following the war and the Yalta Agreement, so fatal to Eastern and Central Europe, Poland was to be submerged once more into the Russian sphere of influence, her autonomy strongly curtailed, subjected to the imposition of a foreign political system — atheistic communism — which differed from that of the Tsar in both quality and intensity.

Yet *Forefathers' Eve* continued to be used, and abused, by Poles of all political stripes eager to "impose their own ideas upon it." Like the Bible, which, as the common saying goes, can be used to prove anything, so Mickiewicz and his *Dziady* were invoked, now by communists, as a "progressive" work, foreseeing the triumph of the proletariat, and now by anti-communists, rallying around Mickiewicz and his work as proto-dissidentism.

The former tendency can be illustrated by a 1947 essay by Julian Przyboś who, besides being a talented avant-garde poet in his own right, was by turns anarchist, socialist, and communist:

> No, the third part of *Forefathers' Eve* has never been a normal read for me. It is a mad, hectic work — rebellious, revolutionary, striking at the foundations of the world of tyranny and crime — it will never be for me a mere aesthetic experience. The cries of pain and anger, and vengeance, mix in with, and drown out, the harmonious

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* Stanisław Tarnowski, *Historya literatury polskiej*.(Kraków: Spółka wydawnicza polska, 1905), Tom V: Wiek XIX, 1831-1850, pp. 18-19.

> angelic choirs. From beneath the clouds of religious decoration, from beneath the angelic flowers, emerge and flash again and again the stiletto and battle-axe of the avenger.*

Thus a Pole writing in the darker days of Stalinism, which, like many others, he actively supported, whether out of conviction, or fear — a member of a college of "bards" enunciating a message of liberty quite different from that underwritten by the *trzech wieszczy*, Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Krasiński.

Communist, state-supported readings of Mickiewicz and *Forefathers' Eve* continued in Poland as long as Soviet bayonets propped up the unpopular system of "popular democracy." As late as the early eighties of the last century, this is how the work was presented to high school students, via the officially sanctioned textbook on Romanticism:

> Mickiewicz created a work in which he expressed both the state of his own personal feelings and the drama of his oppressed nation [...] The spiritual transformation of Gustaw into Konrad constitutes as it were the key to understanding the chief idea of the play. It possesses the eloquence of a symbol. For it signifies the overcoming of a personal crisis in the name of the fatherland, to which Part III of *Forefathers' Eve* is dedicated [...] Konrad [...] becomes the representative of his oppressed nation and the spokesman of its deepest desires [...] *Forefathers' Eve* Part III initiates a new chapter in the development of literature following the 1830 Insurrection. It introduces us into the sphere of the most significant problems of the contemporary life of the nation. Although it refers to happenings from before the November Uprising [of 1830], it forces one to meditate on the contemporary situation and on the tasks which confront modern generations of Poles. In a different way, and on different levels, the images of martyrdom it presents remind us of our duty to our fatherland.**

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* Julian Przyboś, "Około *Dziadów*," in *Czytając Mickiewicza* (Warszawa: Rytm, 1998), p. 131.

** Helena Starzec, ed., et al. *Romantyzm: Literatura polska dla klasy II liceum ogólnokształcącego oraz techników i liceów zawodowych* (Warszawa: WSP, 1974), pp. 97, 99-102.

In this way, *Forefathers' Eve* becomes a paedagogical tool for "meditating" on what one owes to the state — in this case, the communist Polish People's Republic.

Yet just a few short years before this, in the year of revolution that was 1968, Mickiewicz and *Forefathers' Eve* introduced a different set of problems into the contemporary life of the nation. That was the year in which the theatrical director Kazimierz Dejmek realised *Forefathers' Eve* on stage in Warsaw in a way that — whether it was intended or not* — was seen to challenge the continued Russian dominance of Polish political life, and, by extension, the communist system then in place, and the Party which ruled Poland on behalf of Moscow. As Kinga Olszewska writes:

> The authorities saw Dejmek's *Dziady* as a provocation, since it deals with the issue of Russian imperialism and the colonization of Poland during the partitions of the eighteenth century. The authorities recognized that the staging of *Dziady* would have a negative impact on relations between Poland and the USSR. The intellectuals saw the withdrawal of *Dziady,* one of the most significant works of Polish Romanticism, as an attack on the essence of national tradition and a negation of historical circumstances, in which Russia was an aggressor.**

Under Soviet pressure, the government ordered the production shut down only two months after its November premiere, and this led to even greater unrest among students, who took to the streets, until repressed by the government police forces, and "spontaneous" anti-demonstrations of workers carrying signs reading "Students, Back to your Books!"***

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* Dejmek was a member of the Polish Communist Party (PZPR). Supposedly, the production was to be in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet Revolution. He was subsequently drummed out of the Party, and lost his job at the National Theatre in Warsaw.

** Kinga Olszcwska, *Wanderers Across Language: Exile in Irish and Polish Literature of the Twentieth Century.* (Oxford: Legenda, 2007), p. 29.

*** And "Zionists to Israel!" The fracas surrounding *Forefathers' Eve* provided the government with an opportunity to purge its ranks of "Zionists." Deprived of their Polish citizenship, many Polish Jews emigrated to Israel in forced successive waves that depopulated the traditional Jewish population of Poland even more, following the systematic Nazi ethnic cleansing of the war years.

Here we certainly come into contact with the universal eloquence of *Forefathers' Eve*. Mark Kurlansky is perfectly correct when he states, "to stage *Dziady* in Warsaw was no more controversial than a production of *Hamlet* in London or Molière in Paris."* Whether or not the play can be read, or manipulated, into a propaganda piece for or against communism, the thing that should concern all of us is the ability of a government to oppress the free speech of the stage, out of its panic about what it might mean.** As Adam Michnik comments: "The decision to close the play was proof that the government was stupid and did not understand Poles. Mickiewicz is our Whitman, our Victor Hugo... It was an outburst of communist barbarism to attack Mickiewicz."***

In the same year that the above-cited high school textbook was printed, Stanisław Barańczak began work on *Sztuczne oddychanie* [*Artificial Respiration*], an anti-epic describing the impossibilities of individual action, even in a quest to save oneself, in a totalitarian society like the Polish People's Republic. That poetic cycle is somewhat of an intentionally negative image of *Forefathers' Eve.* It too was repressed by the government.**** Barbaric or not, it is the fate of great works of literature to stir people so deeply, as to be adopted by them, and used as cudgels against the opposition, as if their creators had been members of the organisation in question *avant le mot*. It is testimony to the greatness

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* Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Random House, 2005), p. 73.

** There are different ways in which texts are controlled. Concerning the London that Kurlansky refers to, the *London Evening Standard* of 23 February 2015 ran a story about Mark Rylance, who reports that "he has had to remove parts of Shakespeare's plays because they are 'anti-Semitic.'" In the un-bylined article, he continues:"I don't think there's pressure (to remove) the bawdy jokes. He's bawdier a lot more times than people realise. The pressures I feel are more for times where he will say something very antisemitic. I have to make the decision, do I include that or not. There are some very unfortunate antisemitic things that characters say.If a character says it, it doesn't mean the author means it but since the holocaust ... these statements have a lot more resonance now than they did at that time." He does not say whether he is self-censoring the unnamed passages in plays he directs, or whether the "pressure" he felt he was under was applied from an outside source.

*** Kurlansky, p. 76,

**** It was passed around in Poland, in typescript. It was eventually published by the Polish emigré press Aneks in London, in 1978.

of the greatest literary works that they can be adopted and brandished by folks of mutually inimical political camps. That is certainly the case of Mickiewicz's *Dziady*. The communist Przyboś asserts that the "revolutionary" nature of Part III is a rallying cry for the progressive, marxist camp. Anti-communists have used the same text as a hammer against Russian hegemony which, in its Soviet guise no less than its Tsarist, exerted a stifling influence on Polish autonomy, culture, and free expression. No matter what the card-carrying Party member Kazimierz Dejmek intended with his fateful production of *Dziady*, perhaps the Party members who over-reacted in pulling it from the stage felt a real, and not imagined, threat to their vicarious rule of the country? For how eloquent, in the context of the imposed, foreign rule from Moscow, in the context of 1969 and 1989, are the words with which Mickiewicz begins his introduction to Part III:

> For half a century now, Poland has been the scene of such ceaseless, unflagging, inexorable cruelty at the hands of the tyrants who oppress Her, and such illimitable devotion and endurance on the part of Her suffering peoples as the world has not seen since the days of the persecuted Christians.

It matters nothing that Mickiewicz wrote those words in 1832; no one can stop the twentieth century reader from smiling wryly, and making appropriate connections with his or her own situation.

