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**The Self in a Crystal Sphere:  
Juliusz Słowacki's Concept  
of the Subject (in his  
works from the 1830's)**

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The aim of this paper is to characterise the key existential metaphors used by Juliusz Słowacki in his works from the 1830's. Looking at the images used by the author of *Kordian*, one can observe an original concept of a Romantic subject, his identity, ways of experiencing the world and himself, as well as the relations between the "self", the reality, and other people. The motifs which are present in Słowacki's works from that time (the image of a man on "top of the world", motifs of the dream of life, pondering in front of a grave, being enclosed in a crystal sphere, journey without a destination) focus only on a typically Romantic image of human greatness and loneliness in relation to the infinite *universum*. They also depict the world as an incomprehensible and hostile area governed by mechanic laws, a kingdom of inanimate matter. These motifs are coupled with metaphors expressing the wish to restore the cosmic order and "enchanted" the reality again by means of emotion and poetic imagination.

JULIUSZ SŁOWACKI, POLISH  
ROMANTICISM, EXISTENTIAL  
METAPHORS, THE ROMANTIC "SELF"

Tematem artykułu jest charakterystyka kluczowych metafor egzystencjalnych, którymi posługiwał się Juliusz Słowacki w swoich utworach z lat 30-tych XIX wieku. Z używanych przez autora *Kordiana* obrazów wyłania się oryginalna koncepcja romantycznego podmiotu – jego tożsamości, sposobów doświadczania świata i samego siebie, a także więzi łączących „ja” z rzeczywistością oraz innymi ludźmi. Motywy obecne w ówczesnej twórczości Słowackiego (obraz człowieka na „wierzchołku świata”, motywy snu życia, dumania na grobie, zamknięcia w szklanej kuli, podróży bez celu) skupiają się nie tylko na typowo romantycznym obrazie wielkości i samotności człowieka na tle nieskończonego *uniwersum*. Przedstawiają także otaczający świat jako niezrozumiały i wrogi obszar rządzone mechanicznymi prawami, królestwo martwej materii. Tym motywom towarzyszą metafory ukazujące pragnienie przywrócenia kosmicznego ładu oraz ponownego „zaczarowania” rzeczywistości za pomocą uczucia oraz poetyckiej wyobraźni.

SŁOWACKI JULIUSZ, ROMANTYZM  
W POLSCE, METAFORY EGZYSTENCJI,  
ROMANTYCZNE „JA”

**1**  
Unless I refer to an existent translation, all the other fragments quoted in this work have been translated by Karolina Puchała-Ladzińska.

**2**  
Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849): one of the most outstanding Polish Romantic poets; author of eminent lyric poems (i.a., *Smutno mi Boże, Testament mój, Rozłączenie, Rzym, Piramidy, Do Ludwiki Bobrówny, W pamiętniku Zofii Bobrówny* [I am referring to these poems later in the article] as well as plays (*Kordian, Balladyna, Lilla Weneda, Fantazy, Mazepa, Horsztyrski, Książd Marek, Sen srebrny Salomei*), poetic poems (*Mnich, Arab, Godzina myśli, Lambro*), digressive poems (*Podróż do Ziemi Świętej z Neapolu, Beniowski*), and epic lyric poems (*Wacław, W Szwajcarii, Poema Piasta Dantyszka herbu Leliwa o piekle, Ojciec zadżumionych, Król-Duch*).

**3**  
I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Anna Stanisz for her review and valuable comments regarding the English context of this work.

*The classical maxim of great realists says: by describing your village you describe the world (Pilch 2003: 39).<sup>1</sup>*

*A long time ago a man used to build his identity. Now he is looking for it (Dąbrowski 2009: 32).*

**1.**

The monologue of the main protagonist in Juliusz Słowacki's<sup>2</sup> play *Kordian* (*Kordian*), uttered "on the highest peak of Mont Blanc" („na najwyższej igle góry Mont-Blanc”), begins with expressing the fear of “gazing into the dark abyss of the world” („spojrzenie w przepaść świata ciemną.”)<sup>3</sup> Immediately afterwards *Kordian* ecstatically experiences the infinite space:

*Tu szczyt... lękam się spojrzeć w przepaść świata ciemną.  
Spojrzę... Ach! pod stopami niebo i nad głową  
Niebo... Zamknięty jestem w kulę kryształową;  
Gdyby ta igła lodu popłynęła ze mną  
Wyżej – aż w niebo... nie czułym, że płynę.  
Stąd czarne skrzydła myśli nad światem rozwinę. (Słowacki 1952: II, 143)*

*/ This is the summit... but I am afraid  
To gaze into the dark abyss of the world  
I'll look... No!... Sky above and sky below!  
I've become enclosed in a crystal ball;  
And if this spike of ice could float with me  
High into the sky... I would not feel adrift.  
Here I'll unfurl the black wings of my thoughts. / (Słowacki ENG)*

However, the spike of ice does not float with the protagonist, who, unfurling “the black wings of his thoughts” („czarne skrzydła myśli”), listens to people’s prayers that are “drifting to God” („płynących do Boga”) and to the barely audible “sound” of out-of-tune human voices. Then he defines his position again, describing the landscape:

*Tu pierwszy zginę, jeśli niebo się zawali.  
A ten kryształ powietrza by tchnieniem rozbity  
Kręgami się rozpułynie na nieba błękity,  
I gwiazdy w nieznaną uciekną krainę...  
I znikną, jakby ich nigdy nie było...  
Spróbuję – westchnę i zginę... (Słowacki 1952: II, 143)*

