The Romantic Other: Adam Mickiewicz in Russia 1824-1829

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This dissertation examines the role of Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz as the Romantic Other in the formation of Russia’s Romantic identity during his Russian sojourn between 1824 and 1829. Analysis of Mickiewicz’s image as the poetic Other, with respect to his Russian contemporaries, reveals the process that led to the establishment of their individual and national identities during the transition from Classicism to Romanticism in the second half of the 1820s. Examination of materials gathered from a variety of sources – poetry dedicated to, and inspired by, Mickiewicz, reviews of his work, correspondence and memoirs – demonstrates how contemporary Russians perceived Mickiewicz: a Polish poet, all at once a representative of Western literature and culture, a Lithuanian bard, a Slavic Byron, and a poet who was also close to Russia’s cultural and poetic tradition. Special consideration is also given to Mickiewicz as the Other in Pushkin’s poetic paradigm “bard vs. prophet”, through which the Russian poet expressed and interpreted his own poetic identity in the context of Western and Russian literature. Such a multi-dimensional image of Mickiewicz reflects the Russians’ struggle to establish their own Romantic identity in response to Western literary and cultural models, as well as one that would reflect Russia’s own history and tradition. By examining Mickiewicz’s so far unexplored position as the Romantic Other, this dissertation provides a new perspective on the significant role that the Polish poet and his work played in the critical period of Russia’s transition towards its own Romantic literature.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgment ii

Dedication iv

Introduction 1

I. Mickiewicz and the Polish Battle between the Classicists and the Romantics. 13

II. The Transition from Classicism to Romanticism in Russian Literature. 66

III. From the Naïve vs. Sentimental to the Romantic Dialogue: Mickiewicz as Pushkin’s Poetic Other. 110

IV. Between the Classical and the Romantic. 146

Part 1. Mickiewicz’s Evolution from Rebellious Classicist to Romantic National Poet. 146

Part 2. The Classical vs. Romantic Other: Perceptions of Mickiewicz in Russia. 175

V. A Lithuanian Bard and a European Poet: Mickiewicz’s Polishness as the Mirror of Russian Identity. 210

VI. Afterward. Mickiewicz in the Zinaida Volkonsky Salon. 257

Bibliography 271
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Dedication

In memory of Professor Robert A. Maguire
Introduction

The representatives of emerging Romantic movements all over Europe faced a formidable challenge: to define themselves, and by doing so, to formulate their literary and artistic aspirations. This task of Romantic self-identification was perhaps nowhere more difficult than in Russia. In Western Europe, particularly in Germany and in England, the transition from Classicism, to the *Sturm und Drang* movement and concurrently Sentimentalism in England, to Neoclassicism, and finally to the Romantic movement proper, progressed gradually over 100 years. Thus, the young German and English Romantics who appeared on the literary scene at the end of the eighteenth century represented an entirely new generation of writers: rebels against, but at the same time, the heirs of, the preceding traditions. In Russia, due to historical and cultural circumstances, the same process took place over the first 25-30 years of the nineteenth century, with opposing trends existing and co-existing not only within one generation of writers, but often within one author’s work. During the period of such an intense cultural “growth spurt,” a paramount task for Russian writers was the establishment of their individual and, equally important, national literary identity. The Romantic movement in Russia, like the Classical, Sentimental and Neoclassical movements before it, followed existing Western literary models; within this context writers attempted to define the national character (*narodnost’*) of Russian literature. The Russian Romantics shared the key Romantic sensibility with their Western counterparts: an antinomy of the Self vs. the Other as a way of determining one’s own poetic identity. I will argue that the Russians found such an Other in the Polish Romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) who, as Pushkin poetically described him, “lived among us/Amidst a tribe foreign to him,” (“Он
between 1824-1829. Therefore examining the image of Mickiewicz as a Romantic poet in the eyes of his Russian contemporaries demonstrates the process by which they established their own Romantic identity.

The Russian strategy of establishing Romantic identity in relation to the Other followed earlier Western, particularly German models formed during the early Romantic period (die Frühromantiker). Known as “Jena Romanticism” (or “the Jena school”), early German Romanticism developed in the city where some members of this movement lived, lectured and studied at the local university at the turn of the nineteenth century. The philosophical foundations that defined the relationship between the Romantic self and the Other were set forth in Jena. Briefly examining the aesthetic theories of the leading figure of the Jena School, Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), facilitates our understanding of the development of the Russian Romantic identity in relation to Adam Mickiewicz.

The influential Jena circle of friends and collaborators led by Friedrich and his brother Wilhelm (1767-1845) also included such formative figures of German Romanticism as the poet Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg 1772-1801), the philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854), the poet and novelist Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853) and the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). The circle gathered around the brothers Schlegel consisted of young, brilliant, very different but, “sympathetically minded individuals…whose mutually supportive considerations of philosophy, literature, and science became enmeshed in the tangle of their personal and professional
relationships.”¹ The life experiences they shared with one another affected their work, but then, “they composed Romantic poetry and became the passionate, ironic and adventuresome individuals their verse described – thus did life imitate art.”² This phenomenon of modern literature, which Friedrich Schlegel described as romantische Poesie, came into being through the process he called sympoetize and symphilosophize:

Perhaps there would be a birth of a whole new era of the sciences and arts if symphilosophy and sympoetry became so universal and heartfelt that it would no longer be anything extraordinary for several complementary minds to create communal works of art. One is often struck by the idea that two minds really belong together, like divided halves that can realize their full potential only when joined. (Athenaeum Fragments. No 125)³

This fragment conveys the atmosphere of excitement, the sense of creating something new and “extraordinary” that young Romantics felt when they came together to symphilosophize and sympoetize during their frequent gatherings (and in the brothers Schlegel’s journal Athenaeum 1798-1800), while at the same time it reveals a deep need, almost a necessity, for each other: they knew that they could not fully realize their creative potential without the Other. A member of the Jena circle and F. Schlegel’s close friend, Novalis in his Logological Fragments I (No. 3), described the “True collaboration in philosophy,” (italics in the original) as a “common movement toward a beloved world – whereby we relieve each other in the most advanced outpost, a movement that demands

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² Ibid. Prologue. xviii.

the greatest effort against the resisting element within which we are flying." It may be surprising to find that the Romantic Era, which gave birth to the cliché of the Byronic—tragic and always lonely—hero, began in a collaborative spirit with young writers who, rather than stressing their creative individuality by separating themselves from the rest of the world, looked for, and at, each other. However, as Friedrich Schlegel explained in his famous *Athenaeum Fragment* No 116, which is often quoted as a manifesto for the whole movement, the Other was the way to determine the Romantic I:

> And it [Romantic poetry] can also – more than any other form – hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors. It is capable of the highest and most variegated refinement, not only from within outwards but also from without inwards…

The word “mirror” is of paramount importance as it denotes the key precept of Romanticism: the correlation between the portrayed and the portrayer—in order to see myself, to see and understand who I am, I need something, or rather someone, who will reflect my image; I need the Other as much as the Other needs me. Of course, in the ideal Romantic world, this correlation between the portrayed and the portrayer is “free of all real and ideal self-interest,” so, through sympoetizing, i.e., “reflecting each other again and again to a higher power,” the young Romantics believed they could strive for “the highest and most variegated refinement, the ultimate, yet unattainable goal of becoming (an ideal) Romantic poet. Schlegel explained this goal in more practical terms in the earlier *Athenaeum Fragment* 125:

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If there were an art of amalgamating individuals, or if a wishful criticism could do more than merely wish – and for that there are reasons enough – then I would like to see Jean Paul and Peter Leberecht combined. The latter has precisely what the former lacks. Jean Paul’s grotesque talent and Peter Leberecht’s fantastic turn of mind would, once united, yield a first-rate romantic poet.

In the real world, placing Jean Paul (Richter) and Peter Leberecht vis à vis each other as mirrors could only highlight what the other lacked, and thus the frustrating and often painful state of knowing one’s own insufficiencies was the continual predicament of the Romantic poet. He would forever strive for an ideal that he could never achieve; he was in a permanent state of *becoming* a Romantic poet. Therefore his creation, his poetry, would also be in the same state of fluidity: “Other kinds of poetry are finished and are now capable of being fully analyzed. The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected.”

The idea that the modern poet should struggle towards perfection, an ideal, while never being able to attain it, was not entirely new. In formulating this concept, Schlegel was inspired by Friedrich Schiller’s, *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1795). I will discuss Schiller’s treatise in more detail in Chapter Three, but by way of introduction it is worth mentioning that he classified two kinds of poetic creative personality based on man’s relation to nature: the poet, “either is nature or he will seek nature.”

The first kind, the *naïve* poet, lives in perfect harmony with nature and represents the intuitive, divinely

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inspired creative process ("everything that healthy nature does is divine")\(^8\); the second kind, the *sentimental*, is a modern poet, who being separated from nature by artificial civilization and culture, strives to return to a perfect state of unity with nature by means of intellectual, reflective contemplation. "Because, however, the ideal is an infinite one which he never attains, the cultivated man can never become perfect in *his* own way as the natural man is able to do in his."\(^9\) "It is this note of becoming, of striving after the infinite, that Friedrich Schlegel embraced as the essence of Romantic poetry and of man as a progressive being."\(^{10}\) What distinguished the Romantic poet from Schiller’s sentimental type of creative personality were precisely the recognition and the need of the Other, his naïve opposite, who mirrors his insufficiencies. Hence the dialogic nature of Romantic poetry as Schlegel defined it:

A dialogue is a chain or garland of fragments. An exchange of letters is a dialogue on a larger scale, and memoirs constitute a system of fragments. But as yet no genre exists that is fragmentary both in form and content, simultaneously completely subjective and individual, and completely objective and like a necessary part in a system of all the science.\(^{11}\)

Thus, Schlegel, Novalis and other Romantics of their circle, influenced by Fichte’s transcendentalism, created a new poetic discourse: the fragments they created through collaboration, published in the brothers Schlegel’s journal *Athenaeum*, as well as works such as F. Schlegel’s novel *Lucinde* or Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, redefined the relation between content and form, each fragment being subjective and individual, and, at

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\(^8\) Ibid., 29.

\(^9\) Ibid., 40.

\(^{10}\) Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, 433.

\(^{11}\) Schlegel, “Athenaeum Fragment, No 77,” *Philosophical Fragments*, 27.
the same time, an objective part of the infinite whole. Therefore the dialectic of fragments became a defining feature of Romantic poetic discourse.

Schlegel’s aesthetic ideas about the nature of the Romantic novel were also greatly influenced by Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796-1798). On behalf of his fellow Romantics, Schlegel famously declared: “The French Revolution, Fichte’s philosophy, and Goethe’s *Meister* are the greatest tendencies of the age.”\(^{12}\) He developed the idea further in the review “On Goethe’s *Meister*” published in the first issue of *Athenaeum* (1798). It is literally a novel about becoming, a *Bildungsroman*, and Schlegel found, “this book absolutely new and unique,” to be understood only “on its own terms.”\(^{13}\) Moreover, the structure of the novel is perfectly Romantic: “in this novel, where everything is at the same time both means and end, it would not be wrong to regard the first part, irrespective of its relationship to the whole, as a novel in itself.”\(^{14}\) Above all, *Meister* offers a transcendental reflection on human nature:

> It is rather the manner of the representation, which endows even the most circumscribed character with the appearance of a unique, autonomous individual, while yet possessing another aspect, another variation of that general human nature which is constant in all its transformations, so that each variation is a small part of the infinite world.\(^{15}\)

Understandably, Schlegel considered Goethe, the author of this “marvelous prose,” which “is prose, and yet it is poetry…high, pure poetry,” an ultimate Romantic “who is both a

\(^{12}\) “Athenaeum Fragment 216,” Ibid. 46.


\(^{14}\) Ibid., 273-274.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 270.
divine poet and a perfect artist.”¹⁶ According to Schlegel the key to revealing all the aspects and variations of *Wilhelm Meister’s* characters is the conversation, the dialogic discourse of the novel: “But conversations they had to be, for this form removes any one-sidedness.”¹⁷ The ability to present different, opposite points of view—the point of view of the Other—is characteristic of Romanticism and directly antithetical to Classicism (vide the perspective-consistent tragedies of Racine.) It also explains the Romantics’ fascination with Shakespeare, whom Schlegel and many others considered a great Romantic poet and who conveyed his characters’ depth precisely through opposite, conflicting points of view in his tragedies.

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the phenomenon of the inextricable relationship between the Self and the Other established by the Romantics was addressed more than a century later in a Modernist context. The Russian theoretician Mikhail Bakhtin was clearly much preoccupied with the Self vs. Other relationship when he wrote:

> I cannot perceive myself in my external aspect, feel that it encompasses me and gives me expression…In this sense, one can speak of the absolute aesthetic need of man for the other, for the other’s activity of seeing, holding, putting together and unifying, which alone can bring into being the externally finished personality; if someone else does not do it, this personality will have no existence.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 275. While Goethe appreciated Schlegel’s enthusiastic review of his work he did not consider himself a Romantic; in fact in 1829 he emphatically rejected the idea: “I call all the classical healthy and all the Romantic sick.” See, Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 283.

For Bakhtin the aesthetic consideration of the Other (in a creative act) as the necessary counterpart of the Self in achieving individual consciousness comes from, “the general conception of human existence, where the other plays a decisive role”19 (italics in original): “I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me (in mutual reflection and perception).”20 The Modernist dependence on the Self coming into being only through the Other, as expressed by Bakhtin, parallels the process by which the Romantics strove to establish their poetic identities through dialogue with the Other. Thus, Bakhtin’s aesthetic theory resonates with the principle subject of my dissertation—the role of the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz as the Other in the emergence of Russian Romanticism.

Mickiewicz was the perfect figure to play the role of the Other in the Russian literary context because of his unique cultural and national background: he was a Polish poet from Lithuania (which was incorporated as a province into the Russian Empire in 1795.) This seeming paradox becomes more logical upon a closer examination. A person representing an entirely different culture, such as the quintessential Romantic poet Lord Byron, could be admired, but identifying him as a cultural Other to serve the need for self-identification, would have been rather difficult since he embodied a completely different set of norms and cultural experiences. There is simply no shared cultural sphere that would validate the antinomy of the Self vs. the Other. However, for Mickiewicz and the Russians that shared cultural sphere was very pronounced: as a Polish poet from Lithuania he was another Slav, close, but yet very different; he was too Western to be

19 Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtin and the Dialogic Principle, 94

considered a Russian but too Slavic to be considered a Westerner. To complicate things even further, his Lithuanian identity made him too exotic to be a purely Western counterpart to the “savage Russian.” These similarities and differences created an axis along which the Russians could build their own identity. Russian writers, poets and critics used the facets of Mickiewicz’s persona in a variety of ways, depending on the movements and literary views they represented, or on their individual creative needs. The image of Mickiewicz as the Other appears in Russian literature in many different contexts, allowing us to trace the process of the formation of Russian literary identity during the transitional period that marked the shift from Classicism to Romanticism in the second half of the 1820s.

Studies of Mickiewicz’s life in Russia and the poetry he created there have produced a vast body of scholarly work since the poet’s death in 1855, both in Poland and Russia, as well as in Europe and the United States. Therefore it would seem that every aspect of the four-and-a-half years Mickiewicz spent in Russia has been covered from all angles: his relationships with contemporary Russians have been documented, described and analyzed in much detail, as have the poetic works he wrote and published in Moscow and Petersburg. There is also a substantial amount of scholarship on comparative studies of Polish and Russian Romanticism which explores the mutual influences and correlations between the two, with particular focus on the greatest poets of the period, Mickiewicz and Pushkin. Many studies approach the “Mickiewicz in Russia” topic from a historical/political perspective, which includes his strongly anti-Russian drama of Polish national martyrdom, Forefathers Eve Part III written after the Polish Uprising of November 1830. This political event, as well as Forefathers and the various
Russian responses to it, significantly influenced the perception of Mickiewicz and his work in Russia. However, in my analysis I focus on the pre-Uprising period during which Polish-Russian literary relationships were much more concerned with poetry than with politics, thus providing a rich and productive ground for the investigation of the Polish poet’s influence on the development of Russian Romanticism.

No earlier scholar has explored the position of Adam Mickiewicz as the poetic Other in Russian Romanticism. I believe that my approach to the role Mickiewicz played in the formation of the Russian Romantic identity viewed from the point of view of Schlegel and Bakhtin’s aesthetic theories yields new and exciting results in at least three areas of Polish and Russian Romantic studies. Firstly, by recreating the image of Mickiewicz as the poetic Other, my analysis provides a new perspective and insight into Mickiewicz’s life and work during his Russian period. Secondly, demonstrating how the Russians related to Mickiewicz as the Other in constructing their new Romantic identity reveals important aspects of the very process of becoming (to use Schlegel’s term) a Russian Romantic. Finally, in the broader context of Romantic studies, my work shows that the formation of Russian Romanticism as a reaction to Classicism was far from the simple binary opposition of “us vs. them.” The complexities of the tumultuous transition from Classicism to Romanticism in the Russian literary and cultural context have been extensively addressed by Boris Gasparov in his seminal book, *The Poetic Language of Pushkin in the History of Russian Literary Language* (Поэтический язык Пушкина как факт истории русского литературного языка),21 which informed and inspired my understanding of this fascinating phenomenon. My own analysis of the multifarious

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image of Mickiewicz as perceived by his Russian contemporaries offers a new and unique perspective on diverse, often contradictory, aspects of emergent Russian Romanticism, thus further illuminating this transitional and critical period in the history of Russian literature.
I. Mickiewicz and the Polish Battle between the Classicists and the Romantics.

Romanticism in Poland, as in other European countries, developed as a reaction to the preceding traditions of Classicism, Sentimentalism and Neoclassicism: young Polish Romantics rebelled against some of their predecessors, and entered into a polemical discourse with others, while at the same time their work frequently displayed the undeniable influence of past literary achievements. Because it began relatively late, in the 1820s, Polish Romanticism was strongly influenced by the already well-established German and English Romantic movements, as well as by the writings of early French Romantics, such as Madame de Staël and François-René de Chateaubriand. The works of two great predecessors of German Romanticism, Schiller and Goethe, directed the sensibilities of young Polish Romantics towards the inner struggles and passions of the individual and validated their opposition to the existing status quo; the influence of Schiller’s poems, odes, tragedies, particularly The Robbers (Die Räuber, 1781) is easily detectable in the early works of Adam Mickiewicz, as is that of Goethe’s The Sorrows of Young Werther (Die Leiden des jungen Werthers, 1774), Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship (Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, 1794-1796), his dramas Faust (1790, 1808) and Goetz von Berlichingen (1773). Polish Romantics eagerly studied the philosophy of Schelling, the aesthetical and historical writings of the brothers Schlegel and were greatly influenced by Friedrich Schlegel’s definition of Romantic poetry, which traced its roots to ancient Greek and Medieval literature and culture. At the same time, however, the universal, “cosmopolitan” (as Mickiewicz noted) character of German Romantic thought seemed somewhat distant from Polish Romanticism, which from its very beginnings, was
deeply rooted in local culture, history, and folk traditions. Thus, young Romantics like Mickiewicz were more attuned to the writings of English Romantics such as Walter Scott, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, and, of course, Byron. The connection between Mickiewicz’s first book of poetry, Ballads and Romances (Ballady i romanse, 1822) and Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s Lyrical Ballads (1798, 1800) seems rather obvious as both were inspired by the oral tradition of rustic bards and by the language of simple folk, which allowed the poets to convey, “situations from common life,” with “certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect.”

