

# Poland's Angry Romantic



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Two Poems and a Play by Juliusz Słowacki

Edited and translated by

Peter Cochran  
Bill Johnston  
Mirosława Modrzewska  
Catherine O'Neil

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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These three translations were not conceived for a single volume, but it at once seemed natural to put them into one. My thanks to my three colleagues for their assistance. We are also grateful to Marcin Leszczyński for his help. —  
*P.C.*

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Life and work

Few poets are so lionized in their own country, and at the same time so unknown outside it, as Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849), Poland's "Angry Romantic." Słowacki is a fascinating, brilliant, colourful character. Within Poland he has an unassailable position as one of the three great "bards" or *wieszcz*e of the early nineteenth century, and one of the greatest Polish writers of all time. Yet by and large, and quite undeservedly, he is unknown to world literature. The current volume presents three of his most outstanding literary achievements in English translation, in most cases for the first time. In this introduction we shall set Słowacki's work in the context of his literary and political times.

Juliusz Słowacki was born on September 4th 1809, in Krzemieniec in the Volhynia region of Ukraine, a town second only to Vilna (Vilnius) as an eastern centre of Polish culture, although, since the Third Partition of 1795-7 (see below), it was in Russian territory. Słowacki's father Euzebiusz (who died when Słowacki was five) was a professor, classical poet, critic, and translator; his mother, an avid reader. He had a happy childhood, though early on he developed an ironical attitude to life, and had few friends – his closest, Ludwik Szpicnagel, committed suicide at the age of twenty-two. Słowacki became a competent amateur pianist. He spent his adolescence in Vilna, where he defended Mickiewicz in discussions between classicists and romantics, although this did not prevent a strong rivalry subsequently developing between the two poets. He fell in love with a strong-willed girl called Ludwika Śniadecka, but his feelings were apparently not reciprocated. He studied law between 1825 and 1828, but was bored by the bureaucratic job he had in Warsaw.

Słowacki's early poems are melancholy and pessimistic. He translated Moore and Lamartine. His French was fluent, and his English enabled him to read Shakespeare, Scott, and Byron in the original. He wrote two early plays, one about Mary Stuart, which is still performed. He composed oriental tales and poetic novels, and a narrative in verse, *Jan Bielecki*.

On November 29th 1830 the Poles in Warsaw, capital of the "Kingdom of Poland," a Russian territory, launched an uprising against

Russia. The “revolt” lasted several months until tsarist troops finally occupied Warsaw in 1831. Contemporaries (and historians to this day) argue about the reasons for the failure of what is known as the November Uprising, generally concurring it was because of ill-defined aims and confusion amongst its leaders. Słowacki took no part in the preparations for the insurrection of 1830, a fact for which he would later be reproached. He did, however, write an essential patriotic poem, *Ode to Freedom* (*Oda do wolności*, 1831), in which he invokes Luther, Cromwell, and Washington. *Ode to Freedom* came to be regarded as the “hymn” of the Uprising.

Early in March 1831, at the urging of his mother and uncle, Słowacki left Warsaw for Dresden. The Polish National Government employed him as a courier, and his destination was London via Paris. He spent four months in Dresden studying, then went to London where he stayed several weeks, amongst other things seeing Kean play Richard III. Though he enjoyed the city, Paris was cheaper, and so, on the capitulation of Warsaw on September 8th 1831, he went back to France. It was in Paris that the greatest number of Polish refugees from the Tsarist terror had congregated.

He lived largely in the insular émigré community, though, thanks to money from his father’s will, not in the poverty which was the lot of many Polish exiles. In Paris he was a most enthusiastic theatre- and opera-goer (see section below on *Balladina*). The letters he wrote to his mother describing the émigré life in Paris are considered masterpieces of Polish prose.

In 1832 he had his two first volumes of poetry published. The first volume was narrative, the second dramatic. They made little impact. It was on reading them that Mickiewicz made his famous damning statement that Słowacki’s verse was “like a beautiful church without a god.” He meant that Słowacki appeared politically neutral, not merely that he was pessimistic and somewhat anti-clerical. Słowacki also spoke at meetings of the influential Polish Literary Society in Paris and made many important contacts, including Prince Adam Czartoryski, considered to be head (almost the king) of the Polish Government in exile, and the critic Maurycy Mochnacki. However, he was never intimately linked to the politics of the émigré community as Mickiewicz was.

It was at this time that Mickiewicz published his famous drama *Forefather’s Eve* (*Dziady*), and also the best known and best loved of all Polish poems, *Pan Tadeusz*, establishing himself decisively as the national bard of Poland. In 1833 Słowacki wrote *Lambro*, in which the Byronically-named hero, a failed fighter against the Turks who dies in an opium haze, recalls many who took part in the Polish revolt. He

accompanied it in the same volume with a long quasi-autobiographical poem entitled *Hour of Thought* (*Godzina myśli*). He also wrote plays and poems in French, including a drama about Beatrice Cenci. He added Spanish to his languages, and played the stock-market with skill, becoming comfortably off.

In 1833 he left Paris for Geneva – whether or not remembering Byron's precedent (he travelled with *Childe Harold* in hand). His motive may have been to get away from Cora Pinard, a beautiful printer's daughter, or to get away from Mickiewicz, or both. One of Mickiewicz's characters in *Forefather's Eve* is killed by lightning; since the same had happened to Słowacki's stepfather August Bécu (as well as to the protagonist of *Balladina*), he thought of challenging Mickiewicz. However, he was dissuaded. One incident is reported in which the sturdy Mickiewicz picked up the slightly-built Słowacki and threw him out of the house.

Słowacki's poetry was too innovatory and sophisticated for the literary innocence of the Polish émigré community, even though he defined the poet's role as one who put himself at the service of the nation. But he wrote (in the preface to his third volume) that he had no wish to belong to the “religious school, that Last Supper of the Polish poets to which they sat down in Paris.” The anti-Mickiewicz message was clear.

Słowacki was one of a trio of authors who are collectively referred to as the “three bards” (*trzech wieszczów*)—the three giants of Polish Romantic literature. The other two were Mickiewicz (1798-1855) and Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859), author of the plays *The Un-Divine Comedy* (*Nie-Boska Komedia*, 1833) and *Iridion* (*Irydion*, 1836), who subsequently became a good friend of Słowacki, and to whom the latter would dedicate *Balladina*. Of the three, Słowacki was by far the most sceptical and critical; his vision of the world was by and large a dark one. While Mickiewicz's work is marked by a powerful patriotism, culminating in his 1844 *Books of the Polish Nation and the Polish Pilgrimage* (*Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego*) in which Poland is depicted as the “Christ of nations,” Słowacki was highly sceptical about patriotic urges, and shone a harsh critical light on his country and his nation.