*/ I'll be the first to die if heaven falls.  
What if a puff cloud burst this crystal sphere  
And scatter it in circles throughout heaven,  
Even the stars at the elusive border  
Would disappear as if they never were...  
I'll try it – I will perish with a sigh... / (Słowacki ENG)*

His further line of thought is equally twisted and unpredictable – Kor-dian recalls the “tomb of nations” („narodów mogiła”), but this image disappears from his mind as quickly as it appeared. The protagonist looks at the landscape again and, after describing a flock of eagles circling around the peak and “a blue river of fissures” („błękitna szczelin rzeka”), he exclaims, almost triumphantly: “I’m a statue of a man / On the statue of the world” („Jam jest posąg człowieka na posągu świata.”) However, the feeling of superiority is immediately accompanied by the painful realisation of helplessness and loneliness:

O gdyby tak się wdrzeć na umysłów górę,  
 Gdyby stanąć na ludzkich myśli piramidzie,  
 I przebić czołem przesądów chmurę,  
 I być najwyższą myślą wcieloną...  
 Pomyśleć tak – i nie chcieć? o hańbo! o wstydzie!  
 Pomyśleć tak – i nie móc? w szmaty podrę łono!  
 Nie móc? to piekło! (Słowacki 1952: II, 143)

*/ If only I could scale mountains of thoughts  
 The way I have scaled this mountain of ice,  
 If I could stand atop the pyramid  
 Of thoughts and knock my head against the clouds  
 Of misconceptions- -to become myself  
 The incarnation of the highest thought...  
 To think such thoughts and not desire it still?  
 A disgrace that each man dreads!  
 To think such thoughts and not be able to?  
 I'd tear by breast to shreds!  
 To not be able to? Now that is hell! / (Słowacki ENG)*

In the next parts of Kordian's monologue, the thoughts and images are combined in a similar way until they are replaced with a vision of resurrecting Winkelried who, like *deus ex machina*, "rises from the ice" („powstaje z lodów”) in front of Kordian, and induces him to fly on a cloud to Poland...

A reader who expects literature to reflect reality, may be utterly confused by Kordian's monologue. It is difficult to understand its hidden logic; Kordian's stream of thought might seem strange. It is not clear why Winkelried is mentioned in the monologue and why the image

of a man enclosed in a crystal sphere was the reason for Kordian to return to Poland. Was he motivated by internal emptiness and futility of existence, or some sudden and unexpected impulse of heart? Or maybe just a whim and boredom influenced, at once, the ill-fated cloud? There are more unanswered questions like these.

Konrad, the main protagonist of Mickiewicz's<sup>4</sup> *Forefather's Eve, Part III* (*Dziady, część III*) speaks in the famous scene of *The Great Improvisation* (*Wielka Improwizacja*) in a substantially different way. The imagination of the protagonist is equally vivid, but far more predictable and, although he is mad himself, he seems to respect the principles of "common sense" to a much greater degree. Having destroyed the walls of the prison cell and then enlarged them to the size of space, his conscious places itself in its centre.

Ty Boże, ty naturo! dajcie posłuchanie. –  
 Godna to was muzyka i godne śpiewanie. –  
     Ja mistrz!  
     Ja mistrz wyciągam dłonie!  
 Wyciągam aż w niebiosa i kładę me dłonie  
 Na gwiazdach jak na szklanych harmoniki kręgach.  
     To nagłym, to wolnym ruchem  
     Kręcę gwiazdy moim duchem;  
 Milijon tonów płynie; w tonów milijonie  
 Każdy ton ja dobyłem, wiem o każdym tonie;  
 Zgadzam je, dzielę i łączę,  
 I w tęczę, i w akordy, i we strofy plączę,  
 Rozlewam je we dźwiękach i w błyskawic wstęgach. –  
 (Mickiewicz 1995: 157)

<sup>4</sup> The oeuvre of the Polish Romantic Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) was for Słowacki one of the most significant points of reference and a stimulus for creative dialogue (cf. Bąk 2013).

*/ Then heed me, God and nature, for my song  
Is worthy you, worthy to echo long.  
A master I!  
I stretch my hands on high  
And touch the stars. Ah, see!  
Now forth there peels  
As from the crystal wheels  
Of some harmonica, a melody;  
And as the circles roll  
I tune the turning planets to my soul.  
A million notes stream on;  
I catch each one,  
I braid them into rainbow-colored chords,  
And out they flow and flash like lightning swords. /  
(Mickiewicz 1997: 74)*

Konrad's thought becomes greater and more powerful, and grows along with the world until it reaches the size of the universe; his "self" seems to absorb the experience of mankind: it is possessive and comprises various forms of existence.

*Boga, natury godne takie pienie!  
Pieśń to wielka, pieśń-tworzenie;  
Taka pieśń jest siła, dzielność,  
Taka pieśń jest nieśmiertelność!  
Ja czuję nieśmiertelność, nieśmiertelność tworzę,  
Cóż Ty większego mogłeś zrobić – Boże?  
Patrz, jak te myśli dobywam sam z siebie,  
Wcielam w słowa, one lecą,*

Rozsypują się po niebie,  
 Toczą się, grają i świecą;  
 Już dalekie, czuję jeszcze,  
 Ich wdziękami się lubuję,  
 Ich okrągłość dłonią czuję,  
 Ich ruch myślą odgaduję:  
 Kocham was, me dzieci wieszczę!  
 Myśli moje! gwiazdy moje!  
 Czucia moje! wichry moje!