Indeed, the communists got as good as they gave, as far as Mickiewicz is concerned. In 1989, Tadeusz Konwicki produced his cinematic adaptation entitled *Lawa* [*Lava*], from a key scene in Part III. As Małgorzata Terlecka-Reksnis points out, there is no doubt about Konwicki's intention in filming this work in the dying days of Polish communism: "[Konwicki's *Lawa* is], for us masses of common people, a certain type of artistic *summa*, a consideration, through the matrix of *Forefathers' Eve*, of our experiences of war and communism."* Writing in the *Kwartalnik filmowy* in 2002, Barbara Głębicka-Giza concurs:

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* Aleksandr Fiut, et. al. *Kompleks Konwicki: materiały z sesji naukowej zorganizowanej w dniach 27-29 października 2009 roku przez Wydział Zarządzania i Komunikacji Społecznej UJ oraz Wydział Polonistyki UJ (*Krakow: Universitas, 2010), p. 318.

> In his adaptation, Konwicki intended to illustrate his conviction concerning the contemporaneity of *Forefathers' Eve.* Through his introduction of the character of the old Poet, who it seems was to symbolize the writer himself, he obtained the effect of a universalization of the play.*

To speak more precisely, in the case of Konwicki — as in that of so many others — we have an author/interpreter taking conscious advantage of the universal appeal of Mickiewicz's play, which is pre-extant to his artistic machinations. It is the universal nature of *Forefathers' Eve* which allows artists like Konwicki to exploit the text for the particular statements, political and otherwise, which they wish to make. The somewhat iconoclastic Jan Walc puts the matter in an interesting, if not altogether sympathetic, context when he writes thus of how subsequent generations have understood *Forefathers' Eve* in a manner consistent with their own beliefs and world views:

> Part III of *Forefathers' Eve* is a work from the crossroads. It was written in mid-road between Vilnius and Paris, worked up from contradictory lines and scenes, without beginning or end; it is as difficult and unclear as the Polish situation itself; it constructs a true, archly Polish synthesis from a great variety of false details. It is a work that prompts the strangest interpretations. It is at bottom incomprehensible, and yet still vibrant after one hundred and fifty years.**

Most people familiar with *Forefathers' Eve* would take issue with much of what Walc asserts in this passage; I certainly do. What he sees as contradiction and unclarity is the — at times clumsy — breadth of vision and Romantic openness to the inexplicable that gave rise, ultimately, to a new form of drama: Polish Monumental Drama, which unapologetically confounds time with eternity, but always tends to a moral order which is far from incomprehensible. It is this openness and breadth, which we also

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* Barbara Głębicka-Giza "'DOLINA ISSY', 'LAWA' i 'KRONIKA WYPADKÓW MIŁOSNYCH'. O autorskiej twórczości TADEUSZA KONWICKIEGO" in *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 44 (2002), p. 203.

** Jan Walc, *Architekt Arki* (Chotomów: Verba, 1991), p. 142.

have referred to as universality, which has guaranteed the continued vitality of the work, and its contemporary relevance, for now little less than two hundred years since its composition. I believe that I am not alone in my conviction that *Forefathers' Eve* will continue to be read, understood, and exploited for as long as the Polish language continues to exist.

As far as Walc's charges of the drama being "without beginning or end" (part and parcel of his somewhat bemused assertion of the contradictory structure of the cycle), we shall now move on to address this in our overview of the publication history and ordering of sequences.

Publication History; the Four Parts

Forefathers' Eve can best be described as a dramatic sequence in verse, divided into four parts, with a lyric cycle — the *Ustęp* — appended to Part III. It is tempting to call it a closet drama, but that would be misleading. Wacław Borowy speaks of its operatic qualities, and likens Part II to cantata form.* Stanisław Pigoń compares its structure to that of an oratorium.** Portions of it — especially Part III — have been staged successfully, beginning with Stanisław Wyspiański's seminal production in Kraków, more than one hundred years ago (1901). In 2015, the Teatr Polski of Wrocław undertook the mammoth task of staging the entire cycle — for the first time in history.

Whether or not Mickiewicz intended his work for stage production, a comparison of *Forefathers' Eve* with another contemporary Monumental Drama, Zygmunt Krasiński's *Nieboska komedia* [*Undivine Comedy,* 1833], proves that Mickiewicz created a work more convenable to the traditional stage than that of his fellow "bard." Of course, *Forefathers' Eve* presents us with some jarring scene shifts. The action takes place now a prison cell, now at a ball, and at the conclusion of Part III, we find ourselves outside, beholding the rushing penal carriages as they are whipped along the road to interior exile in the depths of Russia. However, these shifting scenes are no more difficult to arrange on stage than Brecht... or Shakespeare, who also played fast and loose with the unity of space and time. All of Part IV plays out in the very conventional settings of the Priest's study. And even

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* Wacław Borowy, *O poezji Mickiewicza* (Lublin: Towarzystwo naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1958), Vol. I, pp. 112-113 *ff.*

** Stanisław Pigoń, *Formowanie* Dziadów części drugiej (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1967, p. 5.

those less than naturalistic touches — the floating spirit of the Maiden from Part II, for example — are contextualised in a believable theatrical space (the nighttime chapel) that creates no great difficulty for the spectator's necessary suspension of disbelief. In comparison with this, the didascalia of Krasiński's imaginary world, full of flying spirits who lead the main character to an abyss into which he is tempted to hurl himself; in among revolutionary hosts at the siege of the last aristocratic outpost in the Holy Cross Mountains; and, finally, to the Second Coming of Christ, present the director and scenographer with challenges that can only be described, as well-nigh insurmountable.

So much for the generic description of Mickiewicz's greatest work. Whether it is witnessed on stage, or read silently, as the train hurtles along and the book is jostled by our neighbour's elbow, it is a comprehensible narrative, with beginning, middle, and end — despite what Walc suggests to the contrary. The only question is, what is the order in which the segments ought to be presented?

As far as the publication history of *Forefathers' Eve* is concerned, Parts II and IV were the first sections to see print, in the 1823 collection of the poet's works entitled *Poezye Tom II* [*Poetry: Volume II*]. These are known as the *Dziady Wileńsko-Kowieńskie,* because of the place of their composition. Mickiewicz began the work as a student in Vilnius, and brought it to a close in Kowno (Kaunas), where for a short time he taught school. Part III, the *Dziady drezdeńskie*, were written while the poet was living in Dresden (1832). In that same year, Part III was published in Paris. The *Ustęp* [*Fragment*, or, as we choose to translate the word, *Passages*] date from the same period, and are a lyric continuation of the action described in Part III. Part I, *Widowisko* [*The Spectacle*] is dated from the early 1820s. It is considered to be the first part of the work, abandoned by the poet for reasons unknown. It never saw print during the poet's lifetime, appearing in 1860 in a posthumous collection of his poetry published in Paris.

Each of the parts is built around the character of an enigmatic hero, who is now jilted lover, now poetic shaman, now "pilgrim" banished (as was Mickiewicz himself) from the Polish-Lithuanian provinces of the Russian Empire to an internal exile. Sometimes, he is a revenant spirit. These seemingly different characters are one and the same protagonist, whose various metamorphoses describe a process of emotional and spiritual growth. In the broadest terms, as our above-cited textbook states, this growth is a progression from self-absorption to other-centredness, first

in relation to his fatherland, and then, in relation to all of humanity. The question is again, in what order are we to witness these transformations? As Borowy states, even the first readers of the cycle were perplexed.*

The usual sequencing of *Forefathers' Eve* respects the order of publication established during the poet's life. Thus, the order of sections in a modern volume of Mickiewicz's works, such as the one we used for this translation,** proceeds from Part II to Part IV, thence to Part III (with the *Passages*) and, finally, to Part I, as a sort of appendix which is often overlooked in critical considerations of the dramatic cycle. This scheme, with Part III coming after Part IV, is followed even by those editors, such as "P.W.", who brought out an 1864 version of the complete *Dziady* beginning the cycle with Part I.*** The logic of this order is that it makes clear the progression of the hero dear to the hearts of all patriotically-motivated readers. Part II and Part IV are both concerned with the tragic, unrequited love of Gustaw, a Wertherian character who has done away with himself out of despair. In Part III, we come across Gustaw in prison for nationalistic activities frowned upon by the Tsarist authorities. At an early moment in Part III, we witness him dramatically re-Christen himself Konrad. This change of names signifies the great inner transformation of the character from a self-absorbed disappointed lover, pleading for the rights of the heart in a cold world of marriages arranged like business propositions, to a politically aware, nationalist revolutionary, who embraces his whole nation — "all of its generations" — in a selfless quest to free it from oppression.

The progression which we propose in this translation of *Forefathers' Eve* — and I am not aware of any other edition which does so — is the logical numerical progression of Part I being followed by Part II, which then proceeds to Part III (with the *Passages*), and concludes with Part IV. We do so for the following reasons. Firstly, even if it be true that the

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* Borowy, I, 103.