In Geneva during the eighteen thirties he wrote his most enduring works – his plays. Some, including a play about William Wallace, have been lost. But *Kordian*, *Horsztyński*, *Balladina* and *Mazepa* are frequently performed to this day in Poland. *Kordian* (1833) is about a failed assassination attempt against the Russian Tsar, with choruses of devils and a climactic execution. The hero proposes single-handedly to kill the Tsar as he is crowned King of Poland; but, with no support from his fellow-

patriots, faints on the threshold of his deed, defeated, Hamlet-like, by his imagination, and is declared insane. Several readers, including Pushkin, thought the anonymous play was by Mickiewicz; but it was in fact conceived by Słowacki as a rival creation to Mickiewicz's *Forefather's Eve*. Today *Kordian* is a part of the standard Polish theatrical repertoire

For *Balladina*, see below.

*Horsztyński*, published posthumously, is set in Lithuania in 1794, at the time of the Kosciuszko Uprising and the Bar Confederacy (see section on *Beniowski* below). It is, like *Hamlet*, about the conflict between a father and a son. Horsztyński senior, a feudal hetman, is working in secret for Catherine the Great, while his son Szczęśny is his enemy, a would-be Jacobin. Both father and son are presented with sympathy for their political and social perspectives, conservative and revolutionary. The son admires the father, yet cleaves to left-wing ideas in which he does not believe; like Słowacki's earlier hero Kordian, he is Hamlet-like in his irresolution. Słowacki left the play unfinished – Horsztyński is assassinated, and it seems that Szczęśny will kill himself, but we do not know.

In Geneva, where he had an active social life, Słowacki inspired the love of another young woman, his landlady's daughter Eglantine Pattey, but her passion was unrequited. More serious perhaps were his feelings for the young aristocrat Maria Wodzińska. She may have inspired his pastoral, reflective poem *In Switzerland* (W Szwajcarii, published 1839).

In 1836 Słowacki moved to Rome, where he met and befriended Count Zygmunt Krasiński, the "third bard." Each found an excellent reader in the other. Słowacki then travelled to Greece and Egypt, seeing Athens, Cairo, and the Nile rapids, well aware of those who had gone before him, including Lamartine, Chateaubriand and Byron. Next he travelled with the Bedouin on camels to Palestine, where he visited Jerusalem and wrote his Dantesque poem *Piast Dantyszek's Poem on the Inferno* (Poema Piasta Dantyszka o piekle) and *Father of the Plague-Ridden at El Arish* (Ojciec Zadżumionych). The former is in terza rima, and places several of Słowacki's contemporaries in Hell – Słowacki was a creative student of Dante.

A more substantial Oriental work is his unfinished travel poem *A Journey to the Holy Land from Naples* (Podróż do Ziemi Świętej z Neapolu). Only its eighth canto, *Agamemnon's Tomb* (Grób Agamemnona), was published in his lifetime. In this melodious poem (translated in this volume), which became a poetic examination of conscience for generations of Poles, Słowacki pronounces the famous lines:

O Poland, trinkets you are still fooled by trinkets;  
 You have been the peacock and parrot of nations,  
 And now you are a foreign servant.  
 Although I know these words won't resonate long  
 In your heart – where thought does not stay for even an hour.  
 I say this because I am sad – and I myself am full of guilt.  
 (– from Catherine O'Neil's translation, in this volume)

*Anhelli* (1838) is a visionary biblical poem in prose about Polish exiles in Siberia. The physical and social misery forced on the exiles by Russian brutality is presented as their wandering through the circles of a white Siberian hell. Quarrelling and perishing, they undergo spiritual degradation. The poem is an anti-thesis to the messianic ideas of Mickiewicz's *Books of the Polish Nation and the Polish Pilgrims*.

By this time it was clear that Słowacki could write with success in any medium and in any form. The temptation which such virtuosity posed may account for why so many pieces – including *Beniowski* – are unfinished. He was a spontaneous writer rather than a systematic one.

He stayed for several weeks at a monastery in Lebanon, then returned to Italy, where, in Florence, he became popular in the salon of Joseph Bonaparte's daughter Caroline Surveilliers. He played the music of Chopin, whom, it was said, he resembled. He made many acquaintances, including a certain Aniela, daughter of a rich Ukrainian landowner (Aniela is the name of the woman Beniowski loves).

Russian repression intensified in Poland. Słowacki's mother was briefly imprisoned, and his income from his father's will seemed in peril.

In 1838 he yielded to the call to return to the community of exiles in Paris, and at once began publishing his work, starting with *Anhelli*, then *Balladina*. He was especially pleased to be able to publish within Poland in the Prussian partition. But censorship made sure that he obtained no voice at all in the Russian-occupied part of the country.

The Paris émigré community saw as little in his recent work as they had in his early publications. Their dislike was more ideological than literary, for it was clear that Słowacki supported neither the right-wingers, nor the monarchists, nor the compromised middle-of-the-road liberals, who favoured only the tiniest measure of land-tenure by the peasants. His anti-clericalism also alienated him. He was independent of all parties, and thus liked and supported by none. In 1841 he wrote a polemic, *A Critique of Criticism and Literature* (Krytyka krytyki i literatury), in which a character, partly himself, partly Shakespeare, denies any connection between poetry and ideology.

But he was not to be discouraged. He finished his Cenci tragedy and wrote another, very highly-regarded play, *Lilla Weneda*, about the ancient conflict between the peace-loving Weneds and the warlike Lechites. The play is inspired by Germanic mythologies, and offers a historical philosophy of an invaded nation, connecting the ideological duality of the Polish nobility with social conflict and a lack of heroism. While a tragedy, the play reveals many features of the Shakespearean grotesque, like *Balladina* mixing drama and comedy, symbol and realism. Słowacki published it simultaneously with *Agamemnon's Tomb*.

He also returned to and completed *Mazepa*, which he had earlier burnt. This very violent drama – set in the court of Jan Casimir, where Byron's poem starts – was premiered in Budapest in 1847, and translated into German, French, English, Russian, and Czech. It, too, is also often performed in modern Poland.