W pośrodku was jak ojciec wśród rodziny stoję,  
 Wy wszystkie moje! (Mickiewicz 1995: 157–158)

*/ My song is worthy God and nature; great  
 It is, for with it I create!  
 Such song is power and deathless energy,  
 Such song is immortality!  
 Yes, I have made this immortality I feel;  
 What greater deed, O God, can you reveal?  
 I body forth my songs in words; they fly,  
 They scatter over all the sky,  
 They whirl on high, they play, they shine;  
 I touch them still though they are far,  
 Their tender graces I caress  
 And their rounded forms I press:  
 Their every movement I divine.  
 I love you, children of my poetry,  
 I love my thoughts, my songs, each one a star;  
 My feelings, tempests swirling high and far.  
 Amid the lot of you I stand, the sovereign*

And loving father of his progeny,  
For you are mine, all mine! (Mickiewicz 1997: 74-75)

Here, “feeling” and “suffering for millions” is, in a way, prepared and justified with the internal dynamic of the protagonist’s thought. Thanks to this dynamic, Konrad may feel that he is the most sensitive man in the world, a new Adam, the greatest poet, experiencing and thinking for himself and others, positioned on the boundary between God and Nature. His rebellion against God stems naturally from the logic of the preceding vision. It is the result of accumulating the great power of imagination and empathy. In this way, Konrad prepares himself for becoming a worthy interlocutor to God and a mediator between heaven and Earth. Then, on the verge of blasphemy, he undergoes a transformation.

Słowacki, however, despite clear references to Mickiewicz’s *Improvisation*, chose a different way. In Kordian’s monologue, there is no point in looking for analogous building of the dynamic of tension that would lead directly to a climax and transformation of personality. Rather, his wandering thoughts resemble a chain of loose associations, a record of scattered impressions that neither follow from the previous ones nor are linked to them by a cause and effect relationship. This chain is governed by loose dynamics of associations and determined by changeable images and emotions, as well as by increasing and reducing the tension. One may have the impression that at the end of his monologue, Kordian is exactly the same as at its beginning. The only difference is that his mind is filled with a slightly different thought. This mind, being an echo of the world, resembles modern reflexivity which is both situational and “self-questioning” (Ziemba 2006: 35).

## 2.

Kordian's monologue encourages me to analyse the nature of the subject in Juliusz Słowacki's works, that which Kwiryna Ziemia describes as a relation between "poetic imagination or poetic consciousness" („wyobraźnią poetycką lub poetycką świadomością") and something "that can be referred to as an image of a poet's mind in a literary work, or a thematic plan of deep structures of his existence" („co można nazwać obrazem umysłu poety w dziele czy stematyzowanym w nim planem głębokich struktur jego egzystencji" – Ziemia 2006: 44). Therefore, as Marta Piwińska argues, if "the inspired poet makes momentary revelations in metaphors" („poeta natchniony dokonuje chwilowych rewelacji w metaforach" – Piwińska 1981: 178), if, as says Czesław Miłosz, "the way in which a man visualizes space, situates himself in his imagination in relation to other things, is synonymous with his way of thinking" (Miłosz 1985: 199) („sposób, w jaki człowiek układa sobie przestrzeń, czyli jak siebie samego w swojej wyobraźni umieszcza wobec innych rzeczy, jest równoznaczny z jego sposobem myślenia" – Miłosz 2013: 223), if, as argued by Lakoff and Johnson, "our ordinary conceptual system [...] is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff 1980: 3), and "metaphor plays an essential role in characterizing the structure of the experience" (Lakoff 1980: 118), and finally if, as Charles Taylor put it, "to know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand" (Taylor 2006: 27), it means that in each metaphor, each poetic imagery, both the beauty of poetry and the truth of existence are included to an equal degree.

Therefore, following the metaphors of existence in Juliusz Słowacki's works from the 1830's,<sup>5</sup> I will make an attempt to find the answers to several crucial questions: how do Słowacki's protagonists perceive

## 5

In the Polish scholarly tradition, there is often a distinction between Słowacki's oeuvre from the 1830's and 1840's. The former is full of strong individualism and Romantic pessimism, whereas the latter, since it is dominated by religious experience, tends to be called "the mystical period".

6

The article refers to numerous suggestions included in the following literature about Juliusz Słowacki's works: Kowalczykowska (1994), Janion, Żmigrodzka (2004), Łubieniewska (1998), Piwińska (1992), Ziemia (2006), Kleiner (2003), Przychodniak (2001), Zwierzyński (2003), Przychodniak (2007), Bąk (2013).

themselves? What is their attitude towards reality? What is the relationship between the protagonists, the world, and other people? Which is more important to them: their mind or the surrounding reality they perceive and experience? What is the nature of the world, according to them: is it a product of their mind, or does it have a more tangible character? What is this perceiving and experiencing “self” like: is it strong or weak, subjected to reality or independent of the laws of the world? What is it filled with: the contents of its own soul, or the exterior impressions? Does it have any centre, continuity, past, present, and future? Does it undergo any changes? I am also going to investigate how the metaphors of existence in Słowacki's poetry relate to each other, whether they form a certain pattern, and by what kind of logic they are governed.