** The four-volume *Dzieła poetyckie* [*Poetic Works*], edited by Stanisław Pigoń (Warszawa: Cyztelnik, 1983).

*** Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady. Nowe wydanie zupełne* (Wrocław: H. Skutsch, 1864). In his note to the table of contents, P.W. writes: *Cześć Czwarta poprzedza Część Trzeczią, według układu zachowanego przez Autora w ostatnim wydaniu* ["Part Four precedes part Three, according to the order preserved by the Author in the last edition"]. It is unclear what last edition is being referred to. However, the implication seems to be that this is the order preserved by Mickiewicz in all complete editions published during his lifetime.

final segment of *Forefathers' Eve* composed by Mickiewicz was Part III, it remains a curious thing that he should give it a numerical designation that places it between the two earlier published sections II and IV. Why, after all, did Mickiewicz choose to entitle the 1823 segments Part II and Part IV? Was this simply calculated, Romantic mystification on his part? The desire to suggest the "magnificent torso" genre popular during the Romantic period, the literary equivalent of the artificial ruins sprinkled about the grounds of romantically-inclined lords? Wacław Borowy seems to think so:

> This was an age that had just witnessed a wave of great philological discoveries, as well as great philological-literary forgeries and *pastiches*. Contemporary philological discoveries taught the public to value ancient works, even if they were only preserved in fragments; in the forgeries and *pastiches* fragmentary composition was often utilised to foster the illusion of authenticity. (Already in 1760, James MacPherson's publication of the first volume of the so-called Ossian bore the title *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*). And so other literary works too began to appear in fragments. The example of Goethe, who entitled the first version of his *Faust* (1790) *Faust, ein Fragment*, especially encouraged others to adopt this stratagem.*

Yet if that were the case with Mickiewicz, why should he not entitle the 1832 segment "Part V"? In that way, he could have had his cake and eaten it too: the progression from Gustaw (II,IV) to Konrad (III) would have been retained, and with it the teasing lacuna: II... IV,V. The designation "Part III" is too suggestive for us not to think that the poet intended for it to be inserted between II and IV. In further defence of this supposition, we would also ask why Mickiewicz began the published portions of *Forefathers' Eve* with Part "II." If he had given up on Part I, *Widowisko*, why not retitle what was truly the first published segment, "Part I," especially if *Widowisko* had been surpassed, abandoned, and was never to see the light of day? Borowy at least entertains the possibility that a more traditional ordering of the sequence might have been intended by the poet himself:

> Nine years later, Mickiewicz was to write and publish one more segment of *Forefathers' Eve* [Part III], compositionally linked, in a

* Borowy, I, 103.

certain manner, to the earlier parts. Twelve years later still, while preparing for publication the final collected edition of his poetry to see the light of day during his lifetime, the poet allowed himself to mention the existence of still another part (namely, Part I) to be found "among the author's manuscripts." He also announced that, upon its publication, he intended to change the "order" of the already published sections. Should we take these statements *à la lettre,* or as just another compositional fiction? It is improbable that we shall ever know the answer to that question.*

That said, if "P.W." feels himself entitled to reestablish Part I at the beginning of his 1864 edition of *Dziady*, and we have no quarrel with that whatsoever, we feel ourselves justified too in suggesting that Part I was never really abandoned, that perhaps it is reasonable to take Mickiewicz at his word here; i.e., that he kept Part II as Part II because he intended one day to return to *The Spectacle* and reposition it at the head of the work. And thus, it is at least arguable that Part III was entitled Part III because the poet felt that this was the proper place for that part of his hero's story.

Looking at the transformation of the main character according to the scheme adopted for this translation, we also see a satisfying progression, indeed, an opening out of the individual toward others that is even broader than that achieved in the usual order. In Part I, the unnamed Young Man is completely self-centred, by which we mean that, while yearning, just like the Maiden at the start of the segment, for his Platonic "other half," he has not yet made contact with her. If the Young Man is Gustaw, and the Maiden is Maryla, the story of their love is recounted here in all of its innocence. *Ab ovo*, certainly, yet this is not a bad thing: we have the two individuals sketched out for us, as longing lovers, dimly aware of each other, tending towards one other, but never having been in physical proximity to each other. They are blissful in their ignorance of the pain that is due to crash down upon them, when they finally do meet.

In Part II, their love has played out, albeit off-stage. We do not witness its growth, its raptures or its heartbreak. What we do know, is that it is over. The folkloristic element of the semi-pagan ritual, enacted in Lithuania around All Souls' Day, in which the souls of the recently departed are

* Borowy, I, 104.

conjured forth so that the living can come to know how they can help them navigate the suffering of Purgatory and finally enter into their heavenly reward, is introduced. Whether or not Gustaw — still unnamed — is among the living, or is himself one of the dead, is none too clear. What we have in Part II is a very romantic plea, incarnated by the Young Wife (Maryla) separated from Gustaw by her unwelcome marriage to an unloved spouse, and the Young Man (Gustaw), both as a silent, reproachful revenant, and an eloquent spokesperson for romantic love, as the narrator of the poem that fronts the piece, "Upiór" ["The Walking Dead"].

The segment ends with the spirit of the Young Man ignoring the urgent spells of the *guślarz*, or wizard, who presides at the rites. Perhaps it is because he is still alive; his still living soul was attracted to the *Forefathers' Eve* gathering along with those of the departed — more by the workings of the reciprocal yearning between himself and Maryla, than the prayers and charms of the *guślarz* and chorus. When Part III begins, we come across the Young Man in jail. He is sleeping — his soul is, in short, elsewhere — but when he awakens, he takes the dramatic step of inscribing on the wall "Gustaw is Dead, Konrad is Born," and the date on which the odd transformation took place. And thus begins the metamorphosis from the self-absorbed unrequited lover, to the "great soul," the Byronic poet who will even challenge God on behalf of his nation.

The shift is abrupt and unsettling. It is not often that a character changes his name in the middle of his story. And if that were to be the case, one would expect a bit of a push-back from the other characters who, acting as our representatives on stage, might be expected to confront "the character formerly referred to as Gustaw" with astonished incomprehension. "Konrad? Who's Konrad? What? You want to be called Konrad now? Why?" In Mickiewicz's play, this does not happen. Characters are introduced to the stage, fellow prisoners of Gustaw/Konrad, and — although the renaming has just, in fact, taken place — they refer to him as Konrad, as if that's all they've ever known him by.

That he is the same character as Gustaw of Part II will be made patent at the end of Part III. Maryla, upset at not being able to contact him at a subsequent Forefathers' Eve rite, is comforted by the *guślarz,* who explains to her that, if he cannot be conjured forth, perhaps he has changed the faith of his fathers or (what we now know to be the actual case), he has changed his name. Part III ends with the *guślarz* and girl watching the string of penal wagons rush into internal exile in the depths of Russia.

And there she recognises him, at last, sitting on his wagon, proud and disdainful, with a wound on his chest, and a mark on his forehead.

As we have noted, Part III is the most patriotic, nationally-oriented segment of the drama, and as such, it has received the most commentary since its first composition. The *Ustęp* [*Passages*], a lyrical collection of seven narrative poems, continues the story of the exile, introduced at the conclusion of the dramatic portion of Part III. It should be pointed out that Konrad undergoes two transformations in Part III. First of all, as noted, he shifts from introspection (Gustaw) into dedication to a greater cause, that of national liberation (Konrad). Second, he shifts from egoism to self-abnegation. The desire to recreate a better Poland than that made by the hands of God, as he puts it in the Great Improvisation, proves to be unrealisable. As in Pushkin's *Evgeny Onegin*, here we witness one more "death of Byronism;" there are no "great souls;" one cannot achieve superhuman feats, because there are no supermen. After his fevered soliloquy — and subsequent exorcism — Konrad falls into the background of the story, only to emerge at the end, where he replaces his unrealistic desires to move heaven and earth with an act of small, though real, charity, such as the weakest among us may perform, effecting thereby some real good.

This shrinking of Konrad's character continues in the *Passages*. Whereas the protagonist of the *Passages* is Russia herself — Mickiewicz casts a jaundiced, though marvellously descriptive, eye on the Tsarist Empire — there is one recurring character in them, known only as "the pilgrim." This is Konrad again, his overweening personality shrunk even further, to human dimensions, and indeed to anonymity. We will consider what the term "pilgrim" might man in the context of this journey later on. What is important here, is that the pilgrim, although no longer an agent, is nonetheless a witness; his pilgrimage is a learning process that will redound to the benefit of his people. The theme of an opening out, from individual concerns to wider, national concerns, which is the entirety of Part III, is continued in the *Passages*.

We mentioned that when he is seen by the girl hiding in he hollow tree with the *guślarz* at the conclusion of Part III, Konrad has wounds on his breast and forehead. These wounds are sacramental rather than literal: outward signs of an inner reality. They are the scars of spiritual struggles, visible only to the eye of the spiritually initiated: the shaman-like *guślarz,* and the Maiden whom he guides to that spiritual knowledge.