In 1840-1 he wrote his most original masterpiece, *Beniowski*, in ottava rima – a bold continuation of the tradition established by Byron in *Don Juan* and Pushkin in *Evgeny Onegin* (see below).

It was at this time that he finally fell in love – with Joanna Bobrowa, an exile who had previously been the lover of his friend Count Krasieński. She was still faithful to Krasieński's memory, but she and Słowacki became good friends. Under the influence of this relationship he wrote another play, a realistic, satirical drama called *Fantazy*, set on an aristocratic estate in modern Poland. It features two heroes, one an arrogant Polish Byronic poseur and one a dignified old Russian Decembrist – a remarkable concession, considering that much of Russia was at the time doing its best to destroy Polish language, society, and civilization.

In the last years of his life Słowacki turned to mysticism and to the ideas of the strange messianic figure Andrzej Towiański, whose utopian ideas influenced Mickiewicz also (both poets had met Towiański in 1834). The first fruit of his "conversion" was a translation of Calderón's play *The Constant Prince*. Towiański disapproved of literary work: but the previously sceptical and rational Słowacki saw in his teaching a way to combine thought and deed, to cease being an observer and to be instead a participant. He continued to write – he could do nothing else – and produced two more plays – *Father Marek* (Książdz Marek, 1843) and *Salome's Silver Dream* (Sen srebrny Salomei, also 1843), both of which show an undiminished grasp of historical detail and a continued fascination with history.

At this time – Europe was approaching the revolutions of 1848 – Słowacki even met Wagner, another anti-autocrat, who had to flee from Dresden in 1849 after the revolt there was crushed.

Much of Słowacki's lyrical poetry was written in this period, including *To the Author of Three Psalms* (Do autora Trzech Psalmów), a response to some poems by Krasiński. Poland's political and spiritual resurrection was always his theme.

In 1846 revolt had again erupted in Poland, but lacking as ever the support of the peasants, who distrusted any aristocratic initiatives, it devolved into horrible massacres of landowners by peasants, and of peasants by soldiery. Nevertheless Słowacki, rather like Dostoevsky and with as little evidence, retained his faith in the common people as the ultimate means whereby Poland would be redeemed.

He developed tuberculosis, despite which he travelled to Poznań in Prussian Poland to witness the start of the 1848 revolution, which he compared to Thermopylae. He spoke at meetings: "I tell you," he said at one of them, "the new age has dawned – the age of holy anarchy." Forced from Poznań by the police, he went to Wrocław (then Breslau), where he met his mother one last time.

He returned to France, and died in Paris at four p.m. on April 4th 1849. He was thirty-nine years old.

As censorship relaxed in Austrian Poland, his plays began to be performed, and editions and critiques to be published. On June 28th 1927, on the order of the Polish government his body was returned to Kraków, where it rests next to that of Adam Mickiewicz, and where a theatre is named after him.

To this day, debate continues about Juliusz Słowacki's message, and the meaning of his vast and extraordinarily varied output. One thing is certain – he will continue to be read, performed, and studied for generations to come, while his voice will continue to be deeply relevant to ever new generations.

## 2. *Balladina*

### About the Play

*Balladina* was written in 1834 in Geneva, Switzerland, when Słowacki was twenty-five, though it was not published till 1839, in Paris. The first performance was not to come till 1862, long after the author's death. *Balladina* was conceived as the first of a cycle of six plays intended to portray the history of Poland. Like many of Słowacki's grandiose projects, this one was never finished; the only other play he completed was the third in the cycle, *Lilla Weneda*, set in Polish pre-history.

*Balladina* employed much of the stagecraft that Słowacki had observed in theatres in Paris and elsewhere. Indeed, the very title was inspired by the Parisian theatre—according to Miłosz, *les balladines* were “eerie female dancers” in an opera by Meyerbeer which Słowacki saw in the early 1830's (Miłosz, 235). There is a powerful sense of spectacle throughout the play, from the appearance of Kirkor in his eagle's wings at the beginning to the bolt of lightning at the end.

Despite its Parisian inspirations, however, this is a quintessentially Polish play. This is nowhere clearer than in the extensive and detailed ways in which Słowacki drew on Polish folklore for his characters, his themes, the action, and the language of the play. There are frequent mentions of superstitions, legends, and other folk beliefs. There is considerable use of folk-style songs and rhymes, as well as references to actual and mythical elements from Polish history. Gnezno, for instance, is a mythologized version of the actual old Polish capital Gniezno, and Lake Gopło actually exists. Indeed, the very substance of the play, with its mixture of events and elements from various historical periods, is typical of “folk history,” which is less concerned with dates and chronologies and more with themes and meanings. Słowacki himself emphasized this with the very title *Balladina* (which he initially spelled with an *i*, rather than the more normal *y* in Polish), saying in a letter to his mother that “the whole tragedy is like an old ballad, composed as if by the common people.” Thus, for example, the Poland of *Balladina* is both pagan and Christian at the same time. Though it takes place in “mythical times,” as Słowacki explains, these times are profoundly and unalterably Polish.

The play is also strongly linked to Polish literature. For much of his career Słowacki found himself in the shadow of Adam Mickiewicz, eleven years older and already a huge celebrity when Słowacki was beginning to write. Much of Słowacki's work can be seen in part as a response to that of Mickiewicz. His earlier play *Kordian* had been an answer to Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (even the name *Kordian* is a near-anagram of *Konrad*, one of the

incarnations of Mickiewicz's central character). *Balladina*, in turn, is in part a response to Mickiewicz's 1822 collection *Ballady i romanse* (Ballads and Romances), as the title itself shows; *Balladina* in particular takes off from two of the ballads in that collection, "Lilie" (The Lilies) and "Świtezianka." The idea of the berry-picking and subsequent murder, in turn, came from a pseudo-folk ballad by minor poet Aleksander Chodźko (1804-1891) entitled "Maliny" (Raspberries).

At the same time, the non-Polish reader is initially struck by the proliferation of borrowings large and small from various European sources, above all Shakespeare. It is this that led Miłosz to refer to the play as a "cocktail." Seen more positively, this quality has the effect of placing *Balladina* firmly in the broader tradition of European literature, with powerful intertextual links to the author's wide reading and theatre-going. Also, it shows another quality of Słowacki's that Miłosz comments on—that despite an eventful, at times even dramatic life, Słowacki "seems to have drawn little from his life experience and much from his reading and hallucinatory dreams" (Miłosz, 233).