Therefore, I suggest reading the images and metaphors concerning man and his existence in Słowacki's works from the 1830's simultaneously. On the basis of this, I will try to create a story, perhaps an arbitrary and certainly incomplete one, about the narrative identity of Słowacki's protagonists. The story will comprise comments on the poet's most popular figures of existence, just as a film comprises individual stills recorded on a reel.<sup>6</sup>

It is not my intention to include biographical facts in this article. I am not going to prove that these metaphors of existence refer directly to the poet's personality. Rather, I am looking for metaphorical (self-) portraits of a Romantic protagonist described in these works, and to specify Słowacki's general vision of man, that is his concept of the subject. Therefore, it is of no concern to me whether the author of *Kordian* presents himself or only some of his protagonists in this way. I am not so much interested in Słowacki as a person, as in Słowacki's protagonist and his experience of the world, self-understanding, and subjectivity.

## 3.

**Facing the vastness, on top of the world – powerful and lost**

In Słowacki's poetry from the 1830's, there are many images of a man "on top of the world". The poet was interested especially in setting the scenes of monologues of his protagonists in a mountainous scenery, or on top of high buildings, with the characters facing the infinity and vastness of heaven, Earth, or sea. Sometimes the scenes were set on tops of pyramids, e.g., in the poem *On the Top of the Pyramids* (*Na szczycie piramid*); on the rocks of Dover (*Kordian*) or some secluded place on the shore of the Leman Lake – ,e.g., the poem *Separation* (*Rozłączenie*). At other times, there were empty meadows of The Roman Campagna – the poem *Rome* (*Rzym*), Alpine summits – the poem *In Switzerland* (*W Szwajcarii*), and also the open sea "One hundred miles away from either shore" – *Hymn* "I am sad, Saviour..." (*Hymn „Smutno mi, Boże...”*). Such a situation is depicted almost perfectly by the poet in the opening part of the poem, *A Journey to the Holy Land from Naples* (*Podróż do Ziemi Świętej z Neapolu*). A narrator-protagonist says about himself:

*Chrystusa diabeł kusił i mnie kusi.  
Na wieży świata postawił smutnego  
Życia nicością i pokazał wszędzie  
Pustynie mówiąc: „Tam ci lepiej będzie”. (Słowacki 1956: 17)*

*/ The Devil tempted Christ and he is tempting me.  
He put me on top of the world's tower, saddened  
By life's nothingness, and showed me the surrounding  
wilderness saying: "You will be happier there." /  
(qtd. in Kalinowska 2004: 70)*

7  
Romantic experience  
of the summit is  
depicted in Kolbusze-  
wska (2007: 35–73).

The image mentioned is a portrait of a man experiencing the vastness of the world and feeling lofty emotions in the face of the infinite.<sup>7</sup> However, all the metaphors present Słowacki's Romantic subject in the state of *peculiar duality*. On the one hand, it is a man elevated above the temporality, suspended between heaven and Earth, God and the world, experiencing metaphysical feelings and a typically Romantic loftiness; a protagonist of a powerful spirit, imagination and emotion, aspiring to gain spiritual control over the world. On the other hand, however, he is also presented as a small particle, lost in the infinity, separated from reality and other people. It may be claimed that Słowacki's protagonist is tragically torn between contradictions: top and bottom, greatness and smallness, strength and weakness, good and evil, timelessness and history, radical individuality and a return to the community. The protagonist is lost in the wilderness of the world, but at the same time he is marking his own way, choosing the directions, looking for the purpose of his own life journey.

### **In a crystal ball – separated from the world and people**

The *motif of separation from the world* is particularly disturbing in these images. It reappears consistently and in various forms in Słowacki's works: in the form of a man enclosed in a crystal ball – “Sky above and sky below! / I've become enclosed in a crystal ball [...]” (Słowacki ENG; „Ach! pod stopami niebo i nad głową / Niebo... Zamknięty jestem w kulę kryształową [...]” – Słowacki 1952: II, 143), or being trapped in “a circle of charms” („w kole czarów tajemniczym”), from which one cannot escape – “[...] from which I will never escape. / I could have been something... I will be nothing ...” (Słowacki ENG; „Nie wyjdę z niego... Mogłem być czymś... będę niczym...” – Słowacki 1952: II, 122); it is also an experience of being trapped in a crystal bowl – “Goldfish

in a crystal bowl / Pound against the hard but unseen borders. / This crystal sphere of air in which you splash, / This world is an abyss of nothingness” (Słowacki ENG; „O! złota rybko w kryształowej bani, / Tłucz się o twarde brzegi niewidzialnych granic; / Mały kryształ powietrza, w którym pluszczesz skrzela, / Jest wszystkiem, a świat cały nicości topielą.” – Słowacki 1952: II, 191); or in the form of experiencing loneliness in the “space of the world” („świata przestrzeni”) and an “alien crowd” („obcego tłumu”) – in the poem *A Mother to a Son* (*Matka do syna*). It is also an experience of alienation on the “desert of the world” („na pustyni świata”) – in poems such as *Clouds; Rome; Hymn* “I am sad, Saviour...” (*Chmury, Rzym, Hymn „Smutno mi, Boże...”*). This feeling of alienation is explicitly expressed by the poet in the words of the poem *The Last Memory. To Laura* (*Ostatnie wspomnienie. Do Laury*): “Nothing bids me farewell, nothing awaits me, / Nothing behind or in front of me.” („Nic mię nie żegna, nic mię nie czeka, / Nic za mną! i nic przede mną!” – Słowacki 2005: 107). It usually happens that in his works, Słowacki strengthens the effect of huge distance between the poetic “self” and other people – he does this by means of placing his protagonists on summits (which has already been mentioned), and by means of a motif of protagonists separated by the lake – as in the poem *Conscience* (*Sumnienie*), or the impassable space of the whole world – the poem *Separation* (*Rozłączenie*).