In Part IV, the long interview between Gustaw and the Priest — his boyhood teacher — we are given to understand at the very start of the segment that there is something odd about this midnight visitor. Although he seems a bit off his rocker, the pure-hearted children wonder immediately: is this a ghost? Is this a dead man returned from the grave? And toward the end of the segment we realise that, indeed, here Gustaw is a revenant.

This, that now he is really one of the "walking dead," is as good a reason as any to place Part IV after Part III, as the segment that brings *Forefathers' Eve* to a close. But there is an even better, philosophical reason for doing so. Gustaw, in his final incarnation, is still smarting because of the heartbreak hinted at in Part II — but that is something irrelevant now, he tells us, as he and Maryla are destined to be reunited in heaven anyway. More importantly, he has moved past not only individual, erotic love, but patriotic love, for his fatherland, as well. The final plea he makes returns us full cycle to the Dantean atmosphere of the midnight rites of Part II: it is a plea on behalf of the suffering souls of Purgatory, for succour from the living. Thus, it is a further broadening out of the soul of the character towards a love of all humanity.

It is on the basis of the transformation of the main character of Mickiewicz's play that we suggest the order of segments as printed in this book. In Part I, the Young Man is alone, yearning towards erotic fulfilment with a female he senses, but has not yet come to know. In Part II, the love has come and gone; blasted, it still torments him. In Part III, erotic love is superseded by a love of country, while in Part IV, now that he has passed over to the other side, even this love is seen as too particular, and his concern implicitly embraces the millions of men and women, of all colours and nationalities, who are suffering hopefully in Purgatory. In short, the story of Gustaw/Konrad is not that of a man who learns to love more than one mere woman, it is the story of the Christian soul, who learns to love everyone.

I cannot say whether Mickiewicz would approve of this re-ordering. Nor is there any obstacle presented to the reader who wishes to follow the traditional scheme: II-IV-III-I. Because each of these segments, though linked, constitutes an integral story in its own right, a smooth progression through the book in that manner will cost the reader nothing more than a little back-and-forth shuffling, as she or he moves through this greatest monument of Polish literature.

We now move on to a consideration of the cycle, part by part.

The fact that Mickiewicz never published the so-called *Widowisko* ["Spectacle"] suggests that the text is unfinished. That said, the fact that he neither destroyed the manuscript, nor renumbered the polished segments of the drama, suggests at least that he did not reject out of hand a final reconstitution of the entire drama, with the addition of a freshly redacted, and perhaps broadened, Part I at the head.

Although Part I is most frequently treated as a sort of appendix to *Dziady*, it belongs, as its numerical designation intimates, at the very beginning of the entire cycle. The posthumous 1864 edition, referred to above, places it there. It is not only the numbering of the segments that suggests this; it is also apparent from a consideration of the one recurring male character: Gustaw.

The Gustaw that we come across in Part I is an as-yet unspoiled youth. He is an embryonic character. Not only has he not yet begun to trouble himself with the plight of his partitioned nation, but he has not even had his heart broken by Maryla. We meet him, at the very tail-end of Part I, as a budding poet, a dreamer who would like to be a carefree earthling like his hunting companions, but is predisposed, not to say doomed, to leave the broad highway trod by happy youths and wander lost among the wonders of nature, losing track of clearly marked paths by chasing chimeras in the clouds. He is a man of feeling — perhaps of too much feeling — whose eyes will suddenly well with tears without, it seems, rhyme or reason. And while, true to the basic tenet of Polish Monumental drama (that the worlds of spirit and flesh intersect and overlap), the "spiritual" intimations that tease his super-sensitive antennae arise, not from Dantean spirits, ghosts, or angels, but from a "kindred soul," a *donna ideale*, whom he senses about him, but with whom he cannot seem to make contact. When he does brush up against a numinous form — that of the very curious Black Huntsman in the final scene of the drama — he displays none of the boldness we shall have come to expect of him from his behaviour in Parts II, III and IV. He is positively terrified by this odd creature, seeks to flee him, and when treated to a display of the latter's clairvoyance (or cold reading?), he literally squeals in fright.

Now, if Gustaw, in Part I, is a demonstrably weak protagonist, does this make the young Mickiewicz who created him a weak poet? The answer to that question is a resounding No. Whether or not the beauties of the

Polish verse are mirrored in my English translation is not for me to say. We can, however, comment upon the poet's dramatic sense, which is apparent in any language. Insofar as that is the question before us, we must remark that this early work is much more than a loosely-bound collection of lyric poems revolving around an otherworldly theme. On the contrary, the construction of *Forefathers' Eve*, Part I shows a mature feeling for dramatic narrative.

Were we to divide the Part into scenes, we would find the following eleven:

1. Girl Alone
2. Guślarz, Villagers
3. Young Men and Widow
4. Young Men and Old Man
5. Guślarz' invocation
6. Child and Old Man
7. Child's song ("The Enchanted Youth")
8. Young Men
9. Song of the Huntsman (sung by the Young Men)
10. Gustaw Alone
11. Gustaw and Huntsman

The very manner in which scene 1 segues into scene 2 is a masterstroke of stagecraft. Part I begins in a very naturalistic manner. The didascalia, so different from those found in the other parts, are Ibsenian in their description of the box stage. A very conventional drama begins in scene 1, in which the young Girl, foiled by a guttering candle in her desire to finish reading the epistolary novel *Valérie* (with its hero "Gustave") sets off into an elaborate soliloquy in which she both complains of her loneliness and expresses her desire to finally contact the "kindred soul" she imagines must be destined her. No sooner has she finished her long aside than the chorus of villagers, led by the Old Man (the "guślarz," or wizard, who conducts the Forefathers' Eve rites) crosses the stage on their way to the place where the rites are to be celebrated.

We are stunned and disoriented by this sudden shift: they enter and progress through her bedroom? Of course not; without warning, the scene has shifted outside, where we will remain for the rest of the short play. The fact that there is nothing to signal this shift of scenery might seem, at first, to indicate a compositional flaw. However, nothing can be further from the

truth. With this brusque shift of scenes, Adam Mickiewicz inaugurates the defining characteristic of Polish Monumental Drama: the interpenetration of the worlds of temporality and eternity, of this life and that beyond the grave. We exist, as it were, in the shaded area of the Venn diagram, where time and eternity, eroding matter and indestructible spirit, intersect. As the Girl puts it during the opening soliloquy, when she determines to turn from the unsatisfying world to hold converse with "shades:"

> Life among the shades of an imagined earth?
> The real, tedious one, has not half its worth.
> Shades only? In this world where we draw breath
> Walk there no souls hid from our eyes by death?

This characteristic — the consciousness of the existence of that "shaded area" — which can only be compared to the manner in which the ancient epics are played out on two levels, that of the gods and that of men, will dominate the latter portions of *Forefathers' Eve*. It will be found in the works of the Polish Romantic dramatists who come after Mickiewicz and learn from him: such as Juliusz Słowacki's *Kordian*, Zygmunt Krasiński's *Undivine Comedy*, Cyprian Kamil Norwid's *Krakus*, and continue to define the Polish Monumental Theatre well into the twentieth century. We find it, for example, at the beginning of the century, in Stanisław Wyspiański's *Wesele* [*The Wedding Feast*], and near its end, in the "theatrical spectacula" of Tadeusz Kantor.* As Małgorzata Dziewulska puts it,

> Beginning with Mickiewicz "one might establish the beginnings of [...] a purely Polish variant of theatrical thought," the especial characteristic of which is its passing beyond [mere theatre], immutably moving towards para-religious activity.**

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* For two recent studies of the persistent influence of Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* on Polish avant-garde drama, see Magda Romańska's 2012 book *The Post-traumatic Theatre of Grotowski and Kantor: History and Holocaust in Akropolis and The Dead Class*, and Kris Salata's 2012 article "O Homem Interior e sua Ação: Jerzy Grotowski e a herança de Adam Mickiewicz e do romantismo polonês."

** Małgorzata Dziewulska, *Artyści i pielgrzymi* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1995), p. 140. Cited in Dariusz Kosiński and Mieczysław Limanowski, *Polski teatr przemiany* (Wrocław: Instytut im. Jerzego Grotowskiego, 2007), p. 8.

We are all part of one continuum. Life declines to death, from the loam of death arises new life, and the dead are present now, not only in the spiritual realm, but also in the succeeding generations they engendered. As the Chorus of Young Men sing, chiding the gloomy *guślarz*:

> Not all your kin lie in the grave;
> Consider all the joys you have!
> Take some from us, our happy throng,
> And seek your dead among the young.

And the old grandfather too, after his Nestor-like lament on the passing away of love, and the generation he held so dear ("Your faces, voices, hands, which now surround / Me — What are they worth?") takes comfort in sensing the presence of his departed daughter in the voice of his living grandson:

> Only your voice, my grandchild, yet remains —
> A childish echo of dear, long-dead strains;
> Through it there bubbles your late mother's laugh!