Such a quality makes a play like *Balladina* rich fodder for literary scholars hunting for borrowings and references. Słowacki himself, in his dedicatory letter to Krasieński, talks of the play entering the world "with an Ariostan smile on its face." Kleiner notes that the "snake-eye diamond" in the royal crown, mentioned in Act IV, scene i, is a motif taken from Calderón's play *Los manos blancas no ofenden* (Kleiner, 30-31). Many other connections of this kind can be (and have been) identified. But above all, Słowacki's debt is to Shakespeare.

The Shakespearean elements in the play are what first strike the English-language reader. Indeed, the play has jokingly been described as "*Macbeth* meets *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." Certainly these two plays are present—from *Macbeth* we recognize for instance the murder of a king by a powerful woman and her partner, and the motif of a bloodstain that will not go away; the dinner scene in Act IV, scene i recalls that in Act II, scene iv of *Macbeth*, and each ends with the appearance of the ghost of the protagonist's victim—for *Macbeth* it is Banquo, for *Balladina* her sister Alina. More generally, Słowacki seems to have borrowed from *Macbeth* the prevailing narrative thrust of an irreversible and doomed descent into brutality accompanying an apparent rise to power. Yet in other respects, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* comes to mind: in the play's mingling of real and fantastical characters, in Queen Goplana's love for a village oaf (recalling Titania's love for Bottom), and in the presence of magic in the plot. Sparkfire reminds us of Ariel in *The Tempest*; Kirkor's speeches contain echoes of those of Henry V; Kleiner points out analogies to

*Richard III* and even *As You Like It* (Kleiner, 30); and many other borrowings can be detected. Słowacki himself said that more than anything else the play resembled *King Lear*—he was thinking of the relationship between an aged parent and rival daughters, though here, as Kleiner observes, the powerful king becomes an infirm, helpless mother.

Yet despite all these borrowings and references, *Balladina* is a work of extraordinary originality. What is most significant are not the borrowings themselves, but the creative use Słowacki made of them. The blending of Polish and non-Polish, literary and folk elements is achieved with consummate mastery. Perhaps above all, in combining the fantastic and basically comic spirit of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the grim tragedy of *Macbeth*, Słowacki created a play whose very mood is found nowhere in Shakespeare. Likewise, the play's shift between fantasy, comedy, and bloody reality, with the last inexorably gaining the upper hand as the play moves to its conclusion, is entirely Słowacki's own creation.

Another brilliantly original element of the play is *Balladina* herself. She is a complex, conflicted, richly drawn character; it is this portrayal that holds the drama together, the more so because she is also the main driving force of the action—it is primarily through her actions and decisions that things happen on stage. As Kleiner rightly points out, though *Balladina* is ruthless, bloody, and amoral, as a character she has the quality of greatness (Kleiner, 22). Kleiner compares her to Richard III—she has the same capacity for engaging our dramatic attention, even our sympathy, despite her actions. This is achieved in several ways. First, *Balladina* has the quality of honesty with herself—as her soliloquies show, she clearly sees the psychological processes going on within her, and is able to articulate them. She is inwardly honest while being outwardly dissembling. Second, she is troubled by her own deeds, and Słowacki reveals complex layers of doubt, guilt, and fear underlying her brutal actions. Her first reaction after she kills Alina is to say: “What have my hands done?” In the scenes where she denies her mother, we sense that this denial is driven by terror of being discovered more than by cruelty towards a parent. And lastly, as Kleiner also notes, for all her faults *Balladina* is driven by a desire for greatness; her faults are great faults, and her crimes great crimes. Such qualities make for compelling theatre.

Of the many other outstanding features of the play, one more must be mentioned: its language. In Poland, Słowacki is esteemed above all for his command of language. In *Balladina*, this ability is seen at its peak. He uses language brilliantly to delineate character and to create mood. Note, for example, how the atmosphere of magic and fantasy is sustained by the

lovely passages spoken by Sparkfire and Goplana; how the dissonant voices of boorish Hornbeam and the ethereal Goplana are intertwined in their dialogues; and how the eloquence of Balladina and her “silver-tongued” lover Von Kostrin conceal their crude violence. It is through language that Słowacki achieved the aim he described in a letter to his mother, saying that despite the deliberate improbabilities of the action and the historical inconsistencies, “I have tried to ensure that the people are real and that their hearts are like our hearts.” In other words, it is through language that Słowacki succeeds in anchoring a fantastic and illogical story in a reality with which his readers and viewers can identify.

Yet for all that the play is compelling, and however one chooses to interpret it (see next section), it cannot be denied that Słowacki’s vision of human affairs is a bleak one. One of the reasons Mickiewicz has traditionally been more accessible and popular than Słowacki is that the former was at bottom much more of an optimist, whereas Słowacki’s view of humanity and of history can scarcely be said to be imbued with hope. This is seen clearly in *Balladina*. While the first few acts intertwine comedy and tragedy, it is the tragedy that comes to dominate by the end of the play. Furthermore, as Kleiner notes, alongside the scheming of Balladina and Von Kostrin it seems that fate too conspires against happy resolutions (Kleiner, 23-24). Słowacki has created a world in which things consistently turn out the opposite way to what is intended. Alina is the ideal wife for Kirkor; instead he gets Balladina. Philon’s ideal woman would be Goplana, but she is in love with the boorish peasant Hornbeam, while Philon falls for Alina after her death. The crown should belong to Kirkor or the Hermit, but is assumed first by Hornbeam then by Balladina. In a word, the world of *Balladina* is one that not only is deprived of meaning, but in which things persistently and fatally turn out wrong. Even the main comic character, Hornbeam, is brutally murdered; with him the last remnants of comedy wither away. Słowacki’s vision of the world is not a comforting one.

### ***Balladina’s place in Polish culture***

*Balladina* has proved to be a permanent presence in Polish literature and a major influence on multiple generations of Polish writers and artists. The thematic complexity of the play has offered unending possibilities for new readings. This multilayeredness has meant that successive generations of theatre directors and critics have returned to *Balladina* continually since its first performance, in 1862 in Lwów, then in the Austrian partition of Poland. In fact, it is Słowacki’s most frequently performed play (Kłossowicz,

28). More even than a permanent part of the standard Polish repertoire, it is a work that has been constantly refreshed by new interpretations and understandings.