Similarly to works of German and English Romantics, early French Romantic writings, particularly Chateaubriand’s René (1802), or Madame de Staël De l’Allemagne (1810) or her famous Corrine ou l’Italie, 1807 had a significant influence on Polish Romantic literature. However, the development of French Romanticism from its early phase to the Romantic movement proper followed a different course than in Germany and England. Monumental social, political and cultural changes brought about by the French Revolution initiated a rapid transition from Classicism, so strongly associated with a pre-revolutionary culture and mentality, towards Romanticism, which proposed a “dramatically new artistic approach consistent with the magnitude of the historical change which had taken place.” However, this transformation process was preceded by the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty (1814-1830). Thus French “Romanticism was the

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child of a deliberate anachronism of the Restoration, and some of its chief features
corresponded to the equivocal situation of an official reactionary ideology in a post-
revolutionary and post-Napoleonic society.”24 The frustration of young Romantics is
clearly evident in Stendhal’s indignant exclamation: “Never in history have people gone
through more rapid and total change, in its mores and its pleasures, than in the period
1780 to 1823; and they still want us to have the same literature!”25 Thus in the 1820’s
French Romantics fought for an entirely new literature that would meet the needs and
desires of their generation: the consequence of “rapid and total” change.

The battles of French Romantics with their Classicist opponents became
paradigmatic of a similar process in Poland though in the European context Polish
Romanticism is distinctive because it developed under specific historical and political
circumstances, which gave it a unique, national character and, in a large degree,
determined its course. After the last partitions in 1795, Poland became a nation without a
state and the responsibility of maintaining and preserving Polish national consciousness
and identity fell to literature and art. The unsuccessful November Uprising against Russia
in 1830, in which all hope of resurrecting an independent Polish state was crushed, left
the nation with a spiritual and psychological void, which was to be filled by the great
works of Polish Romantic poetry. However, before 1830, young Polish Romantics still
had to face particularly strong opposition from the Classicist camp. The rise of Napoleon
created an opportunity for Poles to side with a powerful ally against their enemies in the
hope of winning independence. The creation of a semi-independent Duchy of Warsaw in

24 Ibid.

25 Stendhal, *Racine and Shakespeare*, quoted in Michèle Hannoosh, "Romanticism: art, literature, and
history."
1807 strengthened political ties with France, but also fortified the French influence on Polish culture, an influence that continued after the fall of Napoleon, and the formation, in 1815, of the Polish Kingdom with Tsar Alexander I as the ruler. Faced with the annihilation of their political independence, Poles became particularly attached to Neoclassical aesthetics, which in their minds symbolized patriotic virtues and the Polish state they hoped to resurrect. Therefore, the nature of the battles between the Polish Romantics and Classicists in the 1820s is closer to the fierce polemics between young French Romantics and their opponents than to other similar disputes that were going on in Europe at the time.

I should note here that by “Neoclassicism” I refer to a period in literature and art that immediately preceded Romanticism, which is distinctive from proper Classicism of the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century. In France, Neoclassicism, in aesthetical and ethical terms, was a reaction to pre-revolutionary salon culture, Sentimentalism, and the Rococo style in art; during the First Republic Neoclassicism sought to emulate the severe simplicity and heroic monumentality of the Roman Republic, whilst during the Napoleonic era an even grander symbolism of the Roman Empire prevailed. In the history of Polish literature the height of Classicism falls during the reign of the last Polish King Stanislaw August Poniatowski (1764-1795). Throughout its decline, in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, Polish Classicism became increasingly more conservative; defending strict linguistic norms and the purity of the Polish language, whilst aesthetic considerations – similar to French Neoclassicism – led to the recreation of Ancient Roman ideals, synonymous with heroic and patriotic virtues. Polish Romantics who regarded the ancient Greek models as the only acceptable ones, in
their polemical battles with the Classicists frequently used the rather deprecating term “pseudo-Classicism” (“pseudoklasycyzm”) to stress its derivative character. Moreover, young Romantics, in their zeal to free literature from Classicist rule, did not really differentiate between the Neoclassicism of the nineteen century and the more liberal and refined earlier Classicism, and simply referred to their opponents as “Classicists” (“klasyk,” pl. “klasyce”) Such a simplification helped the Romantics to define and establish their own position on the literary scene in relation to their predecessors. In the history of Polish Literature Classicism in the first three decades of the nineteenth century is often described as “late” Classicism (“późny klasycyzm”) or “post-king Stanislaw Classicism” (“klasycyzm postanisławowski.”) An eminent scholar and passionate admirer and defender of Classicism, Ryszard Przybylski, refuses to use any other term but “Classicism” arguing that Polish nineteenth century Classicism is a direct continuation of the preceding eighteenth century Polish and European phenomenon and “constitutes a part of one organic unity, despite understandable differences between individual authors.” However, for the sake of clarity, in the discussion of the polemical battles between Romantics and Classicists I will use the term “Neoclassicism” to highlight the aesthetic principles of Romantics’ opponents.

The distinction between eighteenth century Classicism and the Neoclassicism of the first decades of the nineteenth century is equally important in analyzing the transition from Classicism to Romanticism in Russian literature, which is the principle context of


27 Polish “klasyk” translates to English as a “classic,” a word that has several meanings, therefore “Classicist” is use to signify proponent of Classicism.

my thesis. Romanticism began to develop in Russia about the same time as in Poland, and as I will argue in subsequent chapters, Polish and Russian Romantics had similar views on numerous issues, such as the national character of literature – which should be based on the nation’s own history and folk tradition – or the role of the vernacular in Romantic literary language. However, because of the very different historical, political and cultural circumstances in which Romanticism developed in these two countries, and because of the complexities of the transition from Classicism to Romanticism in Russian literature, I will focus on the battles between Polish Romantics and Classicists in this chapter, and discuss the struggles of Russian Romantics in the next chapter.

The birth of Polish Romanticism can be acknowledged to have occurred in 1822, with the publication of Mickiewicz’s first volume of poetry, which included *Ballads and Romances* (*Ballady i romanse*) as well as some other early poems. This publication initiated a period of fierce polemics between the proponents of the new Romantic movement and the representatives of the reigning Classicist school. Polish literature in the 1820s, like French literature, was still governed by the Classical principle of *bon sens* (good taste), which was particularly visible in poetry and drama. The Classicist camps in Poland and in France considered Boileau’s *L’Art poétique* (1674), which firmly constrained poetry within the rules of high and low genres and *bon sens*, to be the unquestionable norm. The Classicists still revered Racine’s tragedies, as models of the dramatic arts, confined by the unity of action, time, and high style. The theater thus became an arena in which young French Romantics began their fight against the Classicist regime.
In France—as opposed to Germany, where Romantic drama could follow the models of Goethe’s *Faust* and Schiller’s *The Robbers*, and to England, where Shakespeare laid the foundation of modern drama—the theater was the stronghold of Classicist norms. Therefore one of the most important manifestos of French Romanticism, *Racine and Shakespeare*, written by Stendhal in 1823, attacked that stronghold with the demand of the reforms. The first chapter of Stendhal’s pamphlet began with a question: “In order to write tragedies which will interest the public of 1823, should one follow the procedures of Racine or those of Shakespeare?” From the Romantics’ point of view there could be only one answer to this question: only Shakespeare’s model “was capable of giving them the greatest possible pleasure.

*Classicism, on the contrary, presents to them that literature which gave the greatest possible pleasure to their great-grandfathers.* The arguments against the Classicists set forth by Stendhal became paradigmatic of French as well as Polish battles for the liberation of drama and poetry from rigid norms. In drama the “unity of time and place was to be swept away in the rout of the alexandrine” and the subject was to be taken not from antiquity, but from French (Polish) history. Classical poetry and drama, with their high style and refined language, their belief in the supremacy of the rational over the spiritual and metaphysical, and its didactic, one-dimensional characters, were simply boring and outdated to the younger generation. There was a desire for a new literature written in contemporary, living language, and true-to-life dramatic characters who showed real feelings, passions, and emotions. There


30 Ibid., 38.

31 Ibid., 43.
was a demand for poetry that would inspire the human imagination and spirit to reach beyond rational reality; a poetry that would unveil the fantastic, spiritual world. In short young Romantics in the 1820s demanded poetic freedom, literature addressed to all people, and, at the very least, tolerance for their literary endeavors on the part of the reigning Classicist establishment.

In 1830, Victor Hugo reinforced the Romantics’ argument in the Preface to his drama *Hernani* in which he declared:

> The principle of literary freedom, already comprehended by the world of readers and thinkers, has not been less fully accepted by that immense crowd, eager for the pure enjoyment of art, which every night fills the theatres of Paris. This loud and powerful voice of the people, resembling the voice of God declares that henceforth poetry shall bear the same device as politics: TOLERATION AND LIBERTY. Now let the poet come! He has the public. (Emphasis in the original)

When the play opened on February 25, 1830, this passionate call for literary liberties was championed in the Comédie-Française, but soon it was transformed into a demand for social and national freedom, which gave birth to the July Revolution in Paris and a few months later, to the November Uprising in Warsaw.

However, in the relatively peaceful 1820s, the battles that occurred were mainly literary, and the Classicists in Poland, like their counterparts in France, were not ready to give up their superior position without a fight. The polemics, which in the history of Polish literature are known as “the battle between the Classicists and the Romantics” (“walka klasyków z romantykami”) were a struggle between two generations, which displayed the symptoms of the phenomenon defined by Harold Bloom as the “anxiety of

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influence.” Even though Bloom’s theory is largely based on an analysis of the English Romantic poets in relation to Milton, the principle that a new generation of poets admires their predecessors, yet feels the need to displace them in order to insure their own success and place in posterity, also applies in the French and Polish contexts. Mickiewicz, who grew up reading the literature of the Enlightenment, certainly fits Bloom’s definition of the “strong poet” (with a great talent and individuality) who through the “misprision” (or “misreading”) of his Classical predecessors became a great Romantic poet.

It is worth mentioning here that in the context of Russian literature, a similar process of transition from Classicism to Romanticism is much harder to define: it was not so much a transition from an older generation (Classicists) to a younger one (Romantics), as members of both groups belonged to the same generation. Thus, Iurii Tynianov classified the two groups that opposed each other during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, as “archaists” (proponents of Classicism) and “innovators” (proponents of Sentimentalism and later Romanticism). I will come back to this important distinction in later chapters. I will also discuss the evolution of Mickiewicz’s own poetry from Classicism through Sentimentalism and an elegiac phase to Romantic proper in Chapter Four; in this chapter, I will focus only on the Romantic characteristic of his work, as the poet and his poetry became the center of the polemical battles between Romantics and Classicists. After the publication of his first volume of poetry Mickiewicz became the natural leader of the young Romantic camp, which included his university friends as well as other young critics and thinkers, the most distinguished of whom was Mauryce Mochnacki. Before the battle between the Polish Classicists and Romantics
began in earnest, Polish literature went through a period of attempting to bridge the old and the new which can be defined as pre-Romanticism.

The most important and interesting representatives of the older generation of Polish poets whose works straddled the borderline between Classicism and Romanticism (the pre-Romantic period), include Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, who in 1816 published *Historical Songs* (Śpiewy historyczne), a series of ballad-like songs about the glorious events and figures of Polish history. Despite their rigid Classical versification and didactic character, Niemcewicz’s *Songs*, in their form and spirit, laid the groundwork for Polish national Romanticism. Another representative of the pre-Romantic period was the Sentimental poet, Kazimierz Brodziński, who published in 1820 his best-known poem, *Wiesław*, which was Classical in its idyll form but close to Romanticism in its emphasis on folklore. In terms of impact, however, Brodziński’s theoretical essay, *On Classicism and Romanticism* (*O klasyczności i romantyczności*) was more important. This essay was published in the periodical *Diary of Warsaw* (*Pamiętnik Warszawski*) in 1818, along with an article “On the Spirit of Polish Poetry” (“O duchu poezji polskiej”). In this essay Brodziński proposed a new direction in Polish literature which would peacefully combine the Romantic spirit with the Classical style of verse.

Brodziński was well-read in the German philosophical thought of the time, and embraced Johan Gottfried von Herder’s idea that every given national literature has a unique character due to specific experience and history. However, Brodziński opposed the Romantic fascination with mysticism and the gloomy Medieval past: for him the true national character of Polish poetry was that of the peaceful, gentle and pastoral idyll.

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33 Niemcewicz’s *Historical Songs* were much admired by a Russian Romantic poet Kondraty Ryleev who translated them into Russian and used them as a model for his own songs on Russian history. Cf. Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 204.
Brodziński understood the phenomenon of “Romantic feeling” (“czucie romantyczne”) in a spirit of Sentimentalism, as a means to an emotional reflection and “improvement of heart” (“udoskonalenie serca”), but opposed the excessive emotions of Sturm und Drang. Balance was the key and, in a compromise proposed by Brodziński (as described by Andrzej Walicki), “Romanticism would stand for the free expression of feelings and Classicism, in its turn, would temper the Romantic ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘exaltation’; such a compromise, he thought, would agree with the idyllic character of the ancient Poles and of the Slavs in general.”

Even though as a Romantic poet Mickiewicz opposed Brodziński’s conciliatory approach to old and new poetry, his own early verses were based on Classical models, and he valued the older poet’s opinion.

Though Brodziński’s support for the new Romantic ideas was rather moderate, he provoked fierce opposition from Jan Śniadecki, the most prominent representative of the late Enlightenment in Poland (along with his brother Jendrzej). In his article, “On Classical and Romantic writings” (“O pismach klasycznych i romantycznych”) published in 1819 in the daily paper, Vilnius Daily (Dziennik Wileński), Jan Śniadecki presented “Romanticism as a school of treason and plague” (“Romantyczność jako szkoła zdrady i zarazy”); a danger not only to the accepted norms in literature and art, but also to the existing social order.

Śniadecki, true to the spirit of the Enlightenment, believed in the superiority of the mind and reason over emotions and feelings, and even though Brodziński suggested that the Romantic passions could be controlled by the Classical form of poetry, it was still a treacherous undertaking to attempt such a compromise:

To advise people on the art of writing with unbridled imagination with no direction and no rules, would be tantamount to consider untamed passions to be the rules of moral life and to unleash tempest, turmoil and havoc both on the intellectual and the social world.  

Śniadecki also fiercely defended the elevated sources and forms of Classical art and literature against the Romantic fascination with the national, folk tradition, which was essential, for Brodziński (and later Romantics), in establishing a canon of national literature. For Śniadecki, country/folk culture, full of supernatural, mystical elements, was, “duby bab wiejskich,” the primitive superstition of primitive people, unacceptable in learned society. According to Śniadecki, the role of literature and art was to educate and elevate, not to subvert, young minds.

Śniadecki’s essay was very well received by the Classicist camp, but ironically his opinions also earned him a place in Mickiewicz’s ballad, “The Romantic” (“Romantyczność”) published in 1822, as the first poem in Mickiewicz’s first volume of poetry, Ballads and Romances. Combined with the poet’s introductory essay, “On Romantic Poetry” (“O poezji romantycznej”), it became a programmatic manifesto for the Polish Romantic Movement. “The Romantic” tells the story of a young woman who is talking to her dead lover in the middle of a town. The townfolk, “simple people” (“prostota”), are moved by her love and pain and believe, like the girl, that her Johnny

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has come back from the grave to talk to her, but a learned man, Śniadecki, reprimands them by saying that they should rather trust his scientific eye and acknowledge that the lover is not there. The learned man, like his real life original, calls the belief in ghosts, “a product of the imagination of primitive people,” and of, “the girl who is talking nonsense” (“Duchy karczemnej tworem gawiedzi,/W głupstwa wywarzone kuźni./Dziewczyna duby smalone bredzi”). And, following Śniadecki’s example, the learned man calls such beliefs, “treason/ Against the King Reason!” (“A gmin rozumowi bloźni.”) The learned man is answered by a narrator, who clearly is not one of the townspeople but nevertheless shares their beliefs, since, as a Romantic, he also believes that, “Faith and love are more discerning/Than lenses or learning” (“Czucie i wiara silniej mówi do mnie/Niż mędrcia szkiele i oko.”) The narrator then addresses the learned man/Śniadecki and the Classicist camp in words that were destined to become the Romantic manifesto:

Martwe znasz prawdy, nieznane dla ludu,
Widzisz świat w proszku, w każdej gwiazd iskierce.
Nie znasz prawd żywych, nie obaczysz cudu!
Miej serce i patrzaj w serce.
[You know the dead truths, not the living,
The world of things, not the world of loving.
Where does any miracle start?
Cold eye, look in your heart]

36 In the first manuscript of the book Mickiewicz gives a hint who the original learned man is in a note that refers his readers to Śniadecki’s article mentioned above: “see treatises in Dziennik Wilenski about Romanticism” (“ob. Dzien. Wil. o Roman.”), see Mickiewicz: Encyklopedia, ed. Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz et al., (Warszawa: Horyzont, 2001), 534.

37 All of the quotations from Mickiewicz’s works are from Adam Mickiewicz, Dzieła, 16 vols., ed. Julian Krzyżanowski et.al., (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1955). All translations of Polish and other foreign-language quotations are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

38 Translation by W. H. Auden, in Milosz, The History of Polish Literature, 212.

39 Ibid., 213.

40 Ibid., 212.
The whole Romantic program is summarized in the last line of this poem, an imperative addressed to Mickiewicz’s opponent and to the readers as well, beautifully, but not exactly, translated by W.H. Auden: “Have heart and look into the heart.” For Mickiewicz the human heart, the realm of feelings and emotions, not the learned mind, was the key to the world of Romanticism. It was a new world of living, not dead, truths--the world of the fantastic and metaphysical; the world of human imagination in which people believe in miracles, not the rational world of science and reason.

“The Romantic” was a bold demonstration of what Romantic poetry should aspire to in its form and content. As a Romantic manifesto it was a poetic supplement to the Romantic program, which Mickiewicz presented in a lengthy introductory essay, “On Romantic Poetry.” Mickiewicz explained that he wrote the introduction in order to validate his, as well as his fellow Romantic poets’, position, particularly in the presentation of ballads and poems based on folk songs as a legitimate poetic form. However, instead of simply defending Romantic verse, Mickiewicz presents his argument as a historical overview of the development of poetry from its beginnings, and therefore places Romantic poetry in the context of world poetry. He demonstrates that the origins of Romantic literature can be found in Ancient Greece and then in the Middle Ages; thus a rejection of Romantic literature would be equal to the rejection of an integral part of literary history. And part of human history for that matter. There is no doubt that his extensive knowledge of the Greek and Roman classics, which allowed him to become a professor of Classical Literature at the University of Lausanne in 1838, qualified Mickiewicz to postulate such an argument. He traces the origins of Romantic poetry to the Middle Ages when forms such as the ballad and the romance were developed, but
points out that the poets of Ancient Greece laid the foundation for future Romantic poets. Particularly important was the connection between poetry and the Greek people:

In their finest artistic period Greek poets would always sing for the common people; their songs were depositories of feelings, beliefs, and memories of the nation’s past, adorned with a pleasant form and imagination; that exerted a strong influence on the maintenance, strengthening, and shaping of the national character.\(^4\)

These were precisely the qualities that Mickiewicz’s verses introduced into Polish literature for the first time. Interestingly, Mickiewicz, a Romantic poet, uses the same ancient Greek models that were fundamental in creating Classicist aesthetics in artistic and literary genres. He demonstrates that the ancient Greeks were the inspiration for different schools of poetry. Romantics should have the right and freedom to take from the Greek models what they think is the best: the spirit of national folk poetry as an art for all people. Significantly, Mickiewicz dismisses ancient Roman models, arguing that Roman literature only imitated that of the Greeks, and never developed a true national form and character. Moreover, Roman authors, unlike their Greek counterparts, were accessible only to the highest, educated group of society. By rejecting Roman models Mickiewicz was also rejecting the aesthetics of Neoclassicism, which imitated the Romans: for Śniadecki and the whole camp of Polish Classicists, Horace, rather than Homer, was the source of inspiration.