What a gloomy prayer he "blesses" his grandson with: "Lord, let him die young!" It is flippant in its bitterness; it suggests too close an association of this life with that beyond the great divide, such as might misprise the gift of bodily existence, however troubled, however brief.

For neither death nor life is to be taken lightly. Mickiewicz may have his characters plead for tolerance in relation to the semi-pagan rites, at which the Catholic Church looked askance, but this festival, with its "white necromancy," is an exception, not the rule. Once a year,* it ought to be

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* Or perhaps "once a season." In his meticulously researched study of the genesis of Part II, Stanisław Pigoń suggests that *Forefathers' Eve* ceremonies were held "at least four times a year: at the beginning of spring, at the end of autumn, in midsummer, and in midwinter." Mickiewicz plays fast and loose with these seasonal rites, as the temporal setting of the action seems to comprise them all. However, he seems to concentrate on the Springtime *Dziady*, which was "inclusive […] a collective celebration taking place beyond the individual hearthside, in the graveyard of an Orthodox or Uniate church, or among ancient grave mounds (*mogiły*) out in the fields. Not just one family, but the entire parish community, took part." Pigoń, p. 13.

indulged in, for the benefit of the purgatorial souls, and for the solace of those who remain behind. However, life is not to be despised. The festive night over, we must leave the graveyard and return for twelve months of normal life in the sunshine.

The general burden of the Young Men's choruses, whether they are directed at the young Widow or the Old Man, is a celebration of youth and life. There is something noble, and fresh, in the almost expressionistic calm with which the Young Men state their satisfaction in taking their stand in mid-road, between cradle and grave, "beneath the pristine skies."

> The sun has set, the children run,
> The old folk weep and moan.
> But soon enough breaks the new dawn
> When all are coming home.
>
> Before those kids grow grey,
> Or bell for oldsters toll,
> More than one moment gay
> Will yet delight their soul.

Like their fresh, healthy attachment to robust life, the love they celebrate in song and argument is a healthy, normal, erotic and human love. They beg the young Widow — a character the didascalia allude to as identical with, or equivalent to, the mourning girl in Mickiewicz's programmatic ballad "Romantyczność" [Romanticism]* — not to forget

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* "Romantyczność," from Mickiewicz's first collection of verse, *Ballady i Romanse* [*Ballads and Romanses*], has been called the Marseillaise of Polish Romanticism — just as the volume in which it first appears has been described as influencing the course of Polish literature in much the same way that Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* did for English. It describes a young girl, in the daylight, suddenly caught up into a trance, during which she converses with the revenant spirit of her dead lover. The village divides into two camps: the simple folk cross themselves and begin to pray for her, understanding the ecstasy as a spiritual experience. Then, along comes a rationalist scientist, who proclaims the girl "mad," because with his "microscopes and lenses" he can't discern anything out of the ordinary there, let alone a ghost. The narrator then takes voice. Although he doesn't aver to have seen the spirit himself (but then again, no one, besides the girl, has), he takes the side of the common people, because there are "higher truths" than those of science, to arrive at which one must turn one's eye inward, and "look

her first husband ("buy him a Mass," they suggest), but to let her mourning run its course already, for her own good, and get on with the business of life in choosing a new mate.

Here, as in Parts II and IV, erotic love is a terrible mistress, the *kythera deina* invoked with trembling lips by poets stretching from Sappho to Ezra Pound. It is Love that ruins the life of the knight Poraj in the ballad sung by the young Boy at the urging of his grandfather; it is love — "the voice that shot me through" — the passing of which that same grandfather mourns in his expressive lament on the fleetness of time.

Its daemonic character is also evident in the carefully bookended soliloquies of the Girl at the beginning and Gustaw at the end of the segment. Here the matter takes on a Petrarchan, or Neoplatonic eloquence. The Girl — we might as well call her Maryla already, although she is not named in Part I — sighs for just a glimpse of her Platonic "other half," who surely must be waiting for her somewhere, since every atom of creation, she insists, finds its destined pairing. The Platonism of her yearning, not so much toward an earthly love, as to the Ideal, is patent toward the conclusion of her soliloquy:

> Oh, if we but with yearning wings might push
> Apart the clouds, and feel the passing rush
> Of pennons — share one word, exchange one glance —
> Oh, that would be enough of a romance:
> To know, for sure, that both of us exist!
> Then would the soul, whose flagging joys desist
> Almost to feel, so tightly are they wound
> About by torturous pain, unchained, rebound,
> Their shackles shed, toward the skies,
> And this deaf cave become a paradise!

Gustaw fairly repeats her sentiments during his anabasis through the woods. Not only that, but his sense that some spiritual presence actually

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into the heart." Mickiewicz disdainfully refers to the rationalist as a *mędrzec* — a "wiseman." In the Choral dialogues of Part I, the guślarz invites all penitent souls to turn away from "wisemen" and to the "white necromancy" — the *guśle* — of the mystical rites leading to a higher knowledge. For a serviceable English version of "Romantyczność," see W.H. Auden's translation entitled "The Romantic."

does visit him from time to time, "breathing my breath, heart keeping time with mine," which would otherwise sound like Romantic cant, takes on a believability when seen as a conscious pairing with Maryla's earlier words.

> Where are you? Lonely daughter of mystery?
>
> O, let your soul take on, at least
> The vain and passing stuff of flesh;
> Cover yourself but with a crease
> Of rainbow, or a spring's bright flash!
>
> O, let your myriad glories
> Long, long into my parched eyes sink!
> O, your lips' subtle melodies,
> Long, long my thirsty ears would drink!
>
> Shine unto me, dear Sun! I long
> With your image to scald my eyes!
> Sing, Siren! At your thrilling song
> I'll slumber, dreaming of the skies!

As far as the story of Maryla and Gustaw is concerned, the tragic love, of which we learn only after its shipwreck, in Parts II and IV, is a fresh thing in Part I, unsullied, undamaged, unthreatened, because, as yet, uncommenced, in a physical sense at least. Maryla and Gustaw yearn for one another, cannot yet contact one another, and yet they are happy. They know each other not, except in the most teasing fashion; Gustaw is both pained at the fact that he can catch no more than a glimpse of his ideal lover, and yet enraptured all the same by her ephemeral visits.

Here lies the crux of their incipient tragedy. On the one hand, this demonstrable "elective affinity" of Maryla's soul for Gustaw's (and vice-versa) suggests that what Gustaw will say in Part IV about their literally being destined one for another by God is true. They are, in the most real sense of the tired phrase, "soul mates." Yet Mickiewicz, who knew the work of Dante, must also have known the great truth of Neoplatonic love that informs the troubadours, Petrarch, and the Florentine himself: that the *donna ideale* can be worshipped, but never possessed. The tragedy of Gustaw's love is not so much that Maryla will

become the wife of someone else. After all, neither Dante nor Petrarch physically possessed Beatrice or Laura. Rather, Gustaw's tragedy is that, unsatisfied with the future glory he was promised to share with Maryla, he sought — almost blasphemously, as it were — to precipitate it, corporeally, here and now.

Hence the frisson with which Part I comes to an end, in the eerie interview of Gustaw with the Black Huntsman. A creepy bloke he, who introduces himself as:

> A huntsman, like you... With a bit more might,
> Though just as eager. But while you cover
> The woods by day, I'm out hunting at night.
> You skulk for beasts, while I ambush... lovers.

This may be mere jocularity; a witticism playing on the fact of his having "chased down" the helpless "quarry" that was the lost young man. Yet he is a "black" huntsman — an adjective that can both refer to his swarthy appearance, and his mysterious nature. For he presents himself as spiritually prescient; if Gustaw "feels around him" the lover who — somehow — races to him on the wings of the spirit, something that might be explained by the antennae of the heart, the fact that the Black Huntsman recognises this too is quite odd indeed:

> Know first, that someone watches over you —
> A certain being, everywhere you stray,
> Who'd like to take form that you might see,
> And visit — If you're steadfast in what you say...

Has he second sight? Or is he still playing with Gustaw, having overheard his romantic soliloquy? We don't know. Gustaw, however, opts for the former, and his hair veritably stands on end. He has not yet grown into the shaman of Part III who will assert his spiritual dominance over all things, except God — with whom he will, however, claim equal power. Here, rather than being cheered by the Huntsman's metaphysical confirmation of the "being" that ranges about him at all times, aching to take form and "visit" him, Gustaw feels his hackles rise, and seeks to flee the Huntsman in terror. Again, Mickiewicz reminds us that his Halloween story need not necessarily have a happy ending.