For nineteenth-century audiences, the play's political and historical subtexts were most salient. The story of a usurped kingdom going to ruin under a false and tyrannical ruler had strong resonances for Poles living under the partitions (1795-1918). This was the line taken by the great mid-century late Romantic poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid (1821-1883) in his interpretation of *Balladina*, and followed by numerous late nineteenth and early twentieth century audiences. Such a "patriotic" reading was not lost on the Russian authorities, who banned performances of the play in the Russian partition of Poland (Braun, 82).

Słowacki was a huge influence on Stanisław Wyspiański (1869-1907), possibly the single most important figure in Polish theatre history. Wyspiański was an artist and man of the theatre as well as a dramatist, and he created a vibrantly "theatrical" theatre in which spectacle, music, and mystery were at least as important as text and storyline. As Braun puts it, Wyspiański "liberated theater from dependence on literature" (Braun, 125). Wyspiański's extravagant dramas, especially his brilliantly innovative *The Wedding* (Wesele, 1901), could not have been written without the inspiration of *Balladina* and Słowacki's other plays. In *The Wedding*, real-life guests at a turn-of-the-century Kraków wedding interact with characters from Polish history and myth. This was surely influenced by Słowacki's juxtaposition of the real and the mythic in *Balladina*. Even more than in terms of theatrical technique and style, though, Wyspiański looked to Słowacki in the unflinching critique of Polish weaknesses and the comfortless historical vision that both writers shared. Like *Balladina*, *The Wedding* ends in the minor key—a planned rebellion fails because its leader has fallen asleep instead of leaping into action. Wyspiański thus castigates Polish society for its inability to fight for its independence.

With the coming of independence after World War I, other aspects of *Balladina* came to be emphasized. For some directors, the play's psychological and Freudian dimensions came to the fore; other productions emphasized the poeticality of the play and its folk elements (Heise & Pacewicz, 44-45).

One of the most famous productions of *Balladina* took place during World War II and was directed by Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990), who subsequently became one of the most outstanding representatives of Polish avant-garde theatre. Kantor's production, one of his first, was performed by his "Independent Theatre" (Teatr Niezależny) company in May 1943 in a private apartment in Nazi-occupied Kraków. Reading Kantor's "score"

for the performance (Kantor, 80-92), it is clear that the play's metaphysical and moral complexity offered Kantor a starting-point for a radically new approach to theatre. From his influence on Kantor and on Stanisław Wyspiański (see above), it is clear that through plays such as *Balladina* Juliusz Słowacki has been hugely important in the subsequent development of Polish theatre. (In this regard, it should be remembered that the first major production by Jerzy Grotowski, alongside Kantor the other towering presence in Polish avant-garde theatre, was a 1962 version of another of Słowacki's plays, the 1834 drama *Kordian*, which Grotowski set in a lunatic asylum [Wiles, 140-1].)

In the communist era, especially in the high Stalinism of the early 1950's, Marxist critics suggested that in *Balladina* Słowacki was portraying the decadences of the bourgeois life. Csató, for example, discusses the interpretations of Kubacki, Wyka and others, who saw the play as a "political fairy-tale with anti-feudal tendencies" (Csató, 81). In other words, *Balladina* was a play about class struggle—the conflict between the peasantry (the predecessors of the workers) and the ruling class. (The same critics were rather unhappy about the bolt of lightning that kills Balladina at the end of the play.) But after Stalin's death in 1953 and the emergence of the theatre of the absurd (Becket's *Waiting for Godot* was first performed in Paris in the same year), Polish theatre directors began responding rather to *Balladina*'s playfulness and carnivalesque elements—indeed, Wiktor Weintraub viewed *Balladina* as "a precursor of the present day theatre of the grotesque and the absurd." Along these lines, possibly the most famous of all productions of *Balladina* was that of Warsaw director Adam Hanuszkiewicz, who in 1974 offered a marvelously creative version at the Teatr Narodowy in which, amongst other things, Goplana and her minions rode about the auditorium on Honda motorcycles, and the battles were fought with mechanized toy tanks.

In the postcommunist period the play has acquired still other resonances. In a 2004 production at Warsaw's Teatr Polski by renowned director Jarosław Kilian, *Balladina* was transported to newly capitalist Poland, and its protagonist was portrayed as a ruthless careerist making her way in life at any cost. Kilian reports that he regarded *Balladina* as "an ordinary girl ... from the provinces, who takes what she believes she deserves from fate, moves up in life, and lives 'as if there were no God'" (a quotation from the play) ([http://www.teatry.art.pl!/recenzje/balladyna\\_kil/balladynawt.htm](http://www.teatry.art.pl!/recenzje/balladyna_kil/balladynawt.htm), accessed January 10, 2006).

An Internet database of Polish theatre productions (e-teatr.pl, accessed January 10, 2006) lists no less than 110 productions of *Balladina* in

Poland in the period from 1945 to 2005. This fact alone should indicate the abiding appeal and relevance the play has for Polish theatres and audiences. It is also worth mentioning that from a theatrical point of view, Braun (82) reports that actors have been drawn to Słowacki's plays because they offer meaty, engaging parts—in this respect *Balladina* is exemplary. Furthermore, as indicated by innovative productions like Hanuszkiewicz's (described above), Słowacki's stagecraft and sense of spectacle mean that *Balladina* offers marvelous possibilities from a theatrical point of view. For all these reasons, *Balladina* is not merely a historical work of literature, but a living, growing piece of Polish culture.

### 3. *Agamemnon's Tomb*

This poem is many things in Polish literary history. Most prominently, it is an elaborate castigation of the Poles nearly ten years after the uprising against Russia in November 1830 (written in 1836, it was published only in 1840); many Poles know it for accusing them of national vices, such as shameful slavishness in opposition to Spartan bravery (“I am from the sad land of Ilots”/ “jestem z kraju smutnego Iłotów,” st.12), for imitation as opposed to originality (“O Poland ... You have been the peacock and parrot of nations” / “pawiem narodów byłaś i papuga,” st.19). But it is also known for its rather entangled image of Prometheus, Orestes (st.20), and the dying Hercules burning from the poison of Deianira's shirt (st.17). In his *History of Polish Literature*, Czesław Miłosz writes about the poem: “Some lines that have become proverbial show Słowacki's typical aggressiveness in his attitude toward his country. He conceived it his patriotic duty to castigate Poland for being ‘the peacock and parrot’ of other nations, and he searches for her ‘angelic soul’ imprisoned as it were in the skull of a drunken guffawing nobleman” (Miłosz, 238). These lines are the images most often alluded to and obviously constitute the most memorable moments of the poem. Indeed, the poet primarily assumes a punishing role that upsets and confuses his readership – he even describes himself as having been “angry” (gniewny) when he wrote it (in the preface to *Lilla Weneda*, and in a letter to the poet Krasiński). He is both vengeful Orestes and the Eumenides that torment him (st. 20). He is the vulture that gnaws on Prometheus, while Poland herself is Prometheus, or rather “Prometheus’ only son,” in a phrase that confuses gender and kinship terms. To further complicate things, the poet at one point says he is only speaking out of sorrow, and that he himself is guilty as well (“I myself am full of guilt”/ “I sam pełen winy,” st. 19).