In the examples above, there is clearly the ancient motif of *homo bulla*: a man enclosed in a crystal ball (or in a soap bubble). The motif was intensively used, i.a., in the 17<sup>th</sup> century *vanitas* allegories (Purc-Stępiak 2004), and symbolised “the fragility and transience of human life” („kruchosc i ulotnosc życia ludzkiego” [Bobryk 2011: 146]) and “the constant changeability which entangles a human” („nieustanną zmienność, w którą uwikłany jest człowiek” [Purc-Stępiak 2004: 5]).

Słowacki transformed it in a very interesting way: in his oeuvre, the recurrent images of the elevation of the human and his enclosure in a crystal ball emphasise his extraordinariness, or even triumphant individualism, but at the same time, they highlight his alienation, separation from nature, inability to experience a union with others, the lack of closeness to God; in short, a sense of isolation from the world.

The sense of these metaphors concentrates mostly on experiencing *abnormal estrangement*, because the protagonists themselves describe their existential situation in this way.

### **On a grave – silence of people, silence of God**

In this “multitude of things”, Słowacki’s subject appears not only as a small, lonely island, immersed in the ocean of the world, but he is also depicted as a man with a “torn and bloody heart” and a “soul of ashes” (o „sercu rozdartym i krwawym” i „duszy z popiołów”) – *In Switzerland (W Szwajcarii* – Słowacki 1952: III, 149, 160), as a “ghost of coffin”, “proud with sadness” („duch trumny”, „smutkiem dumny”) – *Clouds (Chmury* – Słowacki 2005: 103), silent on a grave, speechless under the empty sky, with pessimist thoughts in a cemeterial scenery.

There is an image which opens Słowacki’s autobiographical poem *An Hour of Thought (Godzina myśli)* which depicts a suffering, disinherited man, living his tragic life in an “disenchanted world”, deprived of God’s presence:

*Głuche cierpiących jęki, śmiech ludzki nieszczerzy,  
Są hymnem tego świata – a ten hymn posepny,  
Zbłąkanymi głosami wiecznie wniebowstępnym,  
Wpada między grające przed Jehową sfery,  
Jak dźwięk niesfornej struny. Ziemia ta przeklęta,*

Co nas takim piastunki spiewem w sen kołyszcie.  
 Szczęśliwy, kto się w ciemnych marzeń zamknął ciszę,  
 Kto ma sny i o chwilach prześnionych pamięta. (Słowacki 1952: II, 79)

8  
 This passage  
 evokes William  
 Blake's visions.

*/ Remote moans of the suffering, phony human laughter  
 Are the hymn of this world – and this sullen hymn  
 Enters heaven with its roaming voices  
 Joins the choirs singing for Jehovah  
 Like a sound of an unruly string. This land is cursed  
 And lulls us to sleep with this song  
 Happy is he who locked himself in the silence of dark dreams  
 Who dreams and remembers the moments of dreaming. /*

This extract portrays perfectly the relations between the dying spirituality of the protagonist and the silent, incomprehensible, and hostile world. Here, reality takes the form of *inanimate matter*, the Newtonian world-mechanism, deprived of real life and going insane<sup>8</sup>.

What appears in such a scenery are Słowacki's omnipresent images of a grave and a "pondering" man, being in a state of "internal fossilisation" („wewnętrzne skamienienie” – Ziemia 2006: 111). Such images may be found in *Kordian* and *A Journey to the Holy Land from Naples*; in *Anhelli* and *The Father of the Plague-Stricken* (*Ojciec zadżumionych*); in *Poetic Letters from Egypt* (*Listy poetyckie z Egiptu*) and in the poet's letters. These images accompany the protagonists who are lacking a sense of purpose and are lost, dead "in the womb of an alien land" („w obcej ziemi łonie” – Słowacki 1956: 34). These protagonists are destined "to sit on graves" („na grobowcach siadać”), "to possess somnambulant kingdoms" („senne królestwa posiadać”), "to have harps that are voiceless and listeners who are deaf" („nieme mieć harfy i słuchaczy

głuchych”) – *Agamemnon’s Tomb in A Journey to the Holy Land from Naples* (*Grób Agamemnona z Podróży do Ziemi Świętej...* – Słowacki 1956: 73, english translations Kalinowska 2004: 80–81). “I was supposed to find here people - I see the corpses” („Miałem tu znaleźć ludzi – widzę trupy” – Słowacki 1952: II, 20) – says the main protagonist of the poetic novel *Lambro*.

Paradoxically, the images of being elevated above the world and pondering on a grave often merge into one vision. Classic examples of this are the monologues on top of the pyramids – which are “mountains” and graves at the same time – *On the Top of the Pyramids, Conversation with the Pyramids* (*Na szczycie piramid, Rozmowa z piramidami*). But this pondering on a grave may actually take place anywhere because, according to Słowacki, a grave means the whole world: the tomb of people, history, culture and God.