In short, Part I, far from being inchoate or rough, is a well-crafted introduction to the entirety of *Forefathers' Eve*. Persons and themes and even verbal refrains ("All is darkness, all is quiet") are introduced here, to be developed and expanded upon in the other three parts. It is, also, Gustaw's introduction to the searing pains which must accompany the great delights of his love for Maryla. Is it this which becomes suddenly apparent to the sensitive poet, in a flash of epiphany, and has him nearly jump out of his skin in terror?

Part II

Revenant spirits form their own subgroup of the literature of the Romantic Age. Most often, they are associated with an unhappy love story. In Gottfried August Bürger's *Lenore* (1773) and Karol Jaromír Erben's *Svatební košile* [*The Wedding Shirts*, 1853], the longed-for lover, whether he be truly the soul of the heroine's love or a demonic spirit, lures the human on to destruction. In Bürger's ballad, Lenore is lost; in Erben's Biedermeyer retelling, she repents of her tempting of heaven and, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the bloodthirsty ghost is laid, and the Czech maiden escapes unscathed.

Not all revenant tales are finger-wagging and catechetical, like Erben's, or ghost stories, like *Lenore*. Revenant tales figure largely in the folk poetry of the Slovaks, and there, more often than not, the returning spirit seeks not the destruction of his former, earthly love, but returns to impart some wisdom to her, from beyond the grave, to teach her.* This is also characteristic of Part II of *Forefathers' Eve*. On the one hand, in it, Mickiewicz continues his story of the fated lovers parted by man and death; on the other, the holistic, Catholic view of life characteristic of the "sturdy folk," which sees creation, and life, as an endless continuum, and death, not as a wall, but a permeable membrane, is underscored in a manner which recalls Dante's *Divine Comedy*.** In Part I of *Forefathers' Eve,*

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* For a more detailed discussion of this, see my "Revenant Spirits in Slovak Folk Narrative Poems," *Kosmas,* XX (2007) 2:1-27. I discuss Erben's poem, and Mickiewicz's "Ucieczka" ["The Escape,"] mentioned below, in my *Romantic Hero and Contemporary Anti-Hero in Polish and Czech Literature: Great Souls and Grey Men*. Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997.

** Katarzyna Lukas explores the Catholic underpinnings of Part IV of Mickiewicz's drama in her "Der romantische Protagonist als Träger des

we accompanied the people to the graveyard, but did not witness the rites. In Part II, the entirety of the segment is played out in the deserted chapel, during the "Mass" on behalf of the departed souls; the aim of the ritual is hinged on that idea of the permeable "membrane" of the grave. The spirits are called forth so that the living, who still care for them, may learn "what they need" in the species of prayer or offering, to ease their transition from Purgatory to Paradise.

If Stanisław Pigoń is correct in assuming that the *Dziady* ritual that Mickiewicz is basing his work on is that celebrated in the Springtime, we see that it was a very fitting choice made by the poet:

> The [Springtime *Dziady*] were celebrated right after Easter, around the time of the first Sunday after the holiday; the exact dates varied by location, but generally: from Saturday until Tuesday. According to the Church calendar, that Sunday, known as Leading Sunday [*Niedziela przewodnia*] is especially set aside in remembrance of Christ's descent into Hell and his leading out therefrom the souls of the patriarchs and Old Testament prophets into the spheres of Heaven. By its very nature then, it is a very fitting time for prayers on behalf of the dead, to lead the penitent souls out of the depths of Purgatory.*

Wacław Borowy, after the German translator of *Forefathers' Eve* Siegfried Lipiner, states that "the three scenes with these spirits constitute a development of a certain thought, of authentic and full humanity."** That is certainly the case, as even the appearance of the bloodthirsty local tyrant elicits in the congregation a remarkable response of generosity. Yet we are in timeless Catholicity here, rather than the eighteenth century Enlightenment (which Borowy is so fond of referring us to); if there is a didacticism here, it takes place not so much directly between poet and reader as it does indirectly, through the lessons imparted by the dead to the living. The latter wish to aid the former, of course, through their ritual

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katholischen Weltbildes. Über den IV. Teil des dramatischen Fragments Dziady von Adam Mickiewicz in deutschsprachigen Übersetzungen" *Studia Germanica Posnaniensia* XXX (2006): 5-33.

* Pigoń, pp. 13-14.

** Borowy, I, 112.

offerings. But transfer also occurs "from there, to here," as the stories told by the revenant spirits — like the *racconti* of the souls encountered by Dante on his journey — contain a moral for the living, by the aid of which they can better themselves, and avoid the pains of Purgation once they cross through that inevitable portal. While delineating the distinctions between the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, and the Eastern, Orthodox belief of the soul's penumbral existence after the death of the body, Stanisław Pigoń underlines this two-way transfer in his book on the structural development of Part II:

> The state of expectation can at the same time be a state of perfecting, but not through satisfaction or posthumous suffering. The only road to that [perfection] may be the help of the living, not even so much through their particular intention, as above all through the practice of mercy, alms, and prayers, and through such actions especially performed by the elderly and the poor; sometimes also by way of the consumption of sanctified meals. In this way the "communion of the saints" comes into being. For, reciprocally, the living also draw strength and inspiration from the realm of the afterlife. [...] In a word, on just such a base of religious faith and direct intimacy do the world of time and the world of eternity bring aid to one another, and that aid of the most effective sort.*

It is the wise, and stirringly written, Dantean passages of Part II, which illustrate that circle of charity which is the Communion of the Saints, that first raise Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* past local interest and make of it a universal work appealing to all human beings. The lessons told, in turn, by the two departed Children, the (damned) Landowner and the flighty Maiden, and internalised by the chanting Chorus, set the poet in the company of Goethe and Dante. Forerunning Joseph Campbell and Karl Jung by more than a century, in his introduction to the segment, Mickiewicz suggests that we tell such stories, not because we are Lithuanian or of a Romantic bent, but because we are human. It is an archetypical tale, encoded, as Jung might say, in our very spines:

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* Pigoń, with reference to P. Evdokimov's *Prawosławie* (Warszawa, 1964). p. 16.

> The beginnings of this ritual stretch back to pagan times, and it was once known as the *uczta kozła* or "goat's feast." The celebrant was called the *Koźlarz, Huslar* or *Guślarz*, a person both priest and bard. [...] It is noteworthy that the custom of banqueting the dead seems to be common to all pagan peoples, whether we be speaking of Homeric Greece, the Scandinavian countries, the Orient, or the far-off islands of the New World. Our Dziady are exceptional in that the pagan ceremonies are now intermixed with notions borrowed from the Christian religion, especially as the feast of All Souls falls roughly at the same time that Dziady are celebrated.

However, the Leitmotiv of love, which binds the entire dramatic cycle together — the frustrated love of the Young Man (Gustaw, though unnamed) and the Young Girl (Maryla, likewise anonymous) is introduced at the beginning of Part II, and brings it to a dramatic conclusion.

Part II is fronted by the lyric poem "Upiór" ["The Walking Dead"].* While unsure whether or not the walking dead of this poem is intended to be identified with the revenant Hermit of Part IV, Wacław Borowy calls it "an introduction, a sort of overture that sets the mood for the entire cycle."** Quite Romantic in a Bürgeresque fashion, it tells the story, in unabashed technicolor, of a very palpable zombie:

> The breast swells, yet cold is that breast,
> His lips and eyelids wide are spread,
> He's here again, yet somewhere else:
> Who is this man? The living dead.
>
> Those who live nearby his grave
> Know that each year his tomb is riven:

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* "Upiór," the Polish form of a common Slavic word, is etymologically connected with the English "vampire" (itself a borrowing from Hungarian, and perhaps originally Turkish, in which tongue *ubir* means "witch"). While there are vampiric overtones in a song from Part III, *upiór* can mean "phantom" as well as any sort of evil spirit. It seems to us that "walking dead" most suits the ambiguous nature of Mickiewicz's hero, who shifts not only between personalities, but also between states of life, and death; indeed, his status, which side of the "membrane" he finds himself on, is never altogether clear.

** Borowy, I, 106.

He wakes each year on All Souls' Eve,
And makes his way toward the living.

But when four Sundays' bells will fade,
Then he returns, his strength expired.
Breast bathed in blood from wounds fresh made,
He sleeps again in churchyard mire.

The anonymous writer of the obituary of Adam Mickiewicz printed in the May, 1856 edition of *The Gentleman's Magazine,* in an otherwise perceptive overview of the stature of the Polish poet, finds in this play grounds for disgust. He calls *Forefathers' Eve* "a wild and irregular drama," and describes it thus:

> Entitled Dziady, a word in Polish denoting "Ancestors," [it is] applied by the Lithuanians to an annual festival, in which the dead are believed to rise from their graves to be fed by the living. On this wretched superstition, and on that of the vampire, both too horrible for poetic use, Mickiewicz wastes some pages of powerful but revolting poetry.*

True, we have a "vampire" here, or some sort of walking dead, or revenant spirit. Each November he is harried out of the quiet of his grave to walk among the living. The motif will be repeated in Part III, where Konrad, the patriotic incarnation of Gustaw (more on that later) sings a bloodcurdling song of vengeance at a gathering of his imprisoned friends:

And my Song says: I shall go out tonight
Upon my countrymen to chew —
Whomever with these fangs I bite
Perforce becomes a vengeful vampire, too!
Yes! vengeance, vengeance,
vengeance on our enemies!
With or without God's sanction,
as the Lord shall please!