The poem exists in a dual textual shape: on the one hand, we have its published form, originally presented as a kind of epilogue to the drama *Lilla Weneda* (it followed the play along with the poem, “List do Aleksandra H.”). On the other hand we have its manuscript form, Canto VIII of *Voyage to the Holy Land from Naples* (*Podróż do Ziemi Świętej z Neapolu*). They are very different texts, appearing in very different contexts. The published version of the poem ends after stanza 21, the climax of the poet’s castigation of Poland. This version was read in public at a meeting of the Polish Literary Society in Paris in December 1839; Słowacki decided to end it on this note, as a dramatic point, rather than share with his audience the intimate emotions he writes about immediately after, in the following stanzas of Canto VIII of *Voyage*. The last 11 stanzas that were found in the manuscript provide a very different tone and moral to the ending of the poem.

Our inclusion of this poem in this volume of translations was dictated not just by its importance to Polish literature, but by its treatment of a central theme in European romanticism: Classical Antiquity. Since Antiquity is an essential part of the fabric of Romantic poetry, of all works of Polish Romanticism, *Agamemnon’s Tomb* fits best into the larger framework of European Romanticism. It is grounded in the ancient and therefore universal language of the epoch probably more than any other Romantic poem. Lord Byron famously remarked, “If I am a poet, the air of Greece has made me one” – and what is true of Byron is equally true of Słowacki and his literary output, where antique themes and elements flow like a torrent through virtually almost all his works.

What makes *Agamemnon’s Tomb* unique, however, even when compared to the British or German Romantic literature saturated with ancient themes is that it harnesses Antiquity as an interpretative mirror for Słowacki’s understanding of the history of Poland and the Polish national character.

In *Agamemnon’s Tomb* Słowacki evokes Ancient history (Thermopylae and Chaeronea), as well as literature and myth, most famously Electra, Hercules, Agamemnon and the Eumenides (Furies). His non-canonical treatment of the Prometheus theme adds an important interpretive layer to a central trope of Romanticism, treated most famously by Byron, Goethe and Shelley. He himself declares his debt to Greek tragedy in Canto IV of *Voyage to the Holy Land*: “My beloved Euripides gave me the word of the Eumenides to declaim” (st.15, *Dziela* [Works], vol. IV, p. 58). Similarly, he mentions Euripides as his inspiration in the preface to *Lilla Weneda* (*Dziela*, vol. VII, p. 288).

The thematic tapestry of the opening stanzas (1-9) of *Agamemnon's Tomb* introduces the main elements of Antiquity – Electra, Orestes and Aeneas – invoked by Słowacki to explore the fate of Poland. In some respects the inclusion of all these characters suggests Słowacki is presenting Polish history as a Polish “Oresteia.” The poet declares he is “like” the Atreides (Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Orestes), introducing the theme of guilt that runs through the poem. The lyric tone changes in stanzas 10-15, where the poet seeks a Greek analogy for Polish history; here he famously rejects the comparison of the defeat of the Polish Uprising with the Battle of Thermopylae (480 B.C.), in which 300 Spartans died heroically and allowed for the Greek victory over Persia at the Battle of Salamis a year later. The allusion to Thermopylae was common in the years following the 1831, but Słowacki dismisses this flattering comparison in favour of the more fitting (and less heroic) allusion to the Battle of Chaeronea.

The defeat of Poland was the subject of heated debates and mutual accusations in the émigré community, leading to various evaluations of the causes of the failure. Słowacki’s stanzas can be read as the poet’s voice in, or an echo of, these debates: the poem (up to stanza 21) was read at the Polish Literary Society in Paris only a week after Prince Czartoryski had given his annual address on the anniversary of the Uprising, November 29<sup>th</sup> 1839 (Libera, 118-19). Comparing the November Uprising to Thermopylae implies that its failure could be explained by overwhelming odds. At first glance the imagined question posed by the imagined Spartans (st.14) – “Were there many of you?” – seems to mean Słowacki is repeating the claim that the uprising failed, like Thermopylae, because the Poles were outnumbered. The switch to Chaeronea, however, demands a very different interpretation, and prepares the way for Słowacki’s castigation of Poland, in stanzas 16-21.

The defeat of the Spartans at Thermopylae, which allowed the Greeks to organize themselves before Salamis, suggests that the deaths of the Spartans served a greater purpose. Chaeronea, on the other hand, evokes a symbolic analogy signifying the end of an independent nation. Chaeronea (338 B.C.) marked the final defeat of free Greek cities by the army of Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great; it was infighting and disorganization among the Greeks, as well as their lack of “national” unity that allowed Philip to win. The battle went down in legend (if not in history) as the moment glorious Greece lost its independence forever. Słowacki suggests that the Polish intellectuals are compared to the petty demagogues of Greece in its period of decline.

We should remember that Słowacki never stopped being aware that the analogy to antiquity was fanciful and thus always needed to be invoked with irony. His uses of it consistently show the Polish problem to be a result of Polish failure, Polish history, and so this particular evocation of antiquity helps him make his point. Perhaps this is why a more positive interpretation of Polish history through the prism of Greek history remained not unwritten, but unpublished; six stanzas in Canto IX of *Voyage to the Holy Land* (included in this volume as an addendum to the translation of *Agamemnon's Tomb*) address the theme of the victorious battle of Salamis, and the poet's role in bringing it about. Neither the final stanzas of Canto VIII (stanzas 22-32), with their lyric nostalgia and then ironic rejection of Romanticism, nor the solemn stanzas about Salamis, satisfied Słowacki sufficiently to publish.

This translation is the first in English to provide the entire text with its ambiguous alternate conclusions.