### **On the way – without direction, dreamily**

The images of wandering (exile, pilgrimage, roaming, moving), which are omnipresent in Słowacki’s works, complete this vision in an interesting way. Here, though, the situation is also paradoxical: this wandering sometimes has a specific direction in a geographical sense (which can be seen in the title of the poem *A Journey to the Holy Land from Naples*), but at the same time, in a spiritual sense, it lacks an explicit direction. The internal journey of the protagonists in Słowacki’s poetry is a rather interminable, somnambulist “roaming” without a specific purpose; *a dreamy journey of a “Pole errant”* among the diversity of the world; the somnambulist wandering of an expelled man in a ghost-like world of silent signs and mute culture. This world resembles a ghost because it has lost its life, because it is like a grave: silent, bereft of spirit. I assume that this world is a different form of the same,

disenchanted, Newtonian world-mechanism that is connected to the motif of “pondering on a grave.”

Therefore, Słowacki’s dreamy protagonists do not have a close contact with “harsh” reality, they are in a state of stupor and inertia, and their wandering does not seem to be filled with materiality, or depend on the laws of gravity. The oneiric metaphor plays a crucial semantic role here. Słowacki’s protagonists experience a feeling that nothing in the world really happens, and “a poor tent of an errant Pole” („biedny namiot błędnego Polaka” – preface to the poem *The Father of the Plague-Stricken* – Słowacki 1952: III, 133) has been put up in a land of dreams. “And my soul comes back to sleep among the graves” („I dusza moja wraca spać pomiędzy groby” – *En s’veillant...* – Słowacki 2005: 76). That is the essence of this existential experience: “I will sleep” because I am destined to “possess somnambulant kingdoms” (*A Journey to the Holy Land from Naples* – Słowacki 1956: 34, 73). It is summarised also by another symbolic image, included in the lyric *To A. M. (Do A. M.)*:

Bo moje serce jest w płaszczu rycerzy,  
Którzy na bieli mają krzyż czerwony,  
A nad nim jeszcze jest pancierz stalony,  
A ono jeszcze głębiej – w trumnie leży. (Słowacki 2005: 189).

/ Because my heart is in the coat of knights  
Which is white with a red cross  
With a steel armour above  
And the heart lies much deeper – in a coffin. /

Comparing these groups of images, which are contradictory to a certain degree, but at the same time complement each other, I notice another

regularity. In all the cases (images of a man contemplating the infinity, pondering on a grave or making a dreamy journey of life), *there is no correspondence between the “self” and the world*. This discrepancy means a lack of spiritual harmony between the “self” and “non-self”, but it also defines the spatial relations between the individual elements of the world presented in Słowacki’s works. Therefore, if the “self” remains motionless, existent in timelessness, then the landscapes whirl around it and become larger. However, if the “self” wanders, the world seems to be standing still in an unaltered form. As a result, either: “[...] I remained alone in a desert – with the collapsing Rome” („[...] ja zostałem / W pustyni sam – z Rzymem, co już się wali” – *Rome* – Słowacki 2005: 113), and “the view in thoughts” („widok w myślach”) changes from the contemplation of a landscape to the vision of flying centuries – “like rain / on the granite walls, on the glows of fires, / on the thunders foreshadowing disasters...” („jak deszcze / Po granitowych ścianach; na pożarów łuny, / Na ogromnych wypadków bijące pioruny...” – as in the poem *On the Top of the Pyramids* – Słowacki 2005: 160). Or, it happens the other way round: “The Faulhorn summit, St. Peter’s dome, Vesuvius, the pyramids, for me they were like the highest twigs of a tree, on which I, a poor wandering bird, would sit for a while to rest” („Szczyt Faulhornu, kopuła świętego Piotra, Wezuwiusz, piramidy, były to dla mnie jak najwyższe gałązki na drzewie, na których ja, biedny ptaszek wędrujący, siadałem na chwilę, aby odetchnąć” – Słowacki 1962: 343). The second image, of a man as a bird sitting on the branches of a tree-world, is a recurring one (especially in Słowacki’s letters from the 1830’s) it is like a persistent *leitmotiv*.

The expressive portrait of a man experiencing a sense of being lost and lonely was presented by Słowacki *expressis verbis* in the preface to volume III of *Poetry* in 1833, where he was trying to prove that this state

of alienation and senselessness is a common existential experience of a man of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, the poet endowed his literary protagonists with such features. The following is a description of one included in the preface mentioned:

9  
These are the words of the Priest uttered to Kordian before his execution.

*[...] Lambro jest to człowiek będący obrazem naszego wieku, bezskutecznych jego usiłowań, jest to wcielone szyderstwo losu, a życie jego jest podobne do życia wielu teraz mrących ludzi, o których przyjaciele piszą, czym być mogli, o których nieznanymi mówią, że nie byli niczym. (Słowacki 1952: II, 11)*

*/ [...] Lambro is a person exemplifying our century and its futile attempts; it is an incarnated derision of fate and his life resembles the life of many people dying now, whose friends write of them who they could be, and strangers say that they had been nothing. /*

### **To enchant the world – that means to come back to life...**

However, the above-mentioned images of isolation are accompanied by attempts to wake up from this dreamy lethargy, the wish to revive a dead soul which lies in a coffin and is covered with ashes, which is very frequent in Słowacki's works from the 1830's. The following appeal was addressed to Kordian, one of the most representative protagonists of Słowacki's works of that time:

*Synu! powstań z prochu  
I leć do Boga, ale przebacz światu.  
Bóg cię wyrывa z lwiej paszczy, i z lochu,  
W którym byś uwiądnął na kształt mdłego kwiatu...  
(Słowacki 1952: II: 198)<sup>9</sup>*

## 10

I am referring to the famous quotation by Max Weber (“Entzauberung der Welt”), who in this way described the consequences of modern consciousness. Cf. Habermas (1990: 1-2).