---

* Anonymous, "Obituary — Adam Mickiewicz," in *The Gentleman's Review* (May, 1856), 45:537-540, p. 538a.

Similar to the writer of the obituary, Lautréamont (Isidore-Lucien Ducasse) also understood Mickiewicz's revenant a tad too literally. Mario Praz quotes a letter from the author of *Les Chants de Maldoror* in which he speaks of having written "Something along the lines of Byron's Manfred and Mickiewicz's Konrad, but, all the same, quite a bit more terrible." By that he seems to mean that Maldoror will take blasphemy to a level at which both Manfred — who in his interview with Arimanes explicitly professes faith in a Creator God — and Konrad (who falls unconscious before he can spit out the last blasphemous word of his tirade, that God is a "Tsar") — retreat. But in another letter, also quoted by Praz, he writes:

> I have sung evil just as have Mickiewicz, Byron, Milton, Southey, A. de Musset, Baudelaire, etc. Naturally, I have exaggerated the diapason a bit in order to achieve something new in the sense of that sublime literature, which does not sing despair for any other reason than to oppress the reader, and make him desire the good as a remedy.*

Is it that we, inheritors of a culture fascinated with the morbid, a culture that Lautréamont himself helped conjure into being, have been so desensitised by slasher movies and the like that the rather tame "vampires" we come across in Mickiewicz seem quaint? Or, how is it that Lautréamont even conceived of Mickiewicz as a "singer of evil" to the extent of including him in the same group as Baudelaire? One can only reckon that he has misread the text, and the writer. Mickiewicz's "walking dead" is a metaphor, not a ghoul; Konrad's later blasphemy is far from heroic: it is the same sort of human frustration, albeit much greater in degree, as that experienced by any person who has ever shaken his fist at the heavens. Konrad's song in Part III cannot, obviously, be taken literally; it is an attempt at sympathetic magic, a metaphorical expression of revolutionary yearnings felt by the generation his protagonist represents:

> Then shall we go as one our thirst to slake
> Upon the foes who us enslave,
> And through their hearts we'll drive a stake

---

* Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1970), p. 165.

That they might never rise from out the grave.
Yes! vengeance, vengeance,
vengeance on our enemies!
With or without God's sanction,
as the Lord shall please!

Slyly, he reverses the roles here: the final punishment inflicted upon the tsarist oppressors of his slain country will be that reserved in folklore for the walking dead — a stake through the heart, so that once dead, they will remain in the ground.

These citations come from Part III. Yet even here, in the case of the Wertherian Gustaw, the poet's purpose is not to terrify. Mickiewicz is not looking for cheap thrills, revolting or otherwise. His *upiór*, also according to the laws of purgation, is undergoing a penance of "four Sundays'" duration, at the end of which the (self-inflicted) wound that cut him off, prematurely, from the community he must visit, is newly administered:

Tales of this man who walks the gloom
Are many — he was young, and still
Live those who wept on his fresh tomb —
They say he died of his own will.

The Catholic Church that Mickiewicz knew looked askance at suicide. God, to quote the play from which the poet took the motto for Part II, "set his canon 'gainst self-slaughter." Suicides were not laid to rest in consecrated ground, no Requiem could be sung for them, and — it was assumed — they sank straight to Hell, fall where they may, as Dante puts it. In *Forefathers' Eve*, Mickiewicz shows himself ahead of his times by alleging extenuating circumstances for the unholy act which, though it must be punished, and severely at that, need not result in damnation. The one great extenuating circumstance is love. The "walking dead" in Part II, and Gustaw in Part IV, will both implicitly, and explicitly, argue that the greater sin is on the part of those who interposed themselves between the Man and Woman that God destined for each other, for all time. God's will simply cannot be overridden by man's. In an interesting take on "what God hath joined, let no man sunder," even the otherwise unforgivable act of suicide cannot be allowed to impede the eternal union of the two souls, which will take place — we learn in Part IV — once Maryla's life has run its course. At that moment,

Gustaw's trials of purgation will come to an end, and God's will — stymied here below by man — will at last be done, for all time.

This exculpatory nature of love — or at least its value as mitigation — is expressed by that most Catholic of poets, Dante, as well. Sins of the flesh, the sins of misguided love, are declared to be the "sins that God hates least," and, accordingly, even those who are damned for perverted love, such as the famous pair of adulterers Paolo and Francesca, are tormented less severely than the icy, conniving hearts, the fraudulent (and fraud, we are told, is the sin that God most abhors).

The mitigating value of love is also a characteristic of the healthy, commonsensical wisdom of the folk. And that very aspect of the folkloric fabric of *Forefathers' Eve* is what Mickiewicz chooses to emphasise in his prose introduction to Part II:

> The so-pious intent of this feast, as well as the lonely places where the ceremonies are held, the late hour, and the fantastic rituals at one time spoke strongly to my imagination; I listened to the legends, stories and songs of deceased persons returning to the living with requests or warnings, and in all of the monstrous inventions one could yet discover certain moral tendencies and teachings set forth in a sensual, folkish manner.

The way in which Mickiewicz speaks of discovering "certain moral tendencies and teachings set forth in a sensual, folkish manner" seems condescending; as if the refined, philosophe-educated elite were in possession of a civilised code, only dimly apparent to the "folk" and clumsily expressed by them. Of course, that would be to completely ignore the moral primacy he accords the simple people, in "Romantyczność" for example, where it is they who are aware of "higher truths" unknown to the wisemen of the world, who gather their empirical evidence on all hands, yet never look into their own heart. Interestingly enough, Mickiewicz's presentation of the Dziady rituals is more than mere Romantic colourisation. According to Stanisław Stankiewicz, ethnographic studies in Belarus underscore the veracity of much of Mickiewicz's statements:

> The observance of Dziady is held among the Belarusan people twice a year. The rituals are celebrated in cottage or cemetery (not, however, in a chapel and not in secret, and the clergy, whether

> Orthodox or Uniate, at times also take part). The ritual in the cottage is presided over by the man of the house or the eldest family member, who intones the prayers, casts the spells, and evokes the forefathers, setting aside for them food and drink. At the cemetery, sometimes a wandering beggar (a *starec*) officiates; at times the same person leads the ritual in both places.*

In his vivid introduction, then, Mickiewicz is speaking on behalf of the folk, encouraging that elite not to disdain the ancient rites and simple beliefs of the common people, as does the man who was to speak so harshly of *Dziady* in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Civilisation tends to isolate; the primitive community of the village is a community of support, where the imperative of reciprocal aid and charity extends even beyond the grave:

> Purgatory's suffering souls!
> Wherever in the world you be:
> If in flaming tar you roll,
> Or in an icy river freeze,
> Or if, for greater punishment,
> Within a blazing log you're pent
> That cries and whistles as the flames
> Gnaw at its slow-consuming frame,
> Come, hurry to our company!

So chants the Guślarz, opening the rites in the dark chapel. Whereas many of the more enlightened Christians, even of Mickiewicz's own time, were doubtful, not only of the existence of Purgatory and the efficacy of prayers for the dead, but even of the idea of a caring, personal God who intervenes in human history, the simple folk of Mickiewicz's drama not only uphold an ancient faith, but they feel the presence of those spirits about them, here and now. For them (and this is not necessarily a primitive thought) Purgatory is not a particular place, as Dante describes it, allegorically; it is a state into which the saved soul, still bearing the burden

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* Cited by Borowy, I, 107-108. A recent monograph (2009) by Piotr Grochowski is devoted to such beggars, and their poetic role as wandering folk-minstrels in the old Polish countryside: *Dziady. Rzecz o wędrownych żebrakach i ich pieśniach.*

of unpractised penitence, enters, upon the death of the body. As a state, it is merely a different level of this our reality; the suffering souls of the dead are about us, here and now: locked in the ice of the river over which our children skate, paying back the penalty for more serious sins in the whistling log burning right now in the hearth at which we warm them, when they return from play.

The sense of unbroken community is underscored by the arrival of the first two souls attracted to the rite: Józia and Rózia: children who passed away prematurely, and whose mother is among the villagers in the chapel. The little boy addresses his mother as naturally as if he were standing before her in the kitchen:

> What's wrong, Mama? Look — it's Józia—
> Don't you know me? Your little bunny!
> And here with me's my sister Rózia.
> We fly through Heaven, Mama, now —
> It's more fun than with you, and how!
> Look at the sunny crowns we wear!
> [...]
> Heaven's fun! Everything's here —
> And every day's a new surprise.
> But even though everything's here,
> We're bored sometimes ... we're scared — a lot ...
> O, Mummy, your two little dears
> Can't find their way to God!