#### 4. *Beniowski*

This lengthy digressive poem in ottava rima is a spectacular return to the Byronic fashion long after Lord Byron ceased to be a literary model for most Polish Romantics, who, having lost the battle for independence in the 1831 insurrection, turned to different cultural inspirations to relieve the pain, and to find ways of meaningful existence in exile. Their far-off native country became idealized and mythologized in literature and painting, either as a nostalgic form of pastoral landscape or as a martyrological, pseudo-biblical story of a nation and its spiritual wandering.

Part of this myth creation was the heroic legend of the Confederation of Bar (*Konfederacja barska*, 1768-76), which forms the background to *Beniowski*, whose main character has a real prototype in the historic person of Maurycy August Beniowski, a Polish nobleman of Hungarian origin, Móric Benyovszky (born September 20th 1746, died May 24th 1786). He became famous in eighteenth-century Europe for his memoirs, written in French, which contain a spurious account of his life, including, at the beginning, his participation in the Confederacy of Bar.

The legend of the Confederacy of Bar, along with the legends of Kościuszko, Napoleon, and the Polish Legions, was one of the formative elements of Polish cultural identity in the early nineteenth century. The Confederation was an association of Polish nobles formed in 1768 at the fortress of Bar in Podolia, now in Western Ukraine, to defend the independence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth against aggression by Russia. The Confederacy opposed King Stanisław August Poniatowski,

and the Polish reformers who were attempting to limit the power of the Commonwealth's nobility. It sought to defend Polish independence, the Polish constitution, the rights of the landed gentry, and Roman Catholicism.

Poniatowski was at first inclined to mediate between the Confederates and Russia, the latter represented by the Russian envoy to Warsaw, Prince Nikolai Repnin; but finding this impossible, he sent a force against them, which captured Bar. However, the simultaneous outbreak of the Koliyivschyna in Ukraine led to the extension of the Confederation throughout the eastern provinces of Poland and even into Lithuania (see II, 87, 1-2).

The Bar Confederates appealed for help from abroad, and helped provoke war between Russia and Turkey (1768-74). So serious did the situation become that King Frederick II of Prussia advised Catherine the Great to come to terms with the Confederates. However, Catherine sent Russian forces to suppress the rebellion, in the fear that it might spread among the Russian serfs (as the Pugachev revolt did later). Confederate bands ravaged the land in every direction, won several engagements with the Russians, and eventually, ignoring Poniatowski, sent envoys on their own account to the principal European powers. In 1770 the Confederacy transferred from its original seat from Silesia to Hungary, whence it conducted negotiations with France, Austria and Turkey with a view to forming a league against Russia. It proclaimed Poniatowski dethroned on October 22nd 1770. The court of Versailles sent Charles François Dumouriez to act as commander-in-chief of the Confederates, but he achieved little. He pronounced Poniatowski a tyrant and traitor at the very moment when he was about to accede to the Confederation. The King was kidnapped for a few days by Confederates in Warsaw 1771: his kidnappers were half-hearted, and he escaped. He thereupon reverted to the Russians, and the Confederation lost the confidence of Europe. Nevertheless, its army maintained the hopeless struggle for some years; the last traces of it did not disappear until 1776.

In 1772, upon the effective defeat of the Confederation, occurred the First Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in which Poland lost thirty percent of her territory and thirty-five percent of her population.

The Confederation of Bar went into Polish myth almost at once as a heroic defence against Poniatowski, the Polish Quisling, and against the murderous power of Russia. Later, Mickiewicz insisted on being buried in a Bar Confederate costume, with cap (see I, 37, 8), and his body, dressed as a poet-soldier, served as an icon of national survival and was artistically copied and proliferated in great numbers of paintings. In fact it may have been those who were at his death who so insisted, for the dead body of the

poet was a political relic, and had to travel round Europe to be properly buried at least twice, in Paris and in Kraków. He also has a grave in Istanbul.

What occurred between the Confederation of Bar and when Słowacki wrote *Beniowski* may be summed-up. On May 3rd 1791 Poniatowski signed a new Polish constitution: it was the first-ever written constitution in Europe, a document so well-balanced that it had the approval, in England, of both Edmund Burke and Tom Paine. But it was intolerable to the neighbouring autarchies, who invaded, and in 1792 occurred the Second Partition, by which the country lost another 308,000 square kilometres to Russia and Prussia. Then, in 1795, a Third Partition attempted to wipe what was left of Poland off the map: the word “Poland” was not to be used again in any diplomatic document. Thousands emigrated, many men joining the armies of revolutionary France – which soon became the armies of Bonaparte. Bonaparte affected to favour an independent Poland, but in fact exploited it without scruple in ways military, political, and economic. Nevertheless, during his first exile, on Elba, he had his loyal Polish cavalry as bodyguard. Others became the heroes of the American war of Independence, like Kazimierz Pułaski, who had been one of the organizers of the Bar Confederation.

At the Congress of Vienna in 1815 after Waterloo, only two minute portions of independent Polish territory were allowed to remain – both “under the protection” of Russia. Between 1820 and 1830 their freedoms were eroded, and their leading citizens arrested. In 1830, encouraged by the revolutions in France and Belgium, a Polish insurrection occurred, but uncertain leadership meant that it was doomed. By September 1831 the Russian army was in Warsaw. Universities and schools were closed, estates confiscated, villages burned, and anyone even suspected of disaffection was hanged. Thousands were sent to Siberia.

Eight thousand Poles left, and settled in Paris. Among them were Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki – neither of whom had taken any part in the insurrection.

Słowacki treats the sacred subject of the Bar Confederation with irony, which in the context of Polish emigration in Paris in 1840 was a literary provocation aimed against the ideological circle of Stanisław Ropelewski, a literary critic of the Polish emigré magazine *Młoda Polska* (*Young Poland*). Ropelewski was an author of derisive articles about Słowacki's poetry. He accused the poet of a lack of proper patriotic spirit, and an inability to write inspiring poetry, despite his stylistic virtuosity.

In *Beniowski* the Bar Confederation is treated in a dual perspective: heroically (represented by the legendary figure of Priest Marek) and

comically, in the character of the naïve protagonist. But the narrative serves only as a setting for numerous authorial digressions, in which Słowacki settles his accounts with the futile politicking of the Polish emigré parties, the pettiness of their ideas, and the absurdity of their beliefs.

The poem centres on a political innocent (like Scott's *Waverley*) who gets caught up in the messy business of the Confederation, from good though confused motives, without ever articulating any understanding of what's going on.

*Beniowski*, like *Don Juan* from which it derives, is (except more seriously) an incomplete text: it was not written chronologically, but contains unconnected material even in the five cantos translated here, and has additional fragments which we have not translated.