## 11

Thorough analyses of the creative power of imagination in Słowacki’s works are presented in Kowalczykova (1994: 161-168, 233-301) and Stanisiz (2007: 240-283).

/ My son! Rise from the ashes; fly to God,  
 Forgive the world. God will deliver you  
 Out of the lion’s mouth and from his dungeon,  
 Where you would wilt just like a faded flower... / (Słowacki ENG)

One may conclude that this spiritual liberation is the main aim of Słowacki’s protagonists, and might be achieved by reconnecting the subject and reality. It turns out that in order for the “self” to exist in Słowacki’s poetry, it has to *fight with the disenchanting world*.<sup>10</sup> The world can be *enchanted again* by the fire of emotion and imagination in the state of dream, euphoria of poetic inspiration, creating a new reality and a new world, saturating it with signs of spirituality (Ziemia 2006: 114, 120).

The process of replenishing the world with spirit is accomplished by heating one’s own heart (and then the whole world) with the fire of emotion. An image of such a man is presented in the poem addressed to *Zygmunt* (*Do Zygmunta*), in which Krasiński was depicted as a “reviver of hearts” („serc wskrzesiciel”), who can “do magic with the heart” („robić z sercem czary”): he changed the heart blood into tears, then he pulled out the heart, “took it to his womb, / warmed it, lit it, so that it doesn’t die / neither less calm nor less proud” („wziął we własne łono, / Ogrzał, oświecił, by nie poszło w trumnę / Ani spokojne mniej – ani mniej dumne” – Słowacki 2005: 192). With this attitude, the poet’s mind is capable of creating new worlds, more genuine than the real ones, because they are revived with the creative power of poetry. This concept of a poet and poetry is mentioned in Słowacki’s prefaces to his works from the 1830’s: preface to a two-volume edition of *Poetry* (Paris 1832), preface to volume III of *Poetry* (Paris 1833), and the prefaces to *The Father of the Plague-Stricken*, *Wacław*, *Balladyna*, and *Lilla Weneda* (*Ojciec zadżumionych*, *Wacław*, *Balladyna*, *Lilla Weneda*).<sup>11</sup>

### The great “self” of a Romantic poet versus the reality

We already know that it was the movement of imagination and strong emotions that created the *real world, the living reality, saturated with signs of the spirit*, although it existed within the mind of the observer. But this reality not only exists in the subject’s mind, but it is also created by it, because it consists of memories that are processed and embellished by the imagination and experiences gathered during the dreamy journey of life. It might be argued that the entity that *enchants the reality again* is the strong “self” of a Romantic artist – through the prism of his psyche, we can observe the world depicted in Słowacki’s poetry (Zwierzyński 2003: 22). This logic of enchanting the world with the power of imagination is fully explained by the poet in prefaces to his works and in numerous poetic pieces (for instance, the poem *In Switzerland* and the famous description of the Mega Spileon monastery in the poem *A Journey to the Holy Land from Naples* – Słowacki 1956: 65–67).

There is, however, a problematic issue here. The very same reality which is enchanted again by the poet creates a virtually impenetrable *barrier between the “self” and the world*; acts like a pane separating him from what is called a source experience. “My thought / Drowning in a swirling starry whirlpool” (Słowacki ENG; “myśli w gwiazd tonące wirze” – Kordian’s words – Słowacki 1952: II, 127) constantly encounters obstacles: things that attract the observer’s attention and through which he perceives the world (like the moon which in Słowacki’s numerous poems, such as *The Moon, Separation, Conscience* [Księżyc, Rozłączenie, Sumnienie], plays the role of an irremovable mediator between the subject, the world, and the reader), or reflections and metamorphoses (as in *Separation* or *Paris*). In Słowacki’s poetry even the thought can become independent, and then alienated (as in the poem, *On the Top of the Pyramids*, where the moment of ecstasy is immediately suppressed by a series of historic images). As

12  
Marian Maciejewski's  
quotation (cited after  
Zwierzyński 2003: 28).

a result, the landscapes are certainly beautiful, but there is something disconcerting, or even ghastly about them: they form a growing, cancerous matter of imagination, are “a decoration’s rebellion” („bunt dekoracji”)<sup>12</sup>, enter the mind of the observer, make him further, and not closer to the world. They are partly responsible for the loneliness of the Romantic subject.

What is interesting is that the absorbed and processed images do not overlap or accumulate, but they replace each other. Słowacki himself provides evidence for it in one of his letters: “I saw the pyramids, but I lost the image that they created in my imagination” („Widziałem więc piramidy, ale za to straciłem obraz, który sobie o nich moja imaginacja tworzyła” – Słowacki 1962: 343).

### **The “self” – a lamp and a mirror of the world**

These whirling and at the same time growing images present the duality of a Romantic mind, which acts as a mirror, but an enchanted one: reflecting and simultaneously transforming the reality, directed towards the mind of the poet rather than the world around him (Abrams 1971: 48–53). Słowacki illustrates this phenomenon by means of two images.

At first, there is an image of the “self” *absorbing the experience of the world*. This aspect is also included in a later poem – *To Ludwika Bobrowna* (*Do Ludwiki Bobrówny*), in which the process of filling the blank card of the protagonist’s mind is described in the following way. First, her eyes “fed with gold and rainbow-like vanity” („karmione złotem i tęczową czczością”) have to fill the spiritual emptiness. The addressee of the poem can do this when her eyes are able to look at people in chains and shed tears, when they do not ignore the picture of poverty, and when they reflect “the heavens with the souls azure and more” („niebiosa, aż do błękitu dusz i jeszcze dalej”), and finally “throw two columns of light, /

like fires on volcanoes” („rzuć [...] dwie światła kolumny, / Jak ognie, które na wulkanach stoją”). Only then will her eyes become “full of heaven” („niebieskie”), which means they will be filled with psychological content, expressing the truth and power of spiritual existence (Słowacki 2005: 254).