According to Mickiewicz, ancient Greek poetry was instrumental in stimulating the civic spirit of society, but such an influence was possible only when poetry was addressed to all the masses: when the connection between the people and poetry was

\(^4\) Jakoż poeci greccy w najświetniejszym okresie swojej sztuki zawsze śpiewali dla gminu; pienia ich były składem uczuć, mniemam pamiętek narodowych, ozdobionych zmyślaniem i wydaniem przyjemnym; wpływały więc silnie na utrzymanie, wzmacnianie, owszem, kształtzenie charakteru narodowego.
lost—when poetry was created for the elite only—it lost its national character and importance. The same rule applied to later civilizations, in which Mickiewicz identified the further degradation of the role of poetry in society: for example, France in the seventeenth century. In the Polish context, in which the literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was entirely modeled on French Classicism, Mickiewicz’s criticism of French literature was crucial. Not only was it a complete break from the ruling Classicist tradition, most importantly it reoriented Polish poetry towards a new model: English Romanticism. This reorientation shaped the Romantic period of Polish poetry, in which Byron, not Boileau and Racine, became the main hero.

Mickiewicz observes that when Classicist models were developed in France under Louis XIV in the second half of the seventeenth century, literature served only the elite of the king’s court. As a result, Classical French poetry, even though perfect in form, was empty and prosaic. Here again Mickiewicz indirectly speaks out against Classical literature: Boileau’s rules were still considered the poetic norm in 1822 in Poland. From the Romantic point of view, this produced Classical poetry void of any real content and feeling, focused only on perfect form and versification; a poetry of the salon, completely detached from the rest of society.

Mickiewicz points out that in contrast to France, the situation of poetry in England was quite different. Due to specific historical and political circumstances, the development of English poetry took a different path:

In feudal England old customs and the old reverence for national poets were preserved for longer and in a form purer than anywhere else. The people participated in the political life and almost constant war expeditions, enjoyed the knights' songs animated by national feelings and adapted to local circumstances. In the poetry of the bards, the wealthy
dukes and feudal lords found stories about their ancestors. That is why folk poetry in England developed for much longer than in other nations, and has survived in Scotland to the present.\(^{42}\)

Mickiewicz further notes that the heritage of a truly shared tradition of national poetry in England, which survived to his day in a pure, untainted form gave birth to poetic geniuses such as Shakespeare, Scott and Byron.

Like many contemporary Romantics in other countries, Mickiewicz calls Shakespeare a “great poet, justly described as a child of feeling and imagination who was educated only by the national poetic tradition” (“Szekspir wielki, słusznie nazywany dzieckiem uczucia i wyobraźni, kształcony jedynie na wzorach narodowych”). Mickiewicz praises Shakespeare for creating a new kind of “dramatic poetry” (“poezja dramatyczna”), in which he realistically described true human nature and the depth of the human heart. As the second most important characteristic of Shakespeare’s drama, Mickiewicz stresses the conflict between passion and duty, which a few years later became the main theme of his own work, *Konrad Wallenrod*. Unlike the Classical drama of Racine, which presented one-dimensional characters from one point of view only, Shakespearian drama fascinated Romantic poets with characters presented from opposite and often conflicting points of view, thus conveying their depth and true human nature. That is why the revival of Shakespearian drama became a *cause célèbre* for the Romantic movement all over Europe and the model for Romantic drama.

\(^{42}\)W Anglii, w stanie jej feudalnym, dawne zwyczaje i dawny dla poetów narodowych szacunek dochowały się czysciej i dłużej niż gdzie indziej. Lud mający udział w życiu politycznym, już w wyprawach wojennych, niemal ciągłych, lubił pienia rycerskie, ożywiane uczuciem narodowym i do miejscowych okoliczności stosowane. Dukowie możni i panujący feudatariusze w poezji bardów dzieje przodka swoich znajdowali. Dlatego w Anglii dłużej niż u innych narodów kształcona była poezja gminna, a Szkocja zachowała ją do ostatnich czasów.
The beginning of the nineteenth century in England witnessed the rise of great national poetry with the appearance of two geniuses: Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) and Gordon Lord Byron (1788-1824):

The present century brought about the appearance of two geniuses: Walter Scott and Byron. The first dedicated his talent to national history, published classically accomplished folk novels set in the Romantic world; author of national poetic masterpieces he became an Ariosto for English. Byron, by enlivening images with emotions, created a new type of poetry, where the passionate spirit emerges in the sensuous traits of the imagination. Byron did for the novel and the descriptive genre, what Shakespeare had done for drama.  

Mickiewicz values the novels of Walter Scott as much as he esteems Byron’s poetry and sees a parallel development between the two: while Scott was creating national literature (“poemata narodowe”) based on the old legends of the common people (“powieści gminne”) and British history, Byron created a new kind of poetic discourse in which poetic images were animated by true feelings and emotions. According to Mickiewicz, Byron’s innovation in English poetry is equal to Shakespeare’s contribution to drama. After years of stagnation English poetry was connected again with the people; the passionate human spirit conveyed by Byron’s emotional poetic imagination animated English verses.

For Mickiewicz the importance and influence of English literature—particularly of Shakespeare, Scott and Byron—on contemporary Romantic poetry could not be equaled, even by that of the German philosophers and poets. In his introduction Mickiewicz devoted surprisingly little space and attention to the history of German

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literature and its significance for Romantic poetry. Such a treatment of German literature is striking not only because it is hard to overestimate the influence of *Sturm und Drang* on the Romantic movement all over Europe, but also because in his formative years in the early 1820s, Mickiewicz read all the works of Goethe, Schiller, Schlegel and other German writers. Mickiewicz points out that the literary geniuses who appeared in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century, thanks to their knowledge of classical and modern languages, were able to draw inspiration from a variety of sources from very different historical periods. As Mickiewicz explains, a German poet could model his poetic form on one literary tradition but draw on the spirit of another. This is how the German poetry of the eighteenth century acquired its cosmopolitan character:

Moreover, the spirit reviving the Germans is cosmopolitan: not directed towards one country or nation but, rather, interested in humanity as a whole; in the painting of delicate emotions of the heart, the sentimentality of knights elevated to an almost intellectual purity. The German poetic world can be termed ideal, intellectual, and different from the mythological; its characteristics best visible in the works of the great Schiller.

Mickiewicz praises German poets, particularly Schiller, for their idealism, for elevating the depiction of the nuanced feelings of the heart to the sublime level of the purity of the intellect, but also points out that German poetry does not have a unique, national character. Clearly Mickiewicz valued the universalism and idealism of German poetry, which is very much visible in his early poems such as “Ode to Youth” ("Oda do młodości," 1820), but it seems that in the context of his first volumes of poetry,

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44 Nadto duch ożywiający Niemców jest kosmopolityczny, nie tak skierowany ku jednemu krajowi lub narodowi, jako raczej zajmujący się całą ludzkością; w malowaniu delikatniejszych uczuć serca sentymentalność rycerska do czystości prawie umysłowej podniesiona. Świat poetycki Niemców nazwać można światem idealnym, umysłowym, od świata mitologicznego różnym; jego cechy najdobitniej wydają się w płodach wielkiego Schillera.
particularly *Ballads and Romances*, he saw poetry that justified folk and national character as most important. He further elaborates that while in England the ballad as a literary genre developed organically from the Scottish songs of the Middle Ages to the present time, thus maintaining its national spirit, in Germany the ballad became popular only in the second half of the eighteenth century. Mickiewicz acknowledges that after English poetry, German poetry is the second most important in creating and promoting ballads, and he lists Goethe and Schiller, among other German poets, as the authors of the most outstanding verse. He adds, however, that Schiller’s style of ballads “somewhat departed from the naturalness and simplicity of the Scottish models” (“nieco się oddali, mianowicie w stylu, od naturalności i prostoty właściwej balladom szkockim”). These remarks confirm that Mickiewicz believed the highest values of Romantic poetry to be naturalness and simplicity combined with the national character of folk verses: the very qualities that define his first volume of poetry.

*Ballads and Romances* enjoyed significant popularity among its readers and in February 1823 had a second edition, thus encouraging Mickiewicz to publish his second volume of poetry in the same year. *Poetry volume II (Poezji tom II)* included three longer works in verse: *Grażyna. A Lithuanian Tale* (*Grażyna. Powieść Litewska*) and the drama *Forefathers Eve (Dziady)* Part II and IV with a ballad “Phantom” (“Upiór”) as an introduction.

*Grażyna* has a typically Romantic setting: the action takes place in the Middle Ages (fourteenth-century Lithuania), mainly in the middle of the night, in and around an old castle. The eponymous “Grażyna” is the heroic wife of the Lithuanian prince Litawor who, as she discovers, has concluded a shameful treaty with Lithuania’s archenemies, the
Teutonic Knights. Grażyna, determined to save her husband’s honor and her country’s freedom, disguises herself as Litawor by donning his armor and leading the Lithuanian army into battle against the Germans. Litawor appears at the last moment to help his wife defeat the enemy but the wounded Grażyna dies soon after. The remorseful husband ends his life by throwing himself on her funeral pyre, thus completing the striking reversal of gender-roles. Grażyna, as did the earlier Żywila (1819) with a similar plot, followed a long succession of heroic maiden-warriors, such as Clorinda from Tasso’s epic poem Jerusalem Delivered (1581), or the historic figure of Joan of Arc. In Grażyna, however, as Maria Janion observed, “Mickiewicz did not simply copy well-known models, which glorified patriotic heroism embodied in a female hero.”

The central conflict of Grażyna is played out between her love and sense of loyalty towards her husband and her patriotic instinct, which prompts her to disobey him, and demonstrates that Mickiewicz, “above all wanted to convincingly present the principle that the duty to resist a ruler whose actions compromise the well being of his nation applies to all people, also those closest to him.” Litawor’s death in the flames of the funeral pyre validates Grażyna’s action and that principle. Moreover, that very same principle of disobedience towards an unjust ruler brought the distant times of medieval Lithuanian past much closer to Mickiewicz’s readers.

The second text in the volume, Forefathers Eve Part II, reconfirmed and further developed the importance of folk tradition as a source and inspiration in Mickiewicz’s work. Forefathers Part II and IV, with Part III written much later in 1832 in Dresden, constitute the highest achievements of Polish Romantic drama. The unique, fragmentary

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45 Maria Janion, Kobiety i duch inności (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2006), 85.
46 Ibid.
structure of the whole work (to the dismay of Classicist critics, Mickiewicz never
completed and published Part I) is loosely connected by the ancient folk ritual of *dziady*
(foresfathers eve) presented in Part II. As Mickiewicz explained in a brief introduction, in
the 1820s, Lithuanian peasants were still gathering in remote chapels or houses near
cemeteries to honor their dead ancestors by offering them food and drink. This pagan
ritual, forbidden by the Catholic Church, took place during the night of All Soul’s Day,
thus, as Mickiewicz observes, combining pagan and Christian traditions. In *Forefathers*
Part II peasants gather in an old chapel and talk to several ghosts who are called up by the
warlock (‘‘guślarz’’), the leader of the ceremony. In each conversation a ghost (a spirit of
a dead person) reveals different reasons why he or she cannot enter heaven. The reasons
or sins, such as lack of suffering on earth, inability to love or cruelty towards others, are
the pronouncements of folk wisdom, reconfirmed at the end of each conversation by a
peasant chorus. Part II has a structure based on an ancient Greek tragedy-like dialogue
between the leader of the ceremony (the warlock) and the chorus. The last ghost that
appears in Part II is a young man, who, in the manner of Goethe’s young Werther, has
committed suicide. He does not say anything, but the reader is led to believe that he is the
main character of Part IV.

The action of *Forefathers* Part IV also takes place on a dark evening, in the little
house of an Orthodox priest and his two small children. In the opening scene a strange
young man appears at the door. The children immediately recognize him as a ‘‘corpse,’’ a
‘‘phantom’’ (‘‘Ach, trup, trup! upiór, ladaco!’’). The stranger does not deny this but
introduces himself as a hermit, dead only to the earthly pleasures of life. (To the very
end, when the young man stabs himself and does not die, the reader wonders whether the
character is a ghost or a living person.) This characteristic of “le mort-vivant,” makes Mickiewicz’s hero very similar to that of Chateaubriand’s René, in fact the story of these two early Romantic heroes is almost identical: “He had been created for another world—a perished world—and while he lives on, there is no place for him. He is an orphan, without father and mother…without last name and a family home. He lost his original home, as if cast out of paradise.” In both cases the voluntary withdrawal from life is, at least partially, caused by unhappiness and suffering in love, but it also signifies a “life in a (social) desert.”

In The Forefathers, the first name of the hero is revealed when the priest recognizes him as a former pupil named Gustaw. His long monologue unveils Gustaw’s tragic life story which began with a fascination with Goethe and other writers who led him to believe in an ideal love, which he discovered does not exist in real life. Now Gustaw understands that sentimental books ruined his life and denounces them as subversive “villainous books” (“książki zbójeckie”), a striking, if not ironic, judgment by a Romantic poet who himself set up a model of ideal Romantic love named Maryla after his real life lover. Gustaw believed that he had found his perfect ideal love in a young aristocratic woman, but his bliss was soon replaced by bitter suffering when she rejected him because of his poverty and chose a wealthy aristocrat instead. On her wedding day, Gustaw committed suicide but, as he admits in the final scene, he will continue to suffer

47 Irena Grudzińska Gross, “Adam Mickiewicz: A European from Nowogródek,” East European Politics and Societies 9, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 305. As Grudzińska points out, Mickiewicz, “disliked Chateaubriand, especially because of his tolerant attitude towards tsarist despotism.” However, as Gurdzińska convincingly argues, Mickiewicz’s poetry may owe more to the French writer than he would have cared to admit. Ibid., 309.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 306
and love her until they meet in heaven because they were united by Providence, destined to be together forever. The significance and the uniqueness of *Forefather* Part IV has been aptly summarized by Czesław Miłosz:

Nonsensical as it seems in resume, Part Four is full of powerful poetic and dramatic effects. Its power resides in what has been called an “objective lyricism,” the ability, so typical of Mickiewicz, to embody outbursts of passion in tangible images. We have to do here with a realistic diary of the heart and, at the same time, a pronounced manifesto of individualism as a revolutionary force struggling against a social order that makes love dependent upon class divisions. Since Gustaw’s monologue is based upon a flow of free associations justified by his presumed madness, what results, in fact, is a display of expressionistic technique, offering great possibilities to modern stage directors.\(^\text{50}\)

As Miłosz points out, in Gustaw, Mickiewicz created the first truly Romantic hero in Polish literature, a great individual who rejects the unjust reality of life, where true love is denied by the social order. Moreover, the dual nature of this new Romantic hero who at one moment seems to be a man and at another a phantom, once again challenged the Classicists’ rationalistic approach to life as exemplified by Śniadecki in *The Romantic*. In *Forefathers* Part IV, however, it is not merely the girl who talks to her dead lover, but the dead lover himself, whose very existence on the stage challenges the audience’s belief in what is real and what is not. This is a double-edged challenge because Gustaw at times seems to be mad and talking nonsense, which is precisely the accusation raised against the girl by the learned man in *The Romantic*. It is important to note that, with Gustaw’s character, Mickiewicz also introduced a psychological portrait of madness, a portrait of a

\(^{50}\) Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, 217.
man pushed to the edge by the consuming passion of love—a trait of many future literary Romantic heroes. However, as Miłosz points out, the mad, “outbursts of passion are delivered in tangible images,” in a new poetic discourse, which was very modern, contemporary-Romantic, yet both beautiful and lyrical. Indeed, Gustaw represents to perfection the kind of character that Romantics called for in their manifestos: he is not a one-dimensional character from Classical drama, but a complex, multidimensional hero, whose sufferings, passions, and struggles are shared by other young people. As a character Gustaw is much closer to Shakespeare’s Hamlet than to any character from Racine’s tragedies.

It is worth noting that Mickiewicz, who like all the Romantics, considered Shakespeare the exemplar for Romantic drama, opened *Forefathers* Part II with a motto from *Hamlet’s* Act I “There are more things in Heaven and Earth, /Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” *The Romantic* also had a motto from *Hamlet’s* Act II: “Methinks, I see…where? /-In my mind’s eyes.” These quotations not only explain how Shakespeare inspired Romantic drama, they also summarize the whole Romantic program that Mickiewicz was realizing in his poetry: he was unveiling a new world of human imagination, feelings and beliefs to his readers, a new reality, of which the rational philosophers of Classicism could not even dream.

The first known printed review of Mickiewicz’s poetry came in 1823 by Franciszek Grzymała, the editor of the pro-Romantic, if somewhat eclectic, Warsaw journal *Astrea*. In his review Grzymała is moderate in his praise of Mickiewicz, but gives him credit for being the first Romantic poet in the Polish language:

Monsieur Mickiewicz was virtually the first of our countrymen to openly walk a path declared Romantic, for shaped by the example of the English
and the German Romantic he speaks their language not as a translator, but
as an original writer, drawing the themes of his works from the past and
his nation’s distant history. The songs, legends and even superstitions
of the Lithuanian people and those of bordering nations are the cornerstones
of his poetry. He wants to create a poetry for the people…

Grzymała acknowledges that Mickiewicz is the first, or as he puts it, “one of the first
Romantic poets,” and he gives credit to the poet’s English and German Romantic
predecessors. Moreover, he stresses the originality of Mickiewicz’s talent, which
produces original Polish poetry, not just an imitation of foreign models. It is also
important that Grzymała recognizes Mickiewicz’s right to use folk songs and legends,
even superstitions (“zabobony”) to create a poetry based on national folk tradition
(“poezja ludu.”). Grzymała’s remarks approving of folklore as poetic inspiration
resemble Brodziński’s views on the importance of the pastoral in poetry and clearly break
away from Classicist norms and Śniadecki’s views of what is admissible in literature.
However, Grzymała’s criticism of Mickiewicz’s poetic language is completely in line
with the rules of bon sense:

In Mickiewicz’s writings the language and versification might at times be
deemed contrary to the rules of linguistic science, on occasion at odds
with the fine modern rules of rhyme and diction. He might also be accused
of not always being the master of his own fertile imagination. Finally
blamed for the fact that in his attempt to attain simplicity and naïveté,

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51 Franciszek Grzymała, “Poezje Adama Mickiewicza,” Astrea 3, no. 5 (1823), in Mickiewicz w oczach
współczesnych. Dzieje recepcji na ziemiach polskich w latach 1818-1930, ed. Witold Billip (Wrocław:
tak okrzyzaną drogą romantyczną, bo wykształcony na wzorach romantyków angielskich i niemieckich, w
mowie narodowej przemawia ich językiem nie jako tłumacz, ale jako pisarz oryginalny, czerpający w lonie
przeszłości, w lonie wieków odległych swojego narodu, osnowę do swych tworów. Pieśni, podania, a
nawet zabobony ludu litewskiego i pogranicznych narodów są główną podstawą jego poezji. Chce on
stworzyć poezją ludu… Ibid., 51-52.
he might in several instances use expressions that are too common.  

Grzymała’s criticism that Mickiewicz’s versification does not follow “today’s” ("dzisiejsza" which really means “Classical”) rules of, “elegant diction of poetry rhyming.” (“wytworna dykcja rymotwórcza”) was one of the main accusations leveled against the poet by the Classicist camp. The criticism of Mickiewicz’s “pedestrian” vocabulary, taken from the living language of the simple people is another one of the Classicist’s favorite reproofs, as is the objection to the poet’s “uncontrolled imagination” ("nie zawsze jest panem bujnej swojej imaginacji") which produced the fantastic world of Ballad and Romances and Forefathers Eve.