As in *Don Juan*, there is often no plot, just digression. What plot there is, is based on the imaginary adventures of the real eighteenth-century Hungarian-Polish Count Beniowski mentioned above, though he bears little relation to Słowacki's innocent protagonist. The plot of Słowacki's *Beniowski* may be summarize as follows

In Canto I, the hero, ruined by litigation, leaves his father's estate (no longer his), with, as it seems, an unfocused intention of joining the Confederation of Bar. He is accompanied by his servant Gregory. In a hallucinatory passage, they think they're being accompanied by a witch on horseback, but she turns out to be Diwa, nurse to the poem's heroine, Aniela. Diwa leads them to Aniela's home, where her tyrannical father intends her for the hand of Dzieduszycki, who (though Słowacki at first withholds the information from us) is against the Bar Confederation. Aniela's passionate eloquence is contrasted with the silence of the inarticulate Beniowski.

Beniowski barely appears in Canto II (see st.64). This canto reveals that Dzieduszycki is indeed a foe to the Confederation, for, while dining in the castle with Aniela's father (a collaborator himself) with a view to furthering his suit, he suddenly finds his hand nailed to the table-top by a knife wielded by the Priest Marek, whose troops need the castle in order to support the Cossack military leader Sawa, their comrade, who is doing battle nearby. Aniela, who has no idea of her father's compromised politics, approaches the castle, finds it overrun by Confederates, sees Dzieduszycki's semi-crucifixion on the table-top, and instinctively draws the knife from his hand. The canto ends with a passionate sermon from the patriot priest.

Canto III starts with a long digression in which Słowacki plays with romantic ideas of poetry, ridiculing the tearful solemnity of post-insurrectionist emigrational writing:

It's clear that after blood rains in November,  
 Poets, like mushrooms, swell each thin capillary:  
 How sad that each weeps buckets to remember  
 The Greek gun-sights that squint his soul's artillery!  
 Each has his language, lame in limb and member;  
 How sad that all are clamped fast in the pillory,  
 So when their plots include some storm and lightning,  
 The censor cuts them, lest they should prove frightening.  
 (III, st.5)

Śłowacki parcels the action out between long digressions about poetry, himself, and his critics: when it starts, Beniowski is seen staring down as if from a height at the Russians attacking Bar. However, his indecisiveness is distracted by two mystical doves, which he follows, only to find six Cossacks trying to burn the oak in which they've roosted. Killing two of the Cossacks, and driving off the other four (as Don Juan does in Byron's poem), Beniowski follows the doves into the tree's hollow trunk. There a trembling sixteen-year-old maiden is hiding – but Śłowacki digresses so that for a long time we don't know whether she's real, or a tree-nymph. The arrival, from Canto II, of Priest Marek and Sawa, to whom she runs for protection, confirm that she's real. Beniowski affirms his virtue and patriotism – and the canto concludes with another sermon from Marek.

Canto IV opens (amidst no little digression) with Marek writing a letter of hard admonition to a foe of the Confederation, while the maiden from the tree stands by with the sealing-wax. A clash of swords reveals Beniowski and Sawa to be fighting on horseback. Beniowski injures Sawa's horse fatally – Sawa, unchivalrically, draws a pistol – when a witch descends and flies both with him, and the doves, into the clouds. Beniowski is naturally bewildered. Priest Marek admonishes him for his violence (without mentioning the witch) and gives him, firstly a mission to the Crimea, and secondly a loving letter from Aniela. The canto ends with an address by the poet to a woman he once loved.

Canto V has two consecutive plots: firstly we find Beniowski in the Crimea, where he finds an eccentrically-clad warrior and his servant sitting at campfire, cooking. Secondly we're reunited with the Cossack Sawa and the witch who lifted him skywards. She, we discover, is in fact his sister, Swentyna, who has attained magical power. Sawa assumes with fraternal fury that she has become a witch through unchastity – she defends herself with bitterness. Neither plot develops further: instead, the fifth canto, and the trunk of the unfinished poem, end with Śłowacki's

address to Mickiewicz, culminating in the defiant parallel between Mickiewicz and Hector, with Słowacki as Achilles, Hector's nemesis.

In the address to Mickiewicz we find the first difference between *Beniowski* and *Don Juan*: for Byron has as his super-dedicattee not a rival genius, but one who thinks, on no evidence, that he is a superior genius – the Poet Laureate, Robert Southey. Both the Anglo-Scots Byron and the Pole Słowacki are motivated by animosity, but in the case of Słowacki the dialectic is a question of substantive literary and ideological differences, whereas in the case of Byron it is just contemptuous and abusive (Southey's "ideology" being unworthy of counter-argument).

There is no magic in *Don Juan*, though there is in Ariosto and Tasso. Byron promises, "I've got new Mythological machinery, / And very handsome Supernatural Scenery" (I, 201, 7-8) but he is joking. He provides none. Słowacki, whether from creative preference, a greater admiration for his Italian models, or from subconscious rivalry with Byron, gives us, sometimes imagined magic, as in the witch on horseback in Canto I, and sometimes real magic, as in the witch on horseback in Canto IV. It could be argued, however, that this does imitate Byron, who seems to give us both a real and an unreal ghost in *Don Juan's* sixteenth canto.

In the argument between Swentyna and Sawa we find another huge difference – that *Don Juan* has rampant and predatory female sexuality as one of its themes, whereas in *Beniowski*, if ever unchaste thoughts or suspicions are voiced, they are always voiced to be refuted. Thus Beniowski, in Canto III, denies any immoral intentions towards the girl in the tree, and thus Swentyna is angry at her brother's suspicions in Canto V. Whether this makes Słowacki more "romantic" than Byron is a point for discussion.

We may admire *Beniowski*, but it's not clear that Słowacki was proud of it. In a letter to his mother of November 10th, 1841, he writes, "Those took their hats off to my little one [*Beniowski*] who had never bowed to me before, and I feel sad that I had to step down from my base, in order for it to be admitted that I am [was] on one ..." <sup>1</sup> His distaste for the Byronic mode in which he wrote so well is perhaps a reason for the poem's unfinished state. Much of the poem remains ingrainedly "romantic," despite the vitriol of some of its satire. Słowacki's mind see-saws between "Romanticism" and "Romantic irony" all the time.

What links Słowacki with Byron – apart from other obvious points of comparison, outlined below – is his definition of patriotism as critical, not

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1: *Letters* II, 149, after Kleiner.