Then, there is a second type of image, connected with *processing experiences*. It will happen when “the soul sits” on the eyes of the observer (*The Pyramids*), and, like a lamp, activates the creative imagination (Abrams 1971: 167–184; Bowra 1957). The act of seeing cannot be separated from the conditions determining it.

What conclusion can be drawn from this? In Słowacki’s works, the act of filling poetry with the experiences of the subject is done according to the principle illustrated by the idea of St. Thomas Aquinas, who described the notion of participation. He specified two types of participation in existence. One resembles a light beam reflected in a mirror, and disappearing when its source disappears. The other can be compared to heating: an object receiving heat becomes warmer, and when laden with heat, it can keep returning it for a long time.<sup>13</sup>

If we were to refer the metaphor of St. Thomas Aquinas to Słowacki’s protagonists, it would transpire that they are like mirrors reflecting the light. Here, the “self” is not the “self”; it is rather all that it experiences. It also means that it is deprived of a centre. Consequently, the concept of the subject in Słowacki’s poetry from the 1830’s presents a series of self-portraits of the “self”,<sup>14</sup> whose part is reflexivity not immersed in itself, not independent and not changing, not keeping anything forever, and not embedded in corporality. Hence, the mirrored mind of Słowacki’s protagonists would be like “interiority without the interior”, an emptiness being filled with experiences of the world, looking at the reflection, oscillating between recording and processing the experiences. Zbigniew Przychodniak commented on this fact accurately, in the following way:

**13**  
This idea is owed to Dr. Adam Workowski, whom I would like to heartily thank.

**14**  
The significance of self-portrait in Słowacki’s works is discussed in Kowalczykowa (1994: 55–56).

[...] poetyckie „ja” liryki Juliusza Słowackiego ucieka od pytań „istotowych”, uchyla się przed samookreśleniem, zdefiniowaniem własnej tożsamości. Pogrążony w egzystencji podmiot-bohater jego wierszy nie stawia pytań o esencję. Poeta tworzy „obrazy autora” w myśl zasady rozszczepiania, multiplikowania form – istnienia i pisania. Ryzykowne pytania o „prawdę” życiową tych obrazów, o tożsamość podmiotu zmieniają się w ciąg pytań o prawdę literatury. (Przychodniak 2007: 160)

/ [...] the poetic “self” in Juliusz Słowacki’s poetry avoids the “essence” questions, evades self-defining and specifying its own identity. The subject-protagonist of his poems, immersed in existence, does not ask questions about the essence. The poet creates “the author’s images” according to the principle of splitting and multiplying the forms of existence and writing. The risky questions about life “truth” of these images and about the subject’s identity change into a series of questions about the truth of literature. /

In one of his essays, Jorge Luis Borges wrote – *nota bene* about Shakespeare, whom Słowacki highly respected – that the author of *Hamlet* did not have a soul because only in this way could he impersonate his protagonists; only in this way could he become the voice of the world (Borges 1999: 77–78). The same appears to be true about Słowacki’s protagonists: the poet’s narration about the adventures of the “self” seems to be the story about a hollow subject, always ready to become someone else. It brings to mind the concept of an “epty self”, which is characteristic of postmodernism (Hoskins, Leseho 1996: 247–248). ♡

— Translated by Karolina Puchała-Ladzińska

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## Streszczenie

Tematem artykułu jest charakterystyka kluczowych metafor egzystencjalnych, którymi posługiwał się Juliusz Słowacki w swoich utworach z lat 30. XIX wieku. Z używanych przez autora *Kordiana* obrazów wyłania się oryginalna koncepcja romantycznego podmiotu – jego tożsamości, sposobów doświadczania świata i samego siebie, a także więzi łączących „ja” z rzeczywistością oraz innymi ludźmi. Motywy obecne w ówczesnej twórczości Słowackiego (obraz człowieka na „wierzchołku świata”, motywy snu życia, dumania na grobie, zamknięcia w szklanej kuli, podróży bez celu) skupiają się nie tylko na typowo romantycznym obrazie wielkości i samotności człowieka na tle nieskończonego *uniwersum*. Przedstawiają także otaczający świat jako niezrozumiały i wrogi obszar rządzony mechanicznymi prawami, królestwo martwej materii. Tym motywom towarzyszą metafory ukazujące pragnienie przywrócenia kosmicznego ładu oraz ponownego „zaczarowania” rzeczywistości za pomocą uczucia oraz poetyckiej wyobraźni.

Koncepcja podmiotowości zawarta w poezji Słowackiego z lat 30-tych XIX wieku ukazuje serię autoportretów człowieka romantycznego, których treścią jest obraz samotnego indywidualisty o rozmytej tożsamości, stroniącego od pytań esencjalnych na rzecz doświadczenia egzystencji, „ja” niezanurzonego w sobie i niezakorzonego w cielesności. Lustrzana świadomość bohaterów Słowackiego okazuje się „wewnętrznością bez wnętrza”, przestrzenią wypełnianą wrażeniami świata, oscylującą między rejestrowaniem a przetwarzaniem wrażeń.

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