From a historical perspective, even more interesting than his praise and criticism of Mickiewicz, are Grzymała’s comments on the lack of criticism of the poet’s works by the Classicist camp. He notes that to date Mickiewicz’s work has been completely ignored by Classicist critics and that, “his poetry in the present time of aesthetical division, of battle between poetic camps that for some time has been waged in Europe and even in Poland should particularly interest his fellow countrymen.” (Emphasis in the original.)

Significantly, Grzymała observes that the battle between the Classicists and Romantics has reached Poland and that Mickiewicz plays an important role as the representative of the Polish Romantic movement; so important that he cannot be ignored.  

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52 [W] pismach p. Mickiewicza pod względem języka i wersyfikacji można by w niektórych miejscach znaleźć wady przeciwne prawidłom nauki językowej, można by dostrzec niekiedy zaniedbania sprzecznego z dzisiejszą wytworną dykcją rymotwórczą; zarzucić by mu także należało, że nie zawsze jest panem bujnej swojej imaginacji i że wreszcie, starając się ciągle o prostotę i naiwność, może być w kilku miejscach obwiniony o niejaką gminność w wyrażeniach. Ibid.

53 [J]ego poezje w dzisiejszych czasach rozdwojenia estetycznego, w walce stronniców poetycznych, toczącą się od niejakiego czasu w Europie, a nawet i w Polszcze, tym większą powinny zwracać uwagę piszących rodaków…. (Emphasis in the original), Ibid. 51
Therefore, Grzymała offers the Classicist camp two possible approaches to Mickiewicz and his poetry: open warfare or a more moderate stance:

Eager defenders of taste shaped after the Classical-French models should therefore either declare an open war against him [Mickiewicz], erase the dangerous plague forthwith, or the moderates, who take the middle way and wish for the reconciliation of both quarreling parties, should objectively assess the quality of his writings and present its advantages and flaws in a fair light.\footnote{Albo więc gorliwi stróży smaku kształconego na wzorach klasyczno-francuskich powinni mu [Mickiewiczowi] wydać otwartą wojnę i w samym zarodzie złumić niebezpieczną zarażę, albo umiarkowani, szukający jakiejs średniej drogi, pragnący pojednania stronnic tw rozjastrzonych, powinni bezstronnie ocenić wartość pism jego, w rzetelnym świetle wystawiając zalety i wady. Ibíd., 52.}

The moderate approach presented by Grzymała and other attempts to reconcile the Classical and Romantic movements did not find many followers on either side. Several years later, Franciszek Morawski, a friend of Mickiewicz’s unrelenting critic Kajetan Koźmian, proposed a compromise based on a vague idea of aesthetical liberalism that would allow the existence of both kinds of literature as long as they were not boring. However, as Alina Witkowska observed, “compromise was impossible mostly because young Romantics did not want it.”\footnote{Alina Witkowska, \textit{Literatura Romantyzmu} (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1986), 65.} Mickiewicz and his young supporters demanded radical changes in literature, not a compromise. In 1823 they could not foresee their eventual triumph: that the dramatic events of the November Uprising of 1830-1831 against Russia would accelerate the process of literary transformation; the Classicists could not know that either, thus they had no choice but to engage in battle.

The Classicists’ tactic of ignoring Mickiewicz’s poetry (the psychology of “if we don’t talk about it, it does not exist”) worked for a while thanks mainly to the tense political situation that developed in Warsaw, and later in Vilnius, the two political and intellectual centers of the Polish territories under Russian control. In 1822 Tsarist police
discovered a conspiracy among young Polish officers who were preparing an anti-Russian revolt and arrested their leader Walerian Łukasiński and others in Warsaw. The investigation of the conspiracy, led by Nikolai Novosiltsov, soon unveiled clandestine student organizations called Philomaths and Philareths (Filomaci i Filareci) at Vilnius University and more arrests followed. Mickiewicz, as a founding member of both organizations, was arrested on October 23, 1823. His young supporters were too distraught for a time to fight their literary opponents. These political circumstances explain why, after all the achievements represented by the first two volumes of his poetry, the first serious critical reviews of Mickiewicz’s works in printed journals appeared only in 1825\textsuperscript{56} when he was already in Russia.


In the first article, “On the Spirit and the Origins of Poetry in Poland”\textsuperscript{57} Mochnacki discusses the situation of Polish Romantic literature and he mentions Mickiewicz, along with other minor poets (J.B. Zaleski and A.E. Odyniec), as the first representatives of Romantic poetry in Poland. Mochnacki does not refer to any specific works of Mickiewicz’s, but “On the Spirit and the Origins of Poetry in Poland” in many ways further develops the ideas presented by the poet in his essay “On Romantic Poetry.” The critic, influenced by German idealism and the natural philosophy of Friedrich Schelling, elaborates on the idea of the Romantic poet, who should strive for the total unity of his individuality (“indywidualność poety”) with the Universum. Only in that state of perfect unity with the universe (Schelling’s idea of unity of Being, Spirit and Nature) can the poet create “real poetry” (“prawdziwa poezja”), poetry that is not a product of his mind (“poezja nie jest dziełem rozumu”) but rather the result of “inspiration” (“natchnienia”) that comes from, “the ideal world, the realm of miracles and illusions” (“świat idealny, kraina cudów i złudzeń”).\textsuperscript{58} This “real poetry” depicts “ever higher, more magnificent and stronger exultations of the soul to the limits of its existence” (“coraz wyższe, coraz wspanialsze, coraz mocniejsze uniesienia duszy do najwyższego jej działalności kresu”), and elevates human thoughts and feelings above earthly existence. This is the poetry that Mickiewicz argued for in his manifesto The Romantic, poetry that transcends the rational thinking of the human mind, the poetry of


\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
*Forefathers Eve*, which inspired readers to see the unseen, such as the, “exultations of Gustaw’s soul pushed to the limits of its existence.”

Similarly to Mickiewicz, Mochnacki declares that “Romanticism is not just a separate word, or a new form of a poetic feeling. This kind of poetry should therefore not be referred to as a School.”

Like Mickiewicz he argues that the history of poetry cannot be separated from the history of humankind, but he puts the stress on the poet’s relationship with nature and unity with the universe. Most importantly, Mochnacki, like Mickiewicz, finds that in the Polish context, the source of Romantic poetry can only be found in the national, Slavic tradition.

Why shouldn't the religious systems of the old Slavs, the fantastic pagan rituals, the character of the peoples and the traits of the times when Christianity did not yet rule over our ancestors’ vast lands, become an abundant source of national poetry? The Slavs believed in protective deities in their domestic and public virtues, worshiped the creator of thunder, lightning and of the entire world. In their mythology we can see traces of a higher level of enlightenment and progress. The descriptions of their celebrations, sacred enclosures, monuments and churches contain many a deep thought and spark of creative imagination... Let us just repeat that truth that if the efforts of our young writers were to be oriented in this direction, this branch of Romantic poetry, rooted in the fertile soil of the old Slavic world, will bear the most beautiful fruits of our national poetry, enlivened by the genius of the past and memories most cherished.

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59 “Romantyczność bynajmniej nie jest oddzielnym wyrazem lub formą uczucia poetycznego. Nie należy więc nazywać ten rodzaj poezji Szkołą.” Ibid.

60 Czyliż systema religijne dawnych Sławan, fantastyczne obrządki ich poganizmu, charakter ludów i znamiona czasu przed zaprowadzeniem chrześcijanizmu do obszernej ziemi przodków naszych nie mogą się stać obfitym źródłem poezji narodowej? Wierzyli Sławnianie w bóstwa opiekuńcze cnót domowych i publicznych, oddawali część twórcy piorunów, błyskawic i całego świata. W ich mitologii znajdujemy ślady, oznaczające wyższy światła i rozumu postęp. Opisy ich uroczystości, świętych zagród, posągów i kościołów, zawierają niejedną myśl głęboką, niejedną iskrę twórczej imaginacji... Powtórzymy tylko tę prawdę, że gałąź poezji romantycznej, zaszczeplona na bujnej niwie sławiańskich starożytności, może wykształcić najpiękniejszą część literatury ojczyznej, bo ożywioną geniuszem przyszłości i najdroższymi wspomnieniami, jeżeli usiłowania naszych młodych pisarzów ku temu celowi zostaną zwrócone. Ibid.
The tradition of the ancient Slavs, which was not corrupted by civilization, and their pagan beliefs in the gods of nature, such as thunder and lighting, preserved the connection with the infinite Universe. Ancient pagan mythology contains that “spark of creative imagination” (“iskra twórczej imaginaecji”) that is the source of true, national poetry. Mochnacki praises Mickiewicz as an example of a poet whose work is based on ancient Slavic history. He does not mention Forefathers Part II, but Mochnacki’s views give further theoretical foundation to Mickiewicz’s ideas and his work based on the ancient ritual of “dziady.” Ancient Slavic tradition in Polish Romantic poetry connects the past and future; thus it must be the foundation of the new national literature.

Mochnacki’s response to Śniadecki’s treatise was a fierce attack on the whole Classicist camp and its ideology. Speaking about the leading representatives of Polish Classical poetry (Stanisław Trembecki, Adam Naruszewicz, Igancy Krasicki) Mochnacki refuses to call them poets and uses the pejorative term “rhyme-creators” instead (“ojczystych rymotwórców (nie mówię poetów)”). Like Mickiewicz in The Romantic, he accuses the Classicists of a rationalistic, materialistic approach to life and to literature, an approach that limits their understanding to ordinary, clear, miserable things. That is why Classicists reject everything that transcends human reason: they call “madness” everything that does not agree with their limited conception of experience; they reason when a poet should feel and wonder; they try to measure immeasurable things, try to define that which is not definable. Mochnacki calls on his Classicist opponents to “abandon facts, experience and observation in order to penetrate the mysteries and phenomena of the world of the human mind by using the inspiration and free

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The Classicists could not ignore Mochnacki’s attacks, and the first response, focusing on Mickiewicz and his poetry, came from a moderate Classicist critic, Franciszek Salezy Dmochowski.

In the introduction to his article, “Comments on the Contemporary Condition, Spirit and Trends of Polish Poetry” (“Uwagi nad teraźniejszym stanem, duchem i dążnością poezji polskiej”) Dmochowski, probably following Mickiewicz’s introductory essay, gives a brief overview of the development of ancient Greek and Roman poetry, which basically agrees with Mickiewicz’s assessment that Roman literature copied Greek models. However, Dmochowski’s conclusion contradicts Mickiewicz’s conviction, that Polish literature should follow Greek models of poetry addressed to all people, rather than Roman models of poetry accessible only to the higher echelons of society. The critic explains that at first, the Romans, too preoccupied with constant wars and public duties, could not devote their attention to the development of their own original literature and art, but once they firmly established their rule over the world, Roman authors, “with genius and taste… perfected beautiful [Greek] models to the highest ideal.” For the very same reasons Polish Renaissance literature, followed the path of poets of the time of Augustus, i.e., used existing models from antiquity, though chose Roman over Greek poetry because, as Dmochowski adds, “the Polish national character agrees with that of the ancient Romans, both languages have similar intonation

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63 Ibid. 54
and syntax, therefore our literature fitted particularly well with the Roman, and adopted its power and noble simplicity so deeply, that the connection between the two was closer than that between any other contemporary nation."\(^{64}\)

Besides the obvious defense of Classicist poetry, Dmochowski’s remark reveals why Poles identified so strongly with the symbols of Neoclassical aesthetics based on Roman models and adopted them as part of their national consciousness.

Turning to his Romantic opponents Dmochowski acknowledges that they do not seek any reconciliation, but rather represent an “all or nothing” attitude; nevertheless, he offers an olive branch. Dmochowski sees common ground with the Romantics in the matter of the pressing need to create models of national poetry that are lacking in Polish literature. He agrees that Romantic poetry is based on the traditions, history, customs and religion of a given nation, while Classical poetry follows Greek and Roman models adapted to language norms, which are similar in all learned societies. But he notes that the two kinds of poetry do not exclude each other if they are created by “a true talent.”

That true talent he certainly finds in Mickiewicz:

The example of the Germans and the English, who created such fine and numerous works from the songs, legends and inventions of the common people, has for several years now encouraged our writers to draw inspiration from the same source and create a national poetry. **Mickiewicz stands at their head.** Having drawn from legends previously unknown, and on them based the beauty of his poems, he is an era in our poetry; he already has several more or less successful imitators, therefore we ought to ponder upon his works more deeply.\(^{65}\)

\(^{64}\) Ibid. 56

\(^{65}\) Przykład Niemców i Anglików, którzy z pieśni, podań i zmyśleń ludu wywiedli tak piękne i liczne dzieła, od lat kilku zachęcił naszych pisarzy do czerpania w tymże samym źródle i do utworzenia narodowej poezji. **Na ich czele stoi Mickiewicz.** Że ten autor czerpał z podań nie znanych nam dotąd i na nich opierał cudowność poematów swoich, że stanowi epokę w poezji naszej i ma kilku mniej lub więcej szczęśliwych naśladowców, przeto nad jego dziełami obszerniej nam zastanowić się wypada. Ibid., 57.
The fact that Dmochowski, a leading representative of the Classicist camp, recognized that the publication of *Ballads and Romances* and *Forefathers Eve* Part II and IV opened up a new era in Polish poetry testifies to his critical talent and understanding of the situation of Polish literature in his time. It is equally significant that Dmochowski recognizes the importance of English poetry, along with German Romanticism, as the inspiration for Mickiewicz and other Romantic poets. The article solidified Mickiewicz’s position as the first and most important Romantic poet in Poland. For all his praise of Mickiewicz’s poetry and talent, however, Dmochowski was still a Classicist critic, faithful to the iron rules of the proper poetic style. And it is in its style that he finds fault with Mickiewicz’s work. He accuses the poet of introducing diminutives and provincialisms into Polish poetry, of occasional improper use of Polish grammar, and of mixing high style with burlesque, the two opposites which, “should never be mixed together in one poem.”\(^{66}\) The critic also regrets that the beauty of *Forefathers Eve*, which has a typically Romantic, fragmentary structure, was not delivered in a, “more regular, unified work.” In the light of Dmochowski’s praise of Mickiewicz’s poetry, the accusations he levels against the poet seem almost petty, but they demonstrate that even for such a seemingly open-minded critic as himself, the Classicist rule of “good taste” overruled even the greatest Romantic talent. He ends his article with gracious encouragement to the young Romantics that they should continue their efforts in creating national poetry and offers advice which would become the slogan of the moderate

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\(^{66}\) Ibid. 61.
Classicist critics: “[the Romantics] should combine the freshness and liveliness of their Romantic imagination with the taste and correctness of the Classicists.”

Mickiewicz responded to Dmochowski’s article not until four years later in a pamphlet, “About the Warsaw Critics and Reviewers” (“O krytykach i recenzentach warszawskich”), which appeared in his volume Poetry (Poezie) published in Petersburg in 1829. Before that happened, however, he published in Russia, Sonnets of Adam Mickiewicz (Sonety Adama Mickiewicza, 1826), which included two cycles: Sonnets, often called “Love Sonnets,” or “Odessa Sonnets,” and Crimean Sonnets, and in 1828 a long narrative poem, Konrad Wallenrod: A Tale from the History of Lithuania and Prussia (Konrad Wallenrod. Powieść z dziejów litewskich i pruskich). Both books represented further milestones in the history of Polish Literature. Later I will discuss both texts and their reception in Russia in more detail, but here it is essential to mention them in the context of the Polish “battle between the Classicists and the Romantics” which raged during the second half of the 1820s. In Sonnets, as the title suggests, Mickiewicz used the rigidly structured sonnet, popular in Renaissance poetry (Petrarch and Shakespeare) and revived by the German Romantics, as his poetic form. Sonnets introduced completely new, exciting dimensions into Polish Romantic literature and challenged Classicist poetic norms.

In the “Love Sonnets” Mickiewicz paid tribute to the Italian master of the genre, Petrarch, by including a quotation from one of his sonnets on the title page, but the opening sonnet “To Laura” also directly refers to Petrarch’s immortal love. The first dozen of Mickiewicz’s sonnets trace ideal, Romantic love to Laura (in real life, Maryla

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67 Ibid, 64.

68 “Quand’era in parte altr’uom da quell, ch’io sono.”
Wereshczakówna) in a first person narration. Even though the hero declares that he does not care that, “people are against them, that he has to love without hope,” that his beloved is married to another man, as long as, “she will confess that God married her soul to him,” the following sonnets reveal that such a declaration, if indeed given, was not nearly enough to calm his painful memories and sufferings. His heart, “burnt by passionate pains,” tormented by self-doubt and contradictions, is like an old, decaying temple, unable to feel love for anyone ever again. The hero’s emotional and mental state resembles that of a Byronic character, mixed with a more elegiac and sentimental attitude towards the past and love. However, from Sonnet XIII, Mickiewicz turns to the other side of the Byronic persona, transforming his hero into an ironic salon dandy, an expert in *ars amatoria*, who ignores and challenges the rules of propriety, thus exposing society’s hypocritical attitudes. The rest of the cycle is devoted to a happy, and very earthly, erotic love. Sensual descriptions of the female lover, of the joyful time together with her are rendered in beautiful, light, and witty metaphors, never before seen in the Polish language.

Mickiewicz’s erotic sonnets were too much even for the most ardent proponents of Romantic poetry. The earthly love and the playful language of “Love Sonnets” were the opposite of Romantic love ideals. Mochnacki, whose review of the *Sonnets* well represents the opinion of the majority of the Romantic camp, focused entirely on the first part of the cycle: on the melancholic, ideal love and the passionate, tragic sufferings of the hero, which he compares to Gustaw’s predicament in *Forefathers* Part IV. In private letters between themselves, the Romantics express the opinion that the love sonnets were

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far below Mickiewicz’s talent as demonstrated in the *Crimean Sonnets*, but in public they presented a united front. Mochnacki also praised Mickiewicz for his masterful control of the sonnet form, which seems to intensify the expression of ideas and feelings conveyed by the poet. However, for the moderate critics of the Classicist camp such as Dmochowski and Brodziński, use of the sonnet form was one of the faults they found with Mickiewicz’s work.

Dmochowski in his “Remarks on Mr. Mickiewicz’s ‘Sonnets’” (“Uwagi nad ‘Sonetami’ Pana Mickiewicza”),⁷⁰ points out that, “the form chosen by the author…a form so opposite to a free and just outpouring of the heart’s feelings,” makes him think that, “the author did not write his sonnets in a moment, in which passionate enthusiasm forces a poet to write down his exultations.”⁷¹ For Dmochowski, “[the] sonnet is not an organ of the heart” and he declares that the mode of expression of love used by Mickiewicz does not speak to him, thus he cannot share the feelings conveyed by the poet, a reversal of the opinions he expressed on the depiction of Gustaw’s feelings and sufferings in his review of *Forefathers*. The critic also finds more transgressions against proper poetic style, grammar and vocabulary in the *Sonnets* than in Mickiewicz’s previous two volumes of poetry. He also derides the erotic sonnets, which are, “jarring in their lack of decency.”⁷² The criticism of the Classicist critics, and the Romantics’ praise of the “Love Sonnets” are both moderate in comparison to the polemic over the second

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⁷¹ Ibid., 72

⁷² Ibid., 73
cycle of the volume, *The Crimean Sonnets*, in which Mickiewicz presented a new vision of man’s condition in the world in provocative style.

Mickiewicz wrote *The Crimean Sonnets* after taking a trip from Odessa to the Crimea in 1825. Parenthetically, I should note here that by a historical coincidence, Pushkin left Odessa the previous year, having written his “Southern Poems” with an eponymous *Prisoner of The Caucasus*; the embodiment of a Russian Byronic hero. Moreover, in 1825 Pushkin was already writing and publishing the first chapters of *Eugene Onegin*, written in the famous sonnet stanza (“Onegin stanza.”) It would seem then, that in terms of chronology Mickiewicz was following in Pushkin’s footsteps. However, that historical-biographical coincidence had significant influence on Mickiewicz’s position in Pushkin’s poetic world, to which I will return in Chapter Three. In the context of Mickiewicz’s own work, he created a new type of a hero in *The Crimean Sonnets*—a lonely, Romantic traveler, who left behind a civilized world that he could not accept. Presumably this traveler is the hero of the “Love Sonnets,” broken by his passion, turned into a dandy, and now disillusioned with life and love altogether. He is the first of Mickiewicz’s exemplary Byronic characters. His journey takes him from his native Lithuania, to the sea, and then to the steppes, and finally, to the mountains of the Crimea. The hero’s geographical trajectory parallels his internal transformation from a lonely Western Traveler into a philosophical Pilgrim. Besides being an account of the hero’s spiritual voyage, *Crimean Sonnets* is a beautiful, poetic example of a Romantic travelogue, which features the exotic land of Crimea for the first time in Polish literature. Orientalism, introduced into Romantic literature by Goethe and Byron, was one of the

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Another interesting biographical coincident is Mickiewicz’s romantic relationship with famous Polish beauty Karolina Sobanska, who at the time lived in Odessa, and who was also Pushkin’s love interest.
great Romantic fascinations and Mickiewicz’s sonnets offer many insights into Oriental
tradition, culture, religion, and philosophy. To render the exotic flavor and atmosphere of
the Orient, Mickiewicz often uses Persian, Arabic, and Turkish words and local names, a
stylistic device that particularly offended his Classicist critics.

Dmochowski’s analysis of *Crimean Sonnets* demonstrates that the originality and
innovations of Mickiewicz’s poetic language were unacceptable to even moderate
Classicists. Speaking on behalf of the Classicist camp, the critic again objects to the
choice of the sonnet form because it limits real descriptions of beautiful Crimean nature.
He also points out that, the rigid versification pattern of the sonnet forces Mickiewicz to
commit many grammatical and stylistic mistakes and to choose improper words. The
foreign vocabulary of *Crimean Sonnets*, words such as “chylat,” (official dress of the
sultan), “namaz” (a Muslim prayer), “Mirza” (a Tatar nobleman)—is explained by
Mickiewicz in extensive footnotes along with geographical names and explanations of
local customs. To Dmochowski, however, foreign words make some stanzas impossible
to understand and he accuses the author of, “voluntarily breaking the language rules,”
adding that, “he unnecessarily introduced Turkish words when Polish ones are nice and
pleasant to the ear, and just as poetic.”74 For Dmochowski what is most difficult to
understand, and, thus, most open to criticism, are the original, innovative, often
surprising, metaphors used by Mickiewicz to convey the beauty of exotic nature. The
metaphors describing the beauty of mountain peaks covered with snow as a, “wall-like
sea of ice raised by Allah/ Who cast the angels a throne of frozen cloud,” and as,
“bulwarks build from a quarter-continent by Daevas/ to block the caravan of stars come

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74 Ibid., 75.
from the East” were completely incomprehensible to the Classicists. In Dmochowski’s opinion, Mickiewicz, instead of describing the beauty of the mountain view in, “proper Polish language, which he can use very well,” created a ridiculous parody of the Oriental style, full of mysticism, empty phrases and lacking in thought. Indeed, Mickiewicz’s images of nature were the opposite of the Classicist formalistic definition of “true beauty,” which is based on, “painting nature and choosing noble, interesting images.” The critic recommends that instead of being inspired by foreign lands the poet should turn his attention to the quiet beauty of the Polish landscape, which much better reflects the true Polish character. The last comment also reveals that Dmochowski saw in *Crimean Sonnets* a lack of “national character,” which the moderate element of the Classicist camp united around Brodziński, the leading Sentimental poet, considered an essential component of successful poetry.

In his review of *Forefathers* and *Sonnets*, Brodziński seconded Dmochowski’s view that the *Crimean Sonnets* did not represent true Polish national poetry. Moreover, in analyzing Gustaw, the hero of *Forefathers* and Pilgrim of *The Crimean Sonnets*,

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75 “The view of the mountains from the steppe of Kozlov” (“Widok gór ze stepów Kozłowa”):
Tam? - czy Allach postawił ścianą morze lodu?
Czy aniołom tron odał z zamrożonej chmury?
Czy Diwy z ćwierci lądą dźwignęli te mury,
Aby gwiazd karawanę nie puszczać ze wschodu?
[There!...Did Allah raise this wall-like sea of ice,
Or cast this angel’s throne of frozen cloud?
Or did the Daevas build these bulwarks form a quarter –continent,
To Block the caravan of stars come from the East?]  
Translaced by Mark Pettus.

76 Ibid., 76

Brodziński disagreed with what these two characters represented: they were Romantic rebels who challenged the existing order of the world, a challenge that frightened the Classicists and which they could not accept, because it threatened their superior position in Polish literature. However, it was these very qualities of the Traveler-Pilgrim who leaves the civilized world, in an act of defiance, travels through an exotic wilderness finds his new inner-reality, which he then describes in a new, Romantic language, that was attractive to the young Romantics. Both Dmochowski’s and Brodziński’s formalist approaches to the *Crimean Sonnets* demonstrate that the moderate Classicist and Sentimental critics were drifting away from their “golden mean” attitude towards the Romantics. Instead they were coming closer to the ultraconservative Neoclassical camp and its anachronistic aesthetics. This prevented them from discovering the true meaning and importance of Mickiewicz’s work.

In his review of the *Crimean Sonnets*, Mochnacki, unlike most contemporary critics, praised not only the innovative qualities of the poetic language but, more importantly, exposed the philosophical and ideological aspects of Mickiewicz’s work. The Pilgrim, who by communing with Nature comes closer to the Absolute, is a personification of the ideal image of the Romantic poet whose individuality is united with the Universe, which Mochnacki proposed in “On the Spirit and the Origins of Poetry in Poland.” In fact the critic observes that in the *Crimean Sonnets*, “the passions and feelings of the poet [Mickiewicz] are connected to almost all of the Nature” (“namiętności i uczucia poety maja związek z całym niemal przyrodzeniem”).78 Furthermore, Mochnacki points out that the conceptual and philosophical aspects of the

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Crimean Sonnets, in which Mickiewicz is, “able to transform material impressions into an intellectual concept,” (“Przetwarza on [Mickiewicz]… wrażenia materialne na pojęcia umysłowe,” emphasis original),\(^{79}\) certainly represent a great achievement made possible, in part, by his use of innovative metaphors.

**Konrad Wallenrod: A Tale from the History of Lithuania and Prussia**, like *Grażyna*, was loosely based on events from medieval Lithuanian history of the 14th century. Konrad, the hero, was born a pagan Lithuanian, and as a little child was captured by Teutonic knights, who raised him as a Christian in Prussia. At the opening of the poem Konrad has been elected the Grand Master of the Order. He requests to be entertained by Halban, an old Lithuanian bard—a Homeric figure—whose songs, incomprehensible to the Prussian knights, awaken the protagonist’s recognition of his national identity. Halban then, is a repository of ancient national history, and once he passes the tradition on, Konrad is compelled to act upon it, i.e., to fight for the freedom of his native Lithuania. To that end he postpones as long as possible the attack on Lithuanian forces and then leads the Teutonic troops to a war that ends in the total defeat of the Order, and then commits suicide to avoid being executed for treason by the knights.

Scholars agree that *Konrad Wallenrod* reflects the strong influence of Byron on Mickiewicz’s poetry but that it also owes much to Scott’s historical novels. The story of Konrad Wallenrod, dark and mysterious, told in flashbacks by various characters including the narrator, grips the reader’s attention to the very end when Konrad’s true, Lithuanian identity is confirmed. Wallenrod is the most Byronic of Mickiewicz’s characters; dark, tragic, proud, prone to fits of anger and drunkenness; an avenger and warrior who can also be a bard. He is a lover and a husband who must choose between

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\(^{79}\) Ibid.
family happiness and the fight for the freedom of his country; he is also a knight who
must choose the path of betrayal and deceit in order to conquer his enemies. These moral
and ethical dilemmas stand at the center of the work and make Wallenrod a truly tragic
character.

In terms of poetic style *Konrad Wallenrod* is a masterpiece. Mickiewicz
interchanged the dominant 11-syllable lines of narration with different feet of
versification (including the first successful adaptation of Homeric hexameter in Polish
poetry) to highlight different characters, songs, and time perspectives. The language of
the poem is simple and direct, sometimes beautifully lyrical, even elegiac, but always
captivating.

Most importantly, in *Konrad Wallenrod* Mickiewicz perfectly expressed the spirit
of the time: the idea that national poetry should be based on an ancient national tradition
and history. The new model of a national poet was inspired by legendary figures such as
Ossian and Boian, and Mickiewicz’s Lithuanian bard Halban also fits that paradigm.
Thus, *Konrad Wallenrod* demonstrates the power of the poet’s word to inspire the hero so
deeply that he is compelled to turn that word into action. This power of the poet to
influence his audience was fascinating, if not overwhelming, to the Romantics; it was
exactly what they saw as the true role of poetry.

*Konrad Wallenrod* reached Warsaw in 1828, soon after its publication in
Petersburg. The Romantic camp and the younger generation received Mickiewicz’s work
with enthusiasm, but the Classicists were frightened, if not horrified by its subversive
message, which now not only threatened the literary, but also the political establishment,
thus they were as critical as ever of the poet and *Konrad Wallenrod*. Since the printing of
the work was forbidden in Warsaw by the Russian authorities, the reactions, both
negative and positive, from clandestine readers of *Konrad Wallenrod* come mainly from
private correspondence and memoirs published in later years.

The young generation on the verge of organizing an uprising against Russia
understood *Konrad Wallenrod* as a call to action, a call to arms. The reactions of the
Romantics to *Konrad Wallenrod* show that the complexity of the hero’s character, his
moral and ethical dilemmas, his tragic predicament, (not to mention the artistic beauty of
Mickiewicz’s work), went unappreciated during the tumultuous times preceding the
uprising. Even Mochnacki’s review of *Konrad Wallenrod* concentrates on the political
aspects of the work. As to its artistic values, he finds the biggest faults in the structure of
the poem, in the “disproportion” (“niestosunek,” emphasis in the original) between
Wallenrod’s character in the first part where he appears as a, “great and terrifying,”
(“wielki i straszny”), lonely knight who is planning the treacherous destruction of the
Teutonic Order, and in the later parts where his actions should have been described at
length. Mickiewicz, however, barely mentions the disastrous campaign of the Teutonic
Knights against Lithuania and the defeat of Wallenrod’s enemies. Instead the last two
parts of the poem are focused on events after the return from war; specifically
Wallenrod’s relationship with his beloved wife Aldona, who lives as a hermit walled-up
in a nearby tower. Mochnacki finds these later parts not, “the poetry of life, the poetry of
reality,” (poezja *życia*, poezja rzeczywistości), but rather, “the poetry of tender,
*sentimental* memories,” (poezja tkliwych, *sentymentalnych* wspomnień!)\(^80\) (Emphasis
in the original.) Moreover, for Mochnacki, the sentimentalism makes Konrad

\(^80\) Ibid., 84
Wallenrod’s character seen psychologically and poetically untrue.\(^{81}\) It is clear that for Mochnacki and the young Romantic camp he represented, the true “poetry of life and reality” was no longer found only in *Forefathers* Part IV, or in *Crimean Sonnets*. Now they demanded the Tyrtean poetry (poezja tyrtejska)\(^{82}\) that would encourage people to fight and sacrifice themselves for their country, thus they were not interested in Konrad Wallenrod’s doubts and regrets.

The Neoclassicist camp opposed the November Uprising and their legalistic attitude towards the Russian authorities in Poland (the Tsar was the head of the Polish Kingdom) also affected their criticism of *Konrad Wallenrod*, which they described as a dangerous, revolutionary work. The attacks on Mickiewicz and his work were led from behind the scenes by Kajetan Koźmian, the “last Warsaw Roman,” and the leader of the ultraconservative Neoclassical camp. Koźmian, the sworn enemy of the poet, never published any open criticism of him because he did not wish his name to be associated with Mickiewicz in public.\(^{83}\) However Koźmian’s opinions were well known in Warsaw and his letter to Franciszek Morawski in 1828 is an apt summary of what he and other Classicists thought of *Konrad Wallenrod*:

> No one has so far considered presenting a drunkard and madman in rhyme lending him more grace, by making him, contrary to history, an infamous traitor, a Lithuanian, and thereby give an idea of how noble Lithuanians

\(^{81}\) “Ileż w tym psychologicznej i poetyckiej nieprawdy!” Ibid., 86.

\(^{82}\) Tyrtaeus was a Spartan poet in the mid 7th century BC, when Sparta fought heavy battles with neighboring Mesenia. Tyrtaeus’ elegies were written to raise the fighting spirit and patriotism of the soldiers. In the history of Polish literature the term “poezja tyrtejska” is frequently used in reference to patriotic poetry that calls citizens to defend the freedom of the country.

love their motherland. What comes to the Pinskian head surpasses all imagination.84

The very subject of *Konrad Wallenrod*, was offensive to the Classicists, and they considered Wallenrod a subject unworthy of Polish poetry. In Koźmian’s idea of national literature there was also no place for heroes/traitors and historical inaccuracies, thus he ironically points out that, “against history” (“wbrew historii”) Mickiewicz created a Lithuanian traitor to demonstrate how, “nobly Lithuanians love their homeland.” Koźmian’s letter demonstrates that the Neoclassicists, like Mochnacki, (but for different reasons), were unable to appreciate the whole drama and tragedy of *Konrad Wallenrod*. Moreover, the last line: “What comes to the Pinskian heads surpasses all imagination,” is a personal attack on Mickiewicz whom Koźmian always treated as someone from the backwater provinces (the provincial city of Pinsk is symbolic here) who dared to challenge the Warsaw literary establishment. However, Koźmian and the Neoclassicist camp could not deny the fact that, with the success of *Crimean Sonnets* and *Konrad Wallenrod*, the seemingly inconsequential provincial poet was pushing them out and replacing Neoclassical values with Romantic fervor. Hence the intensity of their attacks on Mickiewicz and his work.

The Classicists also leveled the already familiar accusation against *Konrad Wallenrod* that it was not Polish poetry, because it did not represent the true Polish and Slavic character:

Oh, poor, unfortunate Poland! Is Monsieur Mickiewicz to be the representative of your literature, of a literature which not only honors you,

84 Kajetan Koźmian to Franciszek Morawski, 30 March 1828, in Billip, Mickiewicz. “Nikomu jeszcze nie przyszło do głowy wystawiać rymem wariata i pijaka, a dla tym lepszego uświetnienia nadawszy mu, wbrew historii, postać beznego zdrażcy, zrobić go Litwinem dla dania wyobrażenia, w jakim szlachetnym sposobie Litwini kochają ojczyznę. Co się w tych pińskich głowach roi, wszelkie pojęcie przechodzi.” Ibid., 353.
but the entire Slavic tribe, a literature that uniquely in the history of its civilized people ensouls, ennobles with a simplicity and unique dignity.  

For the Classicists the only literature that could honorably represent Poland, i.e., the only true Polish national literature, was that which promoted their values: noble-mindedness, greatness, simplicity and dignity, (szlachetność, prostota, godność). Later Koźmian adds that characters such as Wallenrod might be all right for German literature, but, “every Pole and Lithuanian has to reject him with repulsion, as unworthy of them.” Clearly the Classicists did not think that Mickiewicz was worthy of representing Polish literature, but did he care about their opinion?

While the battles over Crimean Sonnets and Konrad Wallenrod were raging in Vilnius and Warsaw, Mickiewicz was in Moscow and in Petersburg, which, as cultural and literary centers, were much closer to Western Europe—Germany, France and England—then Warsaw. His Polish friends kept him informed about the critical responses to his work. In Russia Mickiewicz was celebrated as a great Romantic poet and as such he eventually answered his Polish critics in the famous pamphlet, “About the Warsaw Critics and Reviewers” (“O krytykach i recenzentach warszawskich”) written in 1828 and published in 1829 as an introduction to his Poezje. Explaining the need to write the introduction, Mickiewicz stated:

The reasons for my silence are easy to guess for anyone who is acquainted with the state of modern literary critique in Poland and has a picture of people thus occupied. Yet when I once again publish the works, which have been taken apart so often by so many pens, and I release them into

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85 “Nadeslane,” Gazeta Polska no 140 (1830), in Billip, Mickiewicz. “O biedna Polsko, biedna! To pan Mickiewicz twojej literatury ma być reprezentantem, tej literatury, która zaszczyt nie tylko tobie, ale calemu plemieniu Słowian przynosi, jako tchnąca jedyną w jej dziejach ludów ucywilizowanych szlachetnością, prostotą, godnością.” Ibid., 277.

86 “W Niemczech to szukać takich przykładów… Polak i Litwin z obrzydliwością to odrzuca jako niegodne siebie.” Kajetan Koźmian to Franciszek Morawski, 30 March 1828.
the world in their primal state of imperfection, I fear that my readers may think it due to an obdurate heart, an illness characteristic of criticized authors, that I am obstinately refusing to make use of any comments, even those published in the newspapers, and, on top of everything, in Warsaw.  

Mickiewicz clearly did not think that the level of the critical reviews of his works written in Warsaw merited any response on his part, and needless to say, could not have any influence on his poetry. He knew that in the eyes of his Polish critics, Warsaw was the center of the literary universe, but the poet, whose works had been published in the most influential Russian journals, did not think much of either the Polish capital or the literary establishment there. Throughout the rest of his response Mickiewicz maintains an ironical distance, the perspective of a poet who had broken away from the stifling atmosphere of provincial Warsaw into the worldly literary Parnassus of Moscow and Petersburg.

In the first section of the pamphlet, Mickiewicz focuses on only two accusations leveled against him; namely, the use of provincialisms and foreign words in his poetry. He provocatively admits that he, “not only does not keep away from provincialisms, but perhaps uses them on purpose.” And he asks his critics to notice, “the different styles of his poetry and to judge each work according to different rules,” that apply to a specific style. He points out that in ancient Greek poetry different local dialects had been used, not to mention in the poetry of Robert Burns, J.G. Herder, Goethe, and Scott. Mickiewicz accuses the Polish critics of following the language purists of French newspapers, who,

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87 Powody milczenia mojego łatwo odgadnie każdy, kto zna stan teraźniejszej krytyki literackiej w Polszcze i ma wyobrażenie o ludziach wdzierających się na urząd krytyków. Atoli kiedy powtarzam wydanie dzieł, tyle razy, tyle piórami rozbieranych i te dzieła bez żadnych prawie odmian puszcza na świat w stanie rodzimej ich niedoskonałości, lękam się, aby czytelnicy moii nie myśleli, że przez zatwardział manerma, właściwą autorom krytykowym chorobę, uparłem się nie korzystać z uwag, co większa, z uwag drukowanych w gazetach i do tego w Warszawie.

88 Wyznaję, że nie tylko nie strzęgę się prowincjonalizmów, ale może umysłnie ich używam. Prosiłbym zwrócić uwagę na różne rodzaje poezji w dziełach moich zawarte i każdego z nich styl podług innych sądzić prawidel.
“judge subtle questions of poetic language with a dictionary of the French Academy.”

This is not the way to read and judge poetry.

Speaking on the usage of foreign words in *The Crimean Sonnets*, Mickiewicz primarily addresses Dmochowski, and points out how inconsistent his accusations are. Dmochowski, on the one hand, writes about unsuccessful imitations of the Oriental style in the sonnets, and on the other, admits that he cannot understand words like “Allah,” “drogman,” “minaret,” or “namaz.” Thus it is clear to the poet that the critic is not an expert on Oriental languages. Moreover, these words were used and explained in the works of Goethe, Byron and Moore, “so many times that for a European reader it is a shame not to know them.”

The lack of knowledge of the history of modern European literature, and insufficient knowledge of ancient Latin and Greek languages and literatures is, according to Mickiewicz, the main reason why literary criticism in Warsaw remains on such a low, provincial level. Therefore Mickiewicz declares that:

> The prophecies of the forthcoming downfall of literature and good taste in Poland seem to be groundless - at least Romanticism is not the source of danger. The history of literature proves that the downfall of taste and a lack of talent are due to one sole reason: being confined to a certain number of laws, thoughts and opinions. Once those are digested, the lack of new nourishment leads to starvation and death.  

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89 Przytoczone wyrazy arabskie, lub perskie tyle razy w dziełach Getego, Byrona, Mura użyte I objaśnione były, że o nich czytelnikowi europejskiemu wstyd nie wiedzieć.

90 Wróżyby więc o bliskim upadku literatury i smaku w Polszcze zdają się być bezzasadne – przynajmniej nie ze strony romantycznej zagroża niebezpieczeństwo. Dzieje literatury powszechnej przekonywają, że upadek smaku i niedostatek talentów pochodzi wszędzie z jednej przyczyny: z zamknięcia się w pewnej liczbie prawideł, myśli i zdań, po których wytrawieniu, w niedostatku nowych pokarmów, głód i śmierć następuje.
Romanticism, his own poetry, will not bring the downfall of Polish literature; on the contrary, they bring much needed renewal after decades of stagnation under Classical rules.

The Mickiewicz who wrote the pamphlet was a different man from the one who wrote the poetic manifesto in 1822: he was now a mature poet conscious of his creative and intellectual powers, perhaps a bit too arrogant and unjust in his ridiculing of his Classicist opponents. His letters to friends after the publication of the pamphlet show that he was ready for further attacks from the Classicist camp, but it was in fact the last time that he took part in the Polish, “battle between the Classicists and the Romantics.” In 1829, Mickiewicz, with the help of some Russian friends, obtained a passport and was finally able to leave the Empire for Western Europe. A new chapter of his life began, and soon after the November Uprising of 1830, a new chapter started in Polish political and literary life.

In the above overview of the transitional period between Classicism and Romanticism in Poland, I have tried to demonstrate that this turning point in the history of Polish literature followed similar transitions that had taken place in France, Germany and England: with one exception—the literary domination of a poet of genius, Adam Mickiewicz:

There was a visible one-sidedness to Poland’s Romantic evolution. It was Mickiewicz’s mark, the literary domination of an ingenious poet, whose followers quickly became his imitators... The characteristics of Romanticism at the time of the evolutionary breakthrough were, after the example of Mickiewicz's two Vilnius volumes: folklore, regionalism, and youth as positive moral categories and components of a literary biography. Mickiewicz’s philosophical universalism and the ethical complications of
modern patriotism, as presented in *Konrad Wallenrod*, gained less understanding.\footnote{Witkowska, *Literatura Romantyzmu*. “Miał wszakże polski przełom romantyczny widoczną jednostronność. To jego Mickiewiczowskie piętno, dominacja literacka genialnego poety, którego akolici dość szybko stali się naśladowcami… Znaimionami romantyzmu w okresie przełomu będą więc z reguły, za wzorem dwu wileńskich tomików Mickiewicza, ludowość, regionalizm, młodzieżowość jako pozytywna kategoria moralna i komponent literackiej biografii. Mniej zrozumienia znajdzie Mickiewiczowski uniwersalizm filozoficzny i komplikacje etyczne współczesnego patriotyzmu, zawarte np. w *Konradzie Wallenrodzie.*” Ibid., 62-63.}

The first two volumes of Mickiewicz’s poetry gave a direction to the nascent Polish Romantic Movement. The themes of folk tradition and youthfulness as positive moral values became parts of the literary biography of the poet. This, along with the forms and style of *Ballads and Romances* and *Forefathers Eve* parts II and IV gave Polish Romantics ammunition for their battle against the Classicist camp. The domination of Mickiewicz was so strong that it transformed his acolytes into mere poetic imitators, and even an innovative, brilliant novel in verses such as *Maria* (1825) by Antoni Malczewski was completely ignored by his contemporaries. Understandably, the attacks of the Classicist camp focused almost exclusively on Mickiewicz and his work; the poet’s Romantic manifestos and polemical writings supported and greatly contributed to the victory of the Romantic Movement. The criticism and miscomprehension of *Sonnets* and particularly of *Konrad Wallenrod* demonstrate that in Poland Mickiewicz was ahead of his time. This was contrary to his experience in Russia where both works, as well as the philosophical universalism and moral and ethical dilemmas of *Konrad Wallenrod*, were received with applause and admiration. To Russian readers and fellow Romantic poets, Mickiewicz was as great as Byron.

However, to understand and appreciate Mickiewicz’s role as a Romantic poet in the development of Russian Romanticism, it is necessary to discuss, at least briefly, the
period of transformation from Classicism to Romanticism that took place in Russia. It was far more complicated and complex than its counterpart in Poland.
II. The Transition from Classicism to Romanticism in Russian Literature

In Poland the period of the Enlightenment began almost as late as in Russia; its rise followed the reign of the last Polish king, Stanisław August Poniatowski (1764-1795), whose patronage encouraged the development of the arts. However, the Polish Enlightenment, unlike the Russian, was based on the achievements of previous centuries. As Miłosz notes, “If the Renaissance is called the Golden Age of Polish letters, the short but intense period of the Enlightenment is, in many respects, a link between this seemingly lost heritage and the literature of modern times.” Consequently, Polish Romanticism had a long literary tradition on which to build. Russia, on the other hand, was in an entirely different position. Until the reforms of Peter the Great, Russia was culturally isolated from the rest of Europe, and therefore deprived of the Renaissance, which in Western Europe brought about the abundant development of secular culture and literature. Until the mid-eighteenth century, Russian literature was dominated by the influence of Old Church Slavonic religious writings, which with their archaic language and structure served the needs of the Church rather than of secular literature.

The accelerated process of modernization and secularization, initiated by Peter and continued by subsequent rulers, was particularly vividly expressed in Russian literature. In the middle of the eighteenth century, Russian writers faced the enormous task of creating new models and a new modern literary language that would convey the new secular culture and ideology to a church-dominated, still very medieval society. The theoretical and literary works of Vasily Trediakovsky, Mikhail Lomonosov, and Aleksandr Sumarokov provided the foundation for modern Russian literary discourse.

92 Miłosz, The History of Polish Literature, 159.
Given the fact that French was used as a common language in educated Russian society, it is not surprising that the reforms of Russian literature were based on French models. In poetry, which dominated literature at the time, Boileau’s *Art poétique* (1674) became a theoretical benchmark for Russian poets. As a result, “Russian Classicism of the second half of the eighteenth century was oriented towards the models, names, forms and values that basically belong to the French literature of the seventeenth and the beginning of eighteenth century, i.e., they were a hundred years old.”  

However, the process of modernizing Russian literature swiftly gained momentum and, as a result, the progression of subsequent cultural and literary periods from Classicism to Sentimentalism to Neoclassicism and finally to Romanticism, which in Western Europe took approximately from the mid-seventeenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, occurred in Russia within a span of 50-60 years. In such an accelerated atmosphere of development a paradoxical situation arose: all these very different literary currents existed almost simultaneously. Consequently, a Russian writer of the second half of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century frequently belonged to more than one “school” or literary trend during his lifetime; a situation in which both writers and the reading public were often confused as to who represented the “new” and “old,” who were the innovators and who were conservatives.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, when the aesthetic of Classicism in literature seemed to take root and Lomonosov’s rule of “three styles” governed poetry, the publication of Nikolai Karamzin’s Sentimental novel *Poor Liza* (Бедная Лиза) in 1792, introduced a new language into Russian literary discourse. This language was freed from the restrictions of Old Church Slavonic, as well as from the Classicist rules imposed

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by Lomonosov on syntax and vocabulary; it was a language based on the everyday
discourse of society which was able to convey ordinary human feelings and emotions. As
W.M. Todd III aptly summarized, “Karamzin proposed a program of reciprocal influence –
society would offer the writer its taste and interests while the writer would repay this
with a style of Russian that could replace French as the language of society, even
surpassing it in the range and mellifluousness that polite society cultivated.”94 However,
Karamzin’s work was both innovative and archaic. In terms of the development of the
Russian language his work was definitely innovative. But in the context of the
development of Western European literary trends, he propagated a salon culture with a
Sentimental mode of expression, which in France and other Western European countries
was already a thing of the past. As Boris Gasparov points out, this was one of the many
paradoxes of the transitional period in Russian literature: “Karamzin’s school at the
beginning of the nineteenth century was, both in the eyes of the Russian public and in the
self-consciousness of its representatives, an innovative, radical phenomenon. But in the
perspective of the European cultural process it represented values characteristic of the
mid-Eighteenth century.” 95

Iurii Tynianov defined Karamzin’s school known as “innovators” (новаторы),
and Admiral Alexander Shishkov and his followers as “archaists” (архаисты). The later
group gathered between 1811-1816 in the famous Colloquy of Lovers of the Russian
Word (Беседа любителей русского слова) and strongly opposed Karamzin’s
innovation. Shishkov advocated the importance of Old Church Slavonic in literature as

94 William Mills Todd III, Fiction and Society in the Age of Pushkin. Ideology, Institutions, and Narrative.

95 Gasparov, Poeticheskii iazyk Pushkina, 32.
the foundation of a truly Russian, modern literary language; he upheld the rules of
Russian Classicism, with its strict division of the three stylistic levels and considered
Lomonosov’s solemn patriotic odes, which praised the Russian empire and its greatness,
to be perfect examples of what poetry should be—a means of didactic inspiration of
patriotic feelings.

In fact, Shishkov’s arguments represent one of the many contradictions in Russian
literature of the early nineteenth century: his literary program, which was created in
opposition to Karamzin’s school, (which in the 1820s produced many Romantic writers),
“preceded the Romantic idea of the uniqueness of each nation, its language, history and
culture, and the Romantic cult of the national past, which is imprinted in the memory of
each nation through its language, legends and literature.”96 At the same time, Shishkov’s
ideas, while rooted in the Russian Classicism of the eighteenth century, were much closer
in terms of aesthetics to the French Neoclassicism that developed in France after the
Revolution at the beginning of the nineteenth century97 -- the same French influence that
he found necessary to fight in defense of truly Russian, national character of literature.
However, Shishkov saw Neoclassicism as a reaction to the intimate sentimentality of
salon-oriented literature of Karamzin’s school, which he wanted to eliminate from
Russian literature, and which he also opposed as a symbol of dangerous, revolutionary
French influence. Paradoxically, through this affinity with contemporary French
Neoclassicism, Shishkov's conservative camp of archaists brought Russian literature and

96Ibid., 31

97 “That heroic-patriotic brand of Classicism professed by Shishkov and his followers was in fact quite
closed to the spirit and aesthetics of Neoclassical art, which just at that time was in its height.” (“[Э]та
gerои́чно-патриоти́ческая стру́я классици́зма, исповедуемая Шишковым и его последователями, была
весьма близка духу и стилистике неоклассицисти́ческого искусства, которое как раз в это время
переживало свой расцвет на европейской почве.”) Ibid.
culture much closer to Europe than their opponents—the innovators from Karamzin’s school.

The Gatherings of the “Colloquy of Lovers of the Russian Word” in Derzhavin’s house in St. Petersburg quickly became popular and fashionable events attended by high society. The proceedings were published in the journal, *Readings at the Colloquy of Lovers of the Russian Word* (Чтения в Беседе любителей русского слова), of which 19 issues were printed between 1811 and 1816. In addition to Shishkov and the host, Derzhavin, the leading writers and members of the Colloquy included Ivan Krylov, Nikolai Gnedich, D. I Khvostov, S. A. Shrinsky-Shikhmatov and A. A. Shakovsky.

The formal organization of Shishkov’s followers was a result of the intensification of the ideological discussion about the future of Russian literature, which flourished between Beseda (Colloquy) and Karamzin’s school during the first decade of the nineteenth century. These were not only published polemics but also theatrical parodies: in 1815 Shakhovsky staged his comedy *Lipetsk Spa* (Липецкие воды), in which he included a maliciously witty caricature of Vasily Zhukovsky, the leading representative of Karamzin’s school. The poet’s friends (among them D.V. Dashkov and P.A.Viazemsky) came to his defense and Dmitry Bludov wrote a satire, “A Vision at the Inn at Arzamas, Published by the Society of Scholars” ("Видение в арзамасском трактире, издание обществом учёных людей") which depicts a group of modest provincial writers who overhear the delirious ravings of a sleeping Shakhovsky. The satire became quite famous as a result of which Zhukovsky’s defenders became known as the “Infamous Arzamas Writers” or simply the “Arzamas.” Besides Zhukovsky himself, Viazemsky, Bludov, Dashkov the group also included young Alexander Pushkin, his
uncle Vasily, Konstantin Batiushkov, Alexander Turgenev, and several others; Nikolai Karamzin and Ivan Dimitrev were the honorary members.

The polemics between members of Arzamas and Colloquy dominated the Russian literary scene for a relatively short period of time (1815-1818), but they had far reaching consequences as they determined the development and the direction of the future Romantic Movement in Russia. During its short existence, the members of Arzamas did not consider themselves to be Romantics, but a few years later Zhukovsky, Viazemsky and several others, including A. S. Pushkin, became leading exponents of Romanticism, and it was during the battles with Colloquy that their literary and aesthetic styles were formed. The Arzamas group was not a formal literary organization, however, and never produced any manifestos or theoretical treatises. In contrast to the very serious style of their literary opponents’ gatherings, Arzamas’ meetings had a deliberately informal character, always aimed at ridiculing its enemies—the members of Colloquy. As Viazemsky recalls in his memoirs, the statutes of Arzamas required that:

As in all other societies, every new member of Arzamas must read a eulogy to his late predecessor; but all the members of Arzamas are immortal, so for the lack of their own dead, new members of Arzamas have decided to rent the departed from the jesters of Beseda and the Academy.98

The humorous, even hilarious style of the statutes testifies to the character and style of Arzamas. Pretending to adhere to the customs of formal organizations, where every new member could only replace a deceased predecessor and had to pay him tribute with an

appropriate speech, Arzamas was faced with a dilemma: all its members were immortal, so how could new members honor their dead predecessors? They find a solution that is both humorous and mocks their adversaries: new Arzamas members simply “rent” (“брать напрокат”) deceased predecessors from among the fools/jesters (“халдей”) of Colloquy and the Academy. This is a typical pun in the Arzamas style: Colloquy is so deadly serious that though all their jesters have been dead for a long time, the dead members of Shishkov’s group are more worthy of praise than the living. In Arzamas proceedings, wit, word play, and lightness of style were of the highest value.

The informal style of Arzamas was also evident in the character of their meetings: “The proceedings took place with any given number of members at any place (one meeting of four members was conducted in a carriage on the way from Petersburg to Tsarskoe Selo).”99 Zhukovsky, the permanent secretary of Arzamas, kept the minutes of the proceedings, typically in verse. As one of the members, F. Vigel, recalls, “an evening would customarily start with a reading of the minutes of the last meeting created by Zhukovsky, which already strongly disposed everybody towards merriness.”100 Viazemsky adds that in those minutes Zhukovsky, “fully indulged in his ability to create nonsense.”101 That nonsense (“галиматья,” from the French “galimatias”) referred to Colloquy, its Classically oriented aesthetics, ideology and pompous style.

The playful and humorous atmosphere of the meetings was also a result of the very close relations among Arzamas’ members. It was a group of friends and relatives, and their memoirs and correspondence give the sense of its intimate, family-like spirit.

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101 Ibid.
Members took nicknames from Zhukovsky’s ballads (he was Svetlana), which allowed them to address each other on an intimate first-name basis. The intimacy of Arzamas, the style of its writings, and its approach to literature were, of course, the product of the salon-oriented culture promoted by Karamzin’s camp of innovators. This is not to say that Arzamas favored Sentimental poetry. Karamzin’s influence could be seen predominantly in the lightness of style and in the language based on the conversational vocabulary of the upper class. The characteristic wit of Arzamas was also Karamzinian in the sense that it recalled the salon culture of seventeenth-century France. Yet the main preoccupations of Arzamas remained literary criticism and salvos against its adversaries: the archaists gathered around Shishkov in Beseda.

In contrast to the Beseda writers who, favored theatrical genres of tragedy and comedy and their rigid language requirements, Arzamas writers preferred epigrams, friendly addresses, and parodies, which allowed them to display their light, refined, and witty style. These short forms were first read at Arzamas meetings, and then, when approved by the members, published in literary journals. One such epigram, written by D. Bludov, makes fun of Shishkov and the leading dramatist of Beseda, Shakhovsky:

Хотите ль, господа, между певцами
Узнать Карамзина отъявленных врагов?
Вот комик Шаховской с плачевными стихами,
И вот, бледнеющий над рифмами, Шишков.
Они умом разны: обоих зависть мучит,
Но одного сушит она; другого пучит.102

[Sirs, do you want, to find among the singers/ The worst enemies of Karamzin?/
Here is Shakhovsky the comic, with his pitiful poems./And there is Shishkov, pale from working on his rhymes./They are the same by their intellect: they are both tortured by envy/But envy makes one dry and the other one blown.]

102 Bludov i ego vremia, ed. E. Kovalevsky ed. (S.-Peterburg, 1866), 107, in Literaturenye kruzhki, 96.
This epigram ridicules two of Karamzin’s notorious enemies by enumerating their literary, intellectual, and physical characteristics in a comic manner: Shakhovsky, author of popular comedies, writes tearful poems, while Shishkov, the linguistic expert, pales, i.e., nearly faints, over the rhymes. Both men are crippled by envy, presumably towards each other and/or towards their literary opponents from Arzamas, but it has a different physical effect on each: Shishkov, a thin man in real life, is dried up by envy, while the overweight Shakhovsky is swelled up by it. Shishkov and his archaists could not match the Arzamas writers in wit or style and usually lost such epigrammatic battles.

Arzamas’ literary activities, however, never produced a positive literary program. Its members were satisfied with criticizing and ridiculing the followers of Shishkov and defending their renowned leader Karamzin and his principle of good taste guided by common sense, naturalness and the freedom of Russian language from OCS and Classical rules. This is not to say that the style of Arzamas writers was modeled precisely on Russian Sentimentalism. As Boris Gasparov has observed the, “scornful (“насмешливый”) and confrontational style of Arzamas’ members little resembled the cult of ‘delicate feeling’ (“нежное чувство”) and soft, sentimental irony, which were characteristic of the old representatives of the school.” 103 In fact, Arzamas represented a new generation of writers who acknowledged their great predecessor Karamzin, but in literary terms their defense of his camp of innovators had a much more anti-Shishkov and anti-Beseda then decisively pro-Sentimentalist orientation. The literary public however, considered young members of Arzamas’ group, such as Pushkin, Baratynsky, and

103 Gasparov, Poeticheskii iazyk Pushkina, 52.
Viazemsky as part of the same group of writers that gathered around Karamzin at the turn of the nineteenth century.

By July 1817, there were attempts to create and publish a journal that would be a platform for the literary and journalistic writings of Arzamas’ members; a journal that would have an anti-Classical orientation. However, these plans never materialized because by 1818 the group had peacefully dissolved. In January 1818, Karamzin was selected as a member of the prestigious Russian Academy (Russian language and philosophy), a well deserved honor that came despite the fact that his literary opponent Admiral Shishkov was the Academy’s president. In fact Shishkov asked Karamzin to give a speech there, an event that A.I. Turgenev described as a, “victory not for the Academy, but for Arzamas.” Soon after Turgenev and Zhukovsky were also selected as members of the Academy, which was an acknowledgment that writers from the Arzamas circle had entered the mainstream of Russian literature.

Arzamas’ fame in the history of Russian literature is to some extent due to the teenage Pushkin’s membership in the group, a membership which in many ways determined the development of his poetic talent and personality. Apart from Pushkin, who was unquestionably the leading poet in Russia in the 1820s, Arzamas produced a number of strong writers all of whom occupy important positions in the history of Russian literature. This was a success that Shishkov’s camp could not match. Among the older Arzamas poets who had the greatest influence, the most prominent were Konstantin Batiushkov and Vasily Zhukovsky.

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One of Batiushkov’s contributions to the battles between Karamzin’s camp and the conservative Beseda was the speech he delivered in 1816 when he became a member of the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature at Moscow University. Entitled, “A Discourse on the Influence of Light Verse on Language,”105 Batiushkov’s speech was a cultural and poetic manifesto in which he defended Karamzin’s linguistic reforms and the reciprocal relation between society and the writer: the latter learned from the former, “to divine the secret play of passions, to observe mores, to preserve all social conditions and attitudes, and to speak clearly, easily and pleasantly.”106 The language created by Karamzin’s reforms, “to one degree or another [brought] to a desired perfection,”107 the works of Karamzin himself and also of poets such as Bogdanovich, Dimitrev, Krylov, Kapnist, Neledinsky, Zhukovsky, Muravev, Voeikov and others. From the long list of authors of Russian literature in the 1810s, it is clear that, “Batiushkov’s concept of light verse obviously extends beyond the erotic and epicurean poetry of the Anacreontic tradition.”108 Batiushkov’s argument is that all the different, more playful, or humorous genres such as fables, ballads, friendly epistles, epigrams and folk songs, which are considered light verse by Shishkov’s camp, “have a place of honor on Parnassus, and provide nourishment for the language of verse.”109 That nourishment, according to

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106 Ibid. 3

107 Ibid.

108 Leighton, Russian Romantic Criticism, 7n 7.

Batiushkov, comes from the fact that light verse, unlike the longer forms of epic or tragedy, demands from the poet -

the utmost possible perfection, purity of expression, smoothness of style, flexibility, facility...Beauty of style is an absolute necessity here, and nothing else can take its place.  

The above characteristic of light verse is a definition of style that Arzamas’ poets, and of course Batiushkov himself, adhered to in the highest degree. His erotic and love poems and frequent references to the vanished world of antiquity earned him the title the “Russian Parny.” One of the most famous of his works is the friendly epistle, “My Penates” (“Мои пенаты”1811) addressed to Viazemsky and Zhukovsky, in which the poet-gentleman enjoys the simple pleasures of life, women, wine and the company of his friends. Batiushkov’s carefree persona as depicted in “My Penates” showed just one side of his creative personality. His second preferred genre, after light verse and the friendly epistle, particularly towards the end of his literary career (which was cut short by mental illness in 1822), was that of the elegy, such as “On the Ruins of a Castle in Sweden” (“На развалинах замка в Швеции,”1814) or “The Dying Tasso” (“Умирающий Тасс ”1817).

Batiushkov’s elegiac poetry, along with Zhukovsky’s elegies, which are jointly ascribed to the, “Batiushkov and Zhukovsky school” had the strongest influence on the elegiac current that developed in Russian Romantic poetry. These two aspects of Batiushkov’s poetry serve as a good example of the transitional nature of Russian poetry between the era of Arzamas and the more serious, Romantic period.

Iu. M. Lotman observed that Zhukovsky was the leading figure of Russian poetry despite the fact that his work did not represent the focal point of all literature at the

\[110\] Ibid., 2
time. In fact Zhukovsky was a transitional figure, who was perceived by his contemporaries as the standard bearer of Karamzin’s school of poetry (often referred to as the Karamzin-Zhukovsky school) but was also considered the most important of the early Russian Romantic poets. He is credited with, “almost single-handedly introducing German and English Romantic and pre-Romantic poetry into Russia,” through the translation of Goethe, Schiller, Burger, Gray, Thomson, and Scott among others. Equally important was Zhukovsky’s translation of The Prisoner of Chillon, which in 1821 introduced Byron and Byronism to the Russian reading public.

Zhukovsky made his literary debut with a translation of Thomas Gray’s, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” published by Karamzin in 1802 in his Вестник Европы. From this first published translation of Gray’s poem, the elegy was Zhukovsky’s preferred lyrical genre, and he certainly contributed to the popularization of an “elegiac current” among the Romantic poets in Russia. Zhukovsky transformed the Classical form and language of elegy into a modern poetic style: his elegies mourn the loss of youth, friends, love, and the passing of time and are focused on conveying the inner world of the poet/narrator. Zhukovsky’s poetry was described by Pushkin as a school of “harmonious precision.”

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111 Iu. M. Lotman, introduction to Poety nachala XIX veka. Biblioteka Poeta. Malaia Seriia. 3rd ed., ed. Iu. M. Lotman (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1961), 15-16. However: Zhukovsky was undoubtedly the most prominent figure of the literary movement at the beginning of nineteenth century. All the progressive currents of the era were not focused in Zhukovsky’s work…. Though many important phenomena in the poetry of those years developed away from Zhukovsky, many others in opposition to him…And still, his work set the tone of the poetic chord of the time. (Но несомненно: самой крупной фигурой литературного движения начала XIX века был В. А. Жуковский. В творчестве Жуковского не сились, как в фокусе…все прогрессивные тенденции эпохи. Многие, и важные, явления в поэзии тех лет развивались помимо Жуковского, многие—наперекор ему…И все же именно она была главной нотой в поэтическом аккорде времени.)

112 Leighton, introduction to Russian Romantic Criticism, vi.
The school of “harmonic precision” is the most accurate of the possible definitions of Russia’s elegiac school. It isn’t an objective precision yet, a great master of which Pushkin became in his mature poetry; it is the lexical precision, [and] the demand of the absolute stylistic propriety of each word.\textsuperscript{113}

Precision in using each word, the stylistic purposefulness of every word in each line, but, at the same time, a melodic naturalness of syntax and vocabulary were trademarks of Zhukovsky’s poetry and, as Ginzburg points out, were later brought to perfection by Pushkin. The thematic and stylistic characteristics of Zhukovsky’s poetry are apparent in one of his most famous elegies, “Evening” (1806), in which he meditates on the beauty of nature:

Уж вечер... облаков померкнули края,  
Последний луч заря на башнях умирает;  
Последняя в реке блестящая струя  
С потухшим небом угасает.

[It’s already evening…the edges of the clouds had darkened/The last ray of sunset is dying;/ The last glittering current in the river/Is fading away in a dimming sky.]

The final “dying” of the day reflected in a sunset glow, and the last glimmer of light on the river, turns the poet’s attention to the passing of time. He calls on his former friends, remembering the joyful times they shared together: “Where are you, my friends, you, my fellow travelers?/ Are we never to be united again?” (“Где вы, мои друзья, вы, спутники мои?/ Ужели никогда не зреть соединенья?”) Longing for his companions, he mourns the loss of youthful enjoyments, such as feasting and singing together, “Did really flows of joy dry up?/ Oh, the dead delights!” (“Ужель иссякнули всех радостей

\textsuperscript{113} Lidiiya Ginzburg, \textit{O lirike} (Moskva-Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1964). Школа 'гармонической точности'—самое верное из возможных определение русской элегической школы. Здесь еще не та предметная точность, величайшим мастером которой стал Пушкин в своей зрелой поэзии; это точность лексическая требование абсолютной стилистической уместности каждого слова. Ibid. 22
Significantly, the speaker is removed not only from his friends, but also from the noise of society and civilization. In his solitude, surrounded by nature, the poet realizes his calling: “Yes, to sing is my lot…” (“Так, петь есть мой удел…”). The theme of the poet-singer is developed in another poem, in which the poet mourns the death of a young “Singer” (Певец, 1811):

Он сердцем прост, он нежен был душою
Но в мире он минутный странник был;
Едва расцвел - и жизнь уж разлюбил
И ждал конца с волненьем и тоскою;

[He was a simple-hearted, he was a gentle soul/ But in the world he was a short-lived wanderer;/He had only bloomed – and he already stopped caring for life/And he awaited the end with agitation and anguish.]

It appears that the young Singer has all the characteristics of a Romantic hero: even though he is “simple-hearted” (“сердцем прост”) and a gentle soul (“нежен был душою”)—qualities which are more typical of a Sentimental character—he is also a lonely wanderer in the world. In the fashion of a Romantic, the “poor Singer”, despite his young age, is already weary with life and does not want to live; on the contrary, he longs to die. The likely reason for this rejection of the world and life is a typically Romantic predicament: suffering from unfulfilled love: “Alas! He only knew the suffering of love,” (“Увы! он знал любви одну лишь муку”). The hero also feels separated from the possibility of true bliss as if by a deep abyss: “To know the bliss and to fly towards it with my soul/ At once looking at the abyss that separates me from it all.” (“Блаженство знать, к нему лететь душой,/Но пропасть зрея меж ним и меж собой”). What differentiates the young Singer from later Romantic heroes of Russian poetry is the quiet, mournful, yet captivating and sweet tone of Zhukovsky’s poem. Rather than being fascinated by and identifying with the character of the Singer, as later readers would
identify with a generation of Romantic heroes such as Eugene Onegin, Zhukovsky’s reader in 1811 cannot help but mourn the loss of the poor young Singer.

Zhukovsky’s influence on the development of Russian Romantic literature is particularly important because he is also credited with introducing the ballad into Russian poetry. Zhukovsky’s ballads opened up the medieval world of the supernatural and fantastic and folk traditions of poetry to Russian readers. He created 39 ballads, which were all free translations or adaptations of German and English authors. Belinsky noted that, “we…never had our Middle Ages: Zhukovsky gave it to us.”114 The medieval tradition was one of the major themes of Western Romanticism and Zhukovsky’s ballads introduced into Russian literature the ethos of brave and honorable knights, heroic love, and a mysterious atmosphere and scenery, which he often set in the times of ‘old Rus’. However, even more important than this medieval influence was the inclusion of Russian national folklore in Zhukovsky’s ballad adaptations. He frequently used a motif or a story line from a Western original and re-worked it into a distinctly Russian cultural context, such as in his famous adaptation of Burger’s Leonore which under Zhukovsky’s pen became “Svetlana” (“Светлана,”1811). The opening lines of the ballad, “Once on Epiphany Eve/ the girls were fortune telling” (“Раз в крещенский вечерок/ Девушки гадали”), recall of the beginning of a folk tale. The first scene depicts the old Russian tradition of fortune telling and the story takes place in a distinctly Russian countryside/village setting, with peasants’ huts, peasant customs, icons, a troika and so on. The heroine, Svetlana is an all-Russian, virtuous girl, who venerates the icon of Christ and does not succumb to sensual temptations. Russian folk tradition is also discernible in

the trochaic tetrameter and trochaic trimeter employed by Zhukovsky in order to stylize
the ballad as a folk song.

In the evolution of Romantic literature Zukovsky’s ballads played a very
important role: in terms of the development of poetry the ballad was a new and
exemplary Romantic genre, which allowed poets to employ language free from all
Classical constraints. More importantly, ballads based on folk tradition prompted a
debate: what constitutes national literature? This question lay at the core of the battles
over the narodnost’ fought in Russia in the 1820s, i.e., over what constituted the national
color of literature. Zhukovsky’s works were an important part of these polemics.
Pushkin always valued Zhukovsky’s influence on Russian poetry. On one occasion he
expressed this in a letter to Viazemsky:

You are too protective of me with regard to Zhukovsky. Rather than a
successor, I am precisely a disciple of his, and I succeed only in that I do
not presume to push onto his highway, but wander on a byway. Nobody
has had or will have a style equal to his in power and variety.\(^{115}\)

Pushkin wrote these words five years after the publication of *Ruslan and Liudmila
(Руслан и Людмила)* in 1820, a work that in many ways was inspired by Zhukovsky's
poetry. *Ruslan and Liudmila* brought fame to Pushkin and he was among the first writers
to be recognized as a representative of the Romantic Movement in Russia. Some
proponents of Romanticism praised *Ruslan and Liudmila* as the first example of
Romantic poetry in Russia, but many others, even those who liked Pushkin’s verse, were
not sure what to make of it. It is set in the time of Kievan Rus’ at the beginning of the
11th century, and concerns the heroic efforts of a young warrior to rescue his kidnapped

\(^{115}\) A. S. Pushkin to P. A. Viazemsky, 25 May middle of June 1825, in *Letters of Alexander Pushkin. Three
bride from an evil dwarf sorcerer. As Mersereau observed, *Ruslan and Liudmila* is conventionally called a “mock epic,” but Pushkin “used an assortment of works from various genres as inspiration, including Voltaire’s *La Pucelle*, Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, Zhukovsky’s ballads and old Russian *bylina*.” 116 “The eclectic nature of the work and the heterogeneity of its language, which ranged from Church Slavic to vernacular Russian,” 117 left both opponents and admirers quite perplexed and generated severe criticism, but, more importantly, also began a new phase in the battle surrounding the definition and destiny of Russian national poetry.

The controversial character of *Ruslan and Liudmila* even prompted a member of Arzamas, A. F. Voeikov, who logically should have defended Pushkin, to criticize the work. Voeikov’s confusion is clearly visible as he tries to define the genre of the poem:

But the poem “*Ruslan and Liudmila*” is not an epic, or descriptive or didactic poem. What kind of poem is it? It is *heroic* (*Богатырская*): it describes Vladimir’s heroes (“*богатыры*”), and its core is based on old Russian fairy-tales: *fantastic*, for there are magicians there; *comic*, which the following numerous extracts from it amply prove... 118 (Italics in the original.)

Then Voeikov quotes numerous examples from the text of *Ruslan and Liudmila* to support his critique of the poem and concludes: “Presently this kind of poetry is called

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117 Ibid., 141.

Romantic” (“ныне сей род поезии называется романтическим.”)
(Italics in the original.) It is clear from this context that Voeikov uses the term “Romantic poetry” in a rather pejorative sense. He uses the term again in comparing the monologues of characters in Ruslan and Liudmila with those in Homer’s Iliad, which are much longer, but Voeikov points out that the latter is an epic poem (“поэма эпическая”), while the former is a Romantic one (“романтическая”).

It should be noted here that the creation of a national epic poem was a task that Voeikov and other Arzamas members expected Zhukovsky to fulfill. In an epistle to Zhukovsky published in 1813, Voeikov called on the poet to create a “national poem,” an, “ancient tale in Russian style,” based on existing models such as Wieland, Ariosto and Boian (“В русском вкусе повесть древнюю/ Будь наш Виланд, Ариост, Баян”). Zhukovsky started but never finished the epic poem “Vladimir.” He believed that Pushkin, his pupil, had fulfilled the task of producing a national epic: when Pushkin finished Ruslan and Liudmila, Zhukovsky presented him with his own portrait with the inscription, “To a victorious pupil from a defeated master on that triumphant day on which he completed his poem Ruslan and Liudmila.”

Voeikov, however, did not share Zhukovsky’s opinion, and his analysis of the poem demonstrates that in his judgment Pushkin did not, in fact, fulfill the task of creating a “national epic.” This insistence on creating such an epic demonstrates the flux in Russian poetry at the time: Voeikov in comparing Ruslan and Liudmila to Homer naturally thinks of the need for a Classical, imperial and national work, while Zhukovsky in praising Pushkin’s poem has in mind a different kind of national verse: a poem of the people, highlighting their folklore and

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119 Ibid.

120 Cf. Gasparov, Poeticheskii iazyk Pushkina, 180.
beliefs. Interestingly, in comparison with the intense battle over *Ruslan and Liudmilas*, the critical responses to Mickiewicz’s first two volumes of poetry (*Ballads and Romances*, 1822 and *Forefathers Eve* Part II and IV, 1823) seem far less controversial. Romantics, including the leading critic Mochnacki, praised Mickiewicz’s work for its national character and truly Romantic spirit. Classicist critic Dmochowski also appreciated both volumes, as a manifestation of much needed Polish literature based on national history and tradition and the author’s poetic imagination. However, much like Voeikov, Dmochowski finds faults with Mickiewicz’s language, which includes a “high” poetic style mixed with many colloquialisms and folk idioms. Dmochowski also complains about the *Forefathers* irregular structure, but does not question the validity of its dramatic genre. In the 1820s Polish Romantics and Classicists were not preoccupied with the question of a national epic, which Mickiewicz eventually delivered in 1834 with *Pan Tadeusz*.

Voeikov declares Pushkin to be, “a young poet who already takes a respectable place among our first-rate writers,” and praises certain lyrical aspects of *Ruslan and Liudmilas* as well as its construction, interesting episodes, and character descriptions because, “in these verses our poet is not a storyteller but an artist.” However, a good part of his article is focused on criticizing the poem, especially Pushkin’s use of the Russian language. Voeikov calls some of the errors, “little sins against the language,” such as “немой мрак” (“mute darkness” – “darkness does not speak so it cannot be mute”), and ungrammatical constructions (“Светлеет мир его очам” should be “в его


122 “В сих стихах наш поэт не рассказчик, а живописец.” Ibid., 54
очах”). He also accuses Pushkin of mixing the vocabulary of high and low styles, “От ужаса зажмуря очи,” (“He screwed up his eyes with horror”) the verb is from the Russian vernacular while the noun is from OCS: an unacceptable combination. He also finds fault with the use of the French word “фонтан” (“fountain”) instead of the Russian “водомёт”; and in another place accuses Pushkin of imitating the German syntax of Schiller, which he sees as a sign of bad contemporary taste.

B. Tomashevsky observed that Voeikov wrote his analysis, “not as an older Arzamas member but as a representative of the reactionary camp of criticism.”123 Tomashevsky adds that *Ruslan and Liudmila*, was “too new a phenomenon in Russian poetry to be appreciated by critics who were used to eighteenth-century poetics and rhetoric.”124 It is small wonder that with Classical critical bias which narrowed his point of view, Voeikov was unable to understand *Ruslan and Liudmila* and appreciate the freshness and novelty of the text. However, P. D. Zykov, a critic born in 1798 who was a contemporary of Pushkin, also had many difficulties in understanding the poem.

Zykov was an associate of Pavel Katenin, the leader of a young generation of archaists, and many, including Pushkin, thought that Katenin himself was the author of Zykov’s review, which was signed NN.125 Zykov begins his, “letter to the author of the review of *Ruslan and Liudmila,*” i.e., Voeikov, by praising the poem as, “one of the best literary works of the year.” In fact, Pushkin’s choice of an epic genre for his poem, which

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124 Ibid., 356.

125 P. D. Zykov, “Pis’mo k sochiniteliu kritiki na poemu ‘Ruslan i Liudmila,’” *Syn otechestva* 64, no. 38 (1820), in *Pushkin v prizhizennoi kritike*, 80-81. For the question of authorship of the review see Tomashevsky, 349-350.
marked a departure from the short forms (epigrams, epistle, etc) cultivated by the Karamzin school, was a change welcomed by the new generation of archaists. Likewise, the frequent use of the vernacular in the poem was a sign of a departure from the salon language of, “the beautiful ladies,”¹²⁶ that Katenin and his camp opposed. Negative criticism in Zykov’s review is presented in the form of a dozen questions, (all beginning with “why” “зачем?”) which focus on the lack of convincing psychological motivation for the behavior of characters (“Зачем Руслан присвистывает, отправляясь в путь; показывает ли это огорченного человека?”), inconsistencies in the plot, and lack of connection between the episodes (“Зачем будить 12 спящих дев и поселять их в какую–то степь, куда, не знаю как, заехал Ратмир?”). Tomashevsky observed that Zykov laments the, “lack of those canonical rules of connecting events that apply to a Classical poem,” but adds that even though the critic is not immune from the school-like pedantry that characterizes those critics who judged the poem from a Classicist standpoint, “he is familiar with the current [literary] disputes.”¹²⁷

Such disputes entered a new phase with the publication of *Ruslan and Liudmila*, which followed the controversy between Arzamas’ members and Shishkov’s disciples, who adhered to his Neoclassical principles. The polemics surrounding *Ruslan and Liudmila* in 1820 were carried on by the post-Arzamas circle of Pushkin’s friends on one side and by the new generation of archaists led by Katenin on the other. One of the most important articles in defense of Pushkin and his work came from A. A. Perovskiy, who originally was a member of Karamzin’s school, but by 1820 was closely associated with

¹²⁷ Tomashevsky, *Pushkin*, 350-351.
Zhukovsky and Viazemsky. Perovsky praises *Ruslan and Liudmila* as a wonderful poem and devotes most of his article to ridiculing the comments of Voeikov. Responding to Voeikov’s assertion that *Ruslan and Liudmila* is a Romantic poem because of its medieval warrior theme, and its magical and comical character, Perovsky points out that:

So the mix of heroic, fantastic and comic constitutes Romanticism. What a wonderful definition! Has M[onsieur] V[oeikov] never read the so called Romantic works, in which there was nothing fantastic, heroic or comic? We recommend him read the works of Lord Byron, acknowledged as the leading author of this kind of literature: he won’t find anything fantastic, comic or heroic there.\(^{128}\)

Significantly, Perovsky does not directly state in his review that *Ruslan and Liudmila* is a Romantic poem, but he defends Romanticism against the very narrow and naive classification of Voeikov. The fact that it is a story set in medieval times, or that it contains elements of magic and fairy tales, does not yet make Pushkin’s text a Romantic poem. Perovsky cites Byron’s works, many of which are neither medieval nor magical. *Ruslan and Liudmila*, unlike Pushkin’s “Southern Poems” (*Кавказский пленник*, *Цыганы*), which were published several years later, is not influenced by Byron’s works. Rather, Pushkin draws on Renaissance, Classical and Neoclassical models, the Sentimental and elegiac language of Zhukovsky and Batiushkov,\(^{129}\) The aesthetic principles of Karamzin’s school and Arzamas’ ironical attitude towards folklore,\(^{130}\) in

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\(^{129}\) Tomashevsky, *Pushkin*, 324.

\(^{130}\) Gasparov, *Poeticheskii iazyk Pushkina*, 290.
In 1823, Orest Somov, a critic, editor and one of the first champions of Pushkin and Byron in Russia, publishes a three-part essay, “About Romantic Poetry” (“О романтической поэзии”), in which he attempts to give a historical overview of the development of Romantic poetry in various countries and, if not provide a definition, at least identify the elements that constitute the characteristics of Romantic poetry in general, and specifically in Russia.

This name, Romantic poetry, some trace from the romances sung by the troubadours of olden times, or as with the romances themselves, from the Romance language (Language Romance); others from the introduction of novels (romane), that is, from tales invented by the imagination, or in which historical authenticity is mixed with fictions. However, the name may be completely arbitrary; so in keeping with common usage we will

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131 Orest Somov, “О романтической поэзии,” *Sorevnovatel’ prosveshcheniiia i blagotvoreniia*, 23, 24, (1823), in *Russian Romantic Criticism* 21-34. The journal was published by the Free Society of Lovers of Russian Letters (Вольное общество любителей российской словесности), active 1816-1825. In 1819 Ryleev, Bestuzhev and Kuchelbecker began to play important roles in it; other members were Gnedich, Somov, Delvig and Griboedov. The society advanced many ideas of pre-romanticism, such as “national spirit,” identification with the national historical past, an active interest in folk poetry, a strong interest in individuality (“genius”) and freedom of artistic expression. The general tone was patriotic fervor and civic idealism.
call modern poetry not founded on the mythology of the ancients, and not
slavishly following their rules: Romantic poetry. (Italics in the original)\textsuperscript{132}

The origins of the name “Romantic” were still not clear to Somov and other Romantics in
Russia, and, as he points out, “may be completely arbitrary.” According to Somov, the
term “Romantic” can be applied to any modern poetry and it is easier to say what it is not
than what it is: it is not a poetry, “founded on the mythology of the ancients, and not
slavishly following their rules,” i.e., not Classical French poetry, which is, “didactic,”
“frigid and emaciated,” “alien to the people who adopted it,” (i.e., the modern reader), a
poetry that is a mere imitation of Greek and Roman models. The original poetry of the
ancient Greeks and Romans, “is alive and ardent, for it depicts their mores, mode of life,
and the prevailing conceptions of the time. We delight in the works of the ancient poets
because we see in them a nature distinct from our own, a nature diverse and full of
life.”\textsuperscript{133} Somov praises ancient poetry for its authentic, creative spirit and for its
sensuality; for the true passions, virtues, and vices of the Greek mortals and gods alike,
which are presented in a way comprehensible to, “a primitive man,” unlike “our own
conceptions, present in an abstract form.”

Further Somov notes that while “Classical poetry” refers to, “the ancient poetry of
the Greeks and Romans in pagan times,” “Romantic poetry” signifies “the poetry of the
Middle Ages, or the days of chivalry for which conceptions introduced by the Orthodox
Christian faith serve as the basis, whose subjects are the events of the first centuries…the
deeds of the knights of chivalry…and whose distinctive quality is a tendency toward a

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 24.
better, more blissful world.” According to this definition, the term “Romantic poetry” signifies poetry of Christian times, as opposed to the pagan era, and the poetry of the Middle Ages as opposed to Antiquity. However, Somov rejects this classification as insufficient:

First, conceptions suitable to the age of chivalry are no longer suitable to our enlightened age, and thus we ought to separate all modern poetry from that of the first centuries of Christianity to the twelfth and thirteenth. Second, not all of the European peoples took part in the conceptions, mode of life and deeds of the Italians, Spaniards, French and Germans during the time of chivalry, and consequently the poetry of many of them, particularly the peoples of the Slavic race, would be denied their chief charm for compatriots: narodnost’ and mestnost’.

Somov like other Russian critics struggles with defining modern, Romantic poetry. He proposes a division between, “romances sung by the troubadours of olden times” and the poetry of, “our enlightened age.” Such a time distinction is necessary in the Russian context because if “Romantic poetry” presupposes medieval influence and tradition, it could not be authentic to Russian literature since Russia was cut off from the Western European culture of chivalry and romances. Such a definition would deprive Russian Romantic literature of two key components: narodnost’ and mestnost’. Narodnost’ can be translated as “national identity.” In her commentary on Somov’s essay, Leighton notes that the word narodnost’ was coined by Viazemsky in 1819, and, “it means not only “national,” but also “native,” “popular,” “indigenous,” and “folk.”” Leighton also points out that narodnost’ is, “an anthropological and socio-political concept while mestnost’ is geographical” and was used as a variant of narodnost’, “in the sense of a

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134 Ibid.

135 Ibid.

smaller spatial and temporal unit, and frequently, in connection with the Romantic
demand for local color in literary works.”¹³⁷ For Somov who was looking at Western
models of Romantic literature, the idea of narodnost’ is historically rooted in the poetry
of the chivalric tradition of the Middle Ages; he tries his best to convince his readers that
Russia has a different, but still adequate, historical past which can provide the foundation
for Russian Romantic poetry:

Our chroniclers and the great labor of our illustrious historiographers are
acquainting us with the events of Russian antiquity, and they serve as a
loud reply to those who complain of a shortage of historical legends.
Russia before Vladimir and during the reign of the Prince…beneath the
Tatar yoke…and at the ascendancy to the throne of the Romanov dynasty
– this Russia contains at least as many wealthy subjects as the troubled
ages of old England and France.¹³⁸

Somov encourages Russian poets to describe those glorious events of Russia’s past and
cites historical resources such as medieval chronicles and the oral traditions of legends
and fairy tales. Russian history provides subjects for Romantic poetry as good as those of
other Western European countries, and even better, because they are entirely different
and thus have more “poetic charm.” As for the lack of chivalry, Somov argues that, “the
age of chivalry was for us the age of the bogatyr, whose existence is substantiated by
stories of history and oral legends preserved in our fairy tales.”¹³⁹ Therefore Russia,
“undeniably possesses its own native poetry, indomitable and independent of the legends
of others (Italics in the original).”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Ibid.
¹³⁹ Ibid.
¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 33.
In asserting the importance of *narodnost’* as a concept of national identity based on common history and legends, Somov stresses that poetry should not be limited to, “*memories, legends and pictures of our fatherland*” alone. Like other proponents of Romanticism he argues for the creative freedom of the poet who should have the right to find inspiration in the “entire visible and dream world” where, “mysterious inspiration reveals to the mind’s eye an invisible world of the marvelous.” In fact Somov sees the Romantic Movement as a, “revolt against the Classical poetry of modern times,” a revolt that is trying to abolish the rules of Classicism, which restricts the imagination. The revolt is aimed primarily against French Classicism, but Somov also inveighs against the dominance of the elegiac trend in Russian poetry. Without mentioning Zhukovsky, whom he praises elsewhere for the ballad “Liudmila” as an example of *narodnost’*, Somov regrets that, “all genres of poetry have nowadays been merged almost solely into the elegiac,” which leaves the audience with a desire for the, “unknown, a languor of life, a longing for something better.” By 1823 it was time to move forward and leave Sentimental-elegiac poetry behind. The “something better” was Romantic poetry. Somov readily acknowledges Zhukovsky for introducing Russian readers to the German Romantics and the bards of England through his translations, in which “he showed us new paths through the world of the imagination.” He praises young Pushkin as the poet who continues the work begun by Zhukovsky. According to Somov, Pushkin’s language and mode of expression follow that “new track” into the world of imagination opened by Zhukovsky’s translations of Western Romantic poetry.

Somov’s essay appeared after the publication in August 1822 of Pushkin’s *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*, the first in the cycle of “Southern Poems,” which also includes

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141 Ibid.
The Fountain at Bakhchisarai (1824) and The Gypsies (1825). The Prisoner appeared almost simultaneously with Zhukovsky’s translation of Byron’s The Prisoner of Chillon and the proponents of Romanticism enthusiastically welcomed both publications as a sign of the advancement of the new poetry in Russia. One of the most ardent Romantic critics was P. A. Viazemsky who reviewed Prisoner of the Caucasus in Son of the Fatherland (Сын отечества) in December 1822. This first article on the works of his friend gave Viazemsky an opportunity not only to praise Pushkin’s poem, but also to attack the anti-Romantic position of the Russian Classicist camp. Viazemsky points out that representatives of Classicism in Russia still consider the very name of “Romantic poetry” (“поэзия романтическая”) “wild, predatory and lawless” (“дикое и почитаемое за хищническое и беззаконное”). Speaking for the first time on behalf of the new, Romantic movement, Viazemsky tells his opponents that they can protest the name of the new movement in literature, but they cannot deny that literature, like all humanity, undergoes periods of change and the present moment is one of such transformation. Romanticism, then, is not only a literary, but also a social phenomenon. Outlining the goals of Romanticism in Russia, Viazemsky stresses the need for a “national literature” (отечественная литература) that will be an expression of a “powerful and brave nation” (выражение народа могущего и мужественного). These expectations for Romantic literature are fulfilled by Pushkin’s work The Prisoner of the Caucasus.

The story of the Prisoner is simple: a young wounded officer of the Russian army is captured by Caucasian fighters and cared for by a girl from their village. In the final

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143 Ibid.
scene the hero is set free by the girl who, having thus betrayed her own tribe and watched her beloved Prisoner leave her, feels that her life has no more purpose and throws herself into the river. The Prisoner is modeled on Byron’s Childe Harold but this, Viazemsky writes, does not diminish the quality of the Russian hero. The Prisoner’s character is a new phenomenon in Russian poetry; a character that represents a contemporary Russian:

Without analyzing the almost unanimous opinion, that Byron was describing himself when depicting Childe-Harold, one can state that such characters are often to be seen in modern society. The oversupply of energy, the inner life that is too ambitious to be satisfied by the concessions of an external existence, which is only generous to the moderate wishes of so-called prudence; the inevitable consequences of such a controversy are an excitement without any aim, a ravenous activity which isn’t applied to anything substantial; hopes that are never realized, but that appear with every new ambition, - they must unavoidably sow in one’s soul that undying seed of annoyance, the sickly sweetness of satiety, that mark the character of The Prisoner of the Caucasus and similar works.  

So what are the main features of the new Romantic hero? He is full of contradictions: the lofty ideals of his soul remain ever unsatisfied because of the limitations imposed by the mediocrity of everyday life. His excessive inner strength and excitement have no real purpose and are not focused on any specific goal, so he is occupied by incessant activity that has no significance, hence his high expectations can never be fulfilled. Such a state of mind and soul inevitably leads to boredom, satiation and tearful sentimentality. He is never satisfied with life, always depressed. Viazemsky, while praising Pushkin for

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144 “Не входя в исследование мнения почти общего, что Бейрон себя списывал в изображении Childe-Harold, утвердить можно, что подобные лица часто встречаются взору наблюдателя в нынешнем положении общество. Преизбыток сил, жизни внутренней, которая в честолюбивых потребностях своих не может удовольствоваться уступками внешней жизни, щедрый для одних умеренных желаний так называемого благоразума; необходимые последствия подобной распри: волнение без цели, деятельность, пожирающая, не прикладываемая к существенному; упования, никогда не совершаемые и вечно возникающие с новым стремлением, – должны неминуемо посеять в душе тот неистребимый зародыш скуки, приторности пресыщения, которые знаменуют характер, Кавказского Пленника и им подобных.” Ibid., 126.
creating a truly Russian character who conveys emotions close to those of the Russian reader, finds the portrait of the Prisoner incomplete and complains that Pushkin leaves far too much to the imagination of the reader: “our poet sketches him [the Prisoner] only lightly; we almost have to guess author’s intentions and complete his unfinished creation in our thoughts.”

Pushkin, in a letter to Viazemsky of February 6, 1823, explains that the unfinished, enigmatic portrait of the Prisoner is precisely the point: “there is no need to spell it all out.” His mysterious personality draws the reader closer to the hero and to the text. It is a deliberate literary device. Pushkin’s intent is to create a Romantic hero that is not obvious, but enigmatic. To that end, Pushkin does not give his hero a proper name, he is referred to as “the Russian” (“русский”) or “prisoner” (“пленник”). He could be any Russian man captured by Caucasian fighters during the battle.

In addition to the review in Son of the Fatherland, Viazemsky wrote additional comments on The Prisoner of the Caucasus in a private letter to A.I. Turgenev on September 22, 1822. He criticizes the Epilogue of the poem:

It’s a pity that Pushkin smeared the last verses of his work with blood. What kind of hero is Kotliarevsky, Ermolov? What is good about him, “Like a black plague/Destroying and annihilating indigenous tribes?” This is a blood-curdling and hair-raising kind of fame. Had we enlightened those tribes, there would have been something to sing about. Poetry is not the hangman’s ally, politics may need them, but then it’s up to history to

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145 Ibid. “у нашего поэта он только означен слегка; мы почти должны угадывать намерение автора и мысленно дополнять недоконченное его творение.”

146 A. S. Pushkin to P. A. Viazemsky, 6 February 1823, in Letters of Alexander Pushkin, 110.
judge whether she may be excused or not; the poet’s hymns mustn’t be the celebration of a massacre\textsuperscript{147}

The Epilogue that so unnerved Viazemsky glorifies the victories of the Russian Army and its generals (Kotliarevsky and Ermolov) who conquered the Southern provinces of the Russian Imperium. Both the content and the style of the Epilogue are closer to the archaic, Classical odes written to praise Great Russia and her brave heroes than to a Romantic elegiac poem, which should mourn the tragic death of the young heroine. The description of the slaughter of the southern tribes offends Viazemsky’s Romantic sensibility: such writing is a denial of the Romantic principle of the purpose of poetry. The Epilogue suggests that the Prisoner, having been freed by the Caucasian girl, returns to the army to fulfill his duty towards his country, instead of, as some readers would like, ending his life with his beloved and, thus, following the path of a true Romantic hero.

It is not difficult to understand why Viazemsky was so critical of the Epilogue of the \textit{Prisoner}. The longed-for new Romantic poem that should convey the changes in society and in poetry, in the end turns out to be a piece of Classical political propaganda glorifying the Russian triumphs over the defenseless southern tribes. Pushkin’s stylistic “inconsistencies,” however, do not indicate that he has abandoned the Romantic viewpoint, rather, as Gasparov explains, the Epilogue demonstrates Pushkin’s belief that the poet should have the creative freedom to transgress genre and style:

\begin{quote}
Romantic story, as well as odic epilogue [of \textit{Prisoner of the Caucasus}], are literary codes, and the poet asserts his right to break and mix them. From his point of view Viazemsky is right: Pushkin doesn’t follow the
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\textsuperscript{147} P. A. Viazemsky to A. I. Turgenev, 22 September 1822, in \textit{Pushkin v prizhizennoi kritike}, “Мне жаль, что Пушкин окровавил последние стихи своей повести. Что за герой Котляревский, Ермолов? Что тут хорошего, что он 'Как черная зараза, Губил, ничтожил племена'? От такой славы кровь с темен в жилах, и волосы дыбом становятся. Если мы просвещали бы племена, то было бы что воспеть’”. Поэзия не союзница палачей, политике они могут быть нужны, и тогда суду истории решить, можно ли ее оправдывать или нет; но гимны поэта не должны быть словосложением резни. Ibid., 379.
logic of plot, he finds himself in the middle of an ideological and political “anachronism”. But this opinion is true only if we consider the poem and its author fully involved in the political and literary currents, the most modern and progressive at the moment—as Viazemsky was himself involved. The problem is that Pushkin never fully belonged to anything; his creative thought was going in different directions at the same time, trying to realize to the full all the various valences of that or other idea, image or expression.

The debate surrounding The Prisoner of the Caucasus and its Epilogue reveals the complexity of Russian Romanticism in the early 1820s. This is particularly visible in the aesthetical approach of Pushkin who, with the publication of his “Southern Poems,” emerged as the leading Romantic poet in Russia. However, as Boris Gasparov notes, Pushkin never fully belonged to any movement, and his belief that a poet should have the creative independence to choose genre and style as he feels necessary was not fully understood either by critics or by supporters in his day. Even those closest to Pushkin did not quite comprehend his ideas or his need for creative independence. Viazemsky, as the leading proponent of the Romantic Movement, was more radical in his views than Pushkin and objected to the absence of “purely” Romantic convention in Epilogue of the Prisoner. This controversy surrounding the ending of The Prisoner of the Caucasus shows that within the Romantic camp there were still differing political and aesthetic views as to what constituted Romantic poetry.

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148 Gasparov, Poeticheskii iazyk Pushkina, И романтическая история, и одичайший эпилог – это литературные коды, и поэт за собой право их нарушать и смешивать