Perhaps nowhere else is the permeable membrane of death shown to better advantage than here. First, like any other Purgatorial spirits, the two children come with a request. The living can shorten their period of penitence and help them "find God" in this way:

> So sweet a life on earth we had,
> Too sweet, and this is why we're sad.
> Our life was just one long caress;
> We've never tasted bitterness.
> [...]
> We've come here to your Dziady feast
> Not for prayers or for treats;

We don't need any Masses said,
We don't need cakes, or milk, or bread,
But rather wormwood. Please, two grains,
And for your taking such small pains
Our penance will be completed.
For listen now to our bequest:
According to God's just command,
He who's not tasted bitterness
Will take no sweets from Jesus' hand.

Second, their appearance at the ceremony is also to the benefit of the living. Obviously, one can only imagine what a comfort it would be to their mourning mother, to see them, hear them, and fill her heart with the assurance that they are in a better place, comforted, rejoicing, and beyond all harm. But it is not only she who is benefited by their words. Like the other souls conjured forth on Forefathers' Eve, the children come bearing a message for the living, which is dutifully repeated, internalised, by the Chorus:*

Listen, listen to their bequest:
According to God's just command,
He who's not tasted bitterness
Will take no sweets from Jesus' hand.

In other words, be patient under suffering; those who offer up their sufferings here below, who accept them as a good thing, endured for the love of God, will have so much of an easier road once past the gates of death. We have, in short, a passage from the Sermon on the Mount, boiled down to its common-sense essentials.

Not all of the dead who are conjured are saved, though penitential, souls in Purgatory.** The next soul to appear is that of a local landowner,

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* The message is internalised, but the repetition of the words suggests antiphonal prayer. Interestingly, Pigoń speaks of the structure of Part II, with the ritual back-and-forth between *guślarz* and Chorus, as a structural imitation of the Angelus prayer. This is particularly important, in that the Angelus is not merely a Marian devotion, but is especially related to petitions for the eternal rest of the departed. See Pigoń, pp. 19-20.

** The children and the maiden are saved, purgatorial souls; the landowner is hopelessly damned. Still, Jan Walc sets forth an interesting theory which links

damned for his cruelty to his serfs. When queried by the Guślarz what would help him reach heaven, he replies:

> Heaven? O, you blaspheme in vain.
> I don't want Heaven! Not at all —
> Only a loss would be my gain —
> I only wish my soul would crawl
> A little faster out of me.
> A hundred times I'd rather be
> Pinned to the very floor of Hell
> Than wandering here about my woods —
> I'd bear each type of torture well,
> Yet I can't bear to see the goods
> I once enjoyed, and every station
> Of late-beloved abomination!
> [...]
> [...] such is the Judge's will
> That I must house my damned soul
> Within this tattered corpse until
> One of you pity my hard dole —
> One of you, of my former serfs
> Should feed my hunger, slake my thirst.

Non-Catholics may find this passage a bit confusing. First of all, Purgatory, although a place of suffering, is a place of joy, as well. It is not a testing ground suspended between Heaven and Hell, from which the souls there imprisoned will migrate, up or down, depending on their actions or the prayers of others. There is no downward movement from Purgatory. Purgatory is filled with souls destined for heaven, whose sins have been absolved in confession, but who did not complete the penitence required of them during life. Thus, such souls must pass some time in suffering in this place of "purgation," until their debt to

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them together: "And yet there is something that binds all of the sinners, whose souls have arrived at the Forefathers' Eve ceremony — their introspection, their living for themselves alone, without a care for others." p. 36. Which really is to say that all of them have sinned, for sin is the reckless decision to selfishly follow one's own inclinations, maugre others, maugre God Himself. The distinction is: the maiden and the children have atoned for their sins, the landowner has not.

God — to put it most simplistically — is paid back, either through their patient suffering, or with the help of the prayers offered up by the living on their behalf, which shorten their punitive stay. Every soul in Purgatory is saved; their next destination is one and the same: Paradise.

The landowner, or "lord," who appears now is not among their number. He is damned, and nothing that the living might do would be capable of overturning that verdict. Still, he is condemned by God to wander the nights in his old, sensitive flesh, at which the "nocturnal birds" — the souls of those of his serfs he starved and tormented during life — tear and torment in their turn. Only if he were able, in his state, to receive one crumb, one drop, from his former serfs, in a sign of forgiveness, would this physical torment end, and he would be cast into the Hell for which he perversely longs. Small comfort, that! But he seems to think it would be better than having to wander his woods, which have now passed on to someone else. Despite the best will of the living villagers, however, his request will go unfulfilled:

> CHORUS OF NOCTURNAL BIRDS.
> In vain he begs, in vain he prays:
> For we night-fliers, crows, eagles, owls,
> His sable train, were once his slaves;
> He starved us, now we feed his howls!
> We'll eat the food and quaff the drink
> That's offered him, with beak and claw
> We'll tear it, be it on the brink
> Of his parched, blistered, hungry maw,
> Be it within his gripping mouth,
> With my talons I'll rip it out!
> I'll reach down to his very bowels!
> You had no mercy on us, lord,
> Nor shall we best you on that score!

Mickiewicz is no more a theologian than Dante; he is a poet, writing a drama. Certainly, there is nothing in Christian theology — Catholic or otherwise — that suggests this sort of anti-Purgatory, this state in which a condemned soul is made to undergo a foretaste of his eternal sufferings, before he "merits" a release to the infernal lake. Likewise, the fact that his

tormentors are the souls of those people he treated so horribly during life is problematic. One of them speaks:

> They chased me like a wolf through all
> The garden — to the garden wall.
> Thence was I hauled in front of you
> (Them snapping, snarling all the while) —
> They hauled me off to face a trial
> And over what? Some apples, pears ...
> Fruits of the field, like water, fire,
> Which God intended Man to share!
> And yet my lord cried out in ire
> "Make an example out of him!"

Is this part of the eternal reward of that poor soul? That he is now the torturer of the man who tortured him? If so, that's a fairly sick conception of the repose of heaven, where "every tear will be wiped away." But again: we are not reading theology here, we are reading poetry. And this table-turning scene fits in well with the simplistic concepts of folk justice — like Dante's *contrapassi* — that the common-sense metaphysics of the village present.*

When this lot disappear, we are treated to one more interview with a Purgatorial soul. This is that of:

> [...] Zosia, born and raised
> Among you, and my beauty's praise
> Was ever on your lips, with spite,
> For I held marriage in despite —
> My beauty lost to everyone.

---

* Who says that the tormenting "Nocturnal Birds" are *saved* souls? Just because they were victimised during life, doesn't mean that they too did not come up short at the individual judgement and, like their lord, are themselves damned to Hell. This may be an echo, conscious or not, of Dante's *contrapasso* of the thieves in Hell, who pursue one another in the guise of reptiles, stealing the human form of their "victims" only to be pursued by them in turn, once the odd metamorphosis takes place. Even in the more theologically traditional world of the *Divine Comedy* we come across instances of sinners constituting the punishment of other sinners, which we may be seeing here.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Charles S. Kraszewski (b. 1962) is a poet, translator and literary critic. He has published three volumes of original verse: *Beast* (Alexandria, 2013), *Diet of Nails* (Boston, 2013) and *Chanameed* (Atlanta, 2015). Among his critical works is *Irresolute Heresiarch: Catholicism, Gnosticism and Paganism in the Poetry of Czesław Miłosz* (Newcastle-on-Tyne, 2012); many of his verse translations are collected in the volume *Rossetti's Armadillo* (Newcastle-on-Tyne, 2014). This translation of Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* is the first complete verse translation of the cycle published in English. It has been exploited in its entirety by the Teatr Polski in Wrocław, and partially set to music by Arturas Bumšteinas in his contemporary orchestral work *Different Trains* (2014).

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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.

The present translation of Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* is the first complete verse translation of the cycle published in English. It has been put to use in its entirety by the Teatr Polski in Wrocław, and partially set to music by Arturas Bumšteinas in his contemporary orchestral work *Different Trains* (2014).

Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) is the national poet of Poland. He was successful in every genre at which he tried his hand, setting the benchmark for excellence in poetry, prose and drama for all the writers that came after him. His lyric poems, collected in *Ballads and Romances*, ushered in the Romantic Movement in Polish literature. His *Erotic* and *Crimean Sonnets* (1826) form one of the most accomplished cycles in that demanding form since Petrarch. His narrative poems, *Konrad Wallenrod* (1828) and *Grażyna* (1823), reveal his sustained mastery with longer poetic genres. Mickiewicz's epic in twelve cantos, *Pan Tadeusz* (1834), is universally recognized as Poland's national epic, as well as the last Vergilian epic written in Europe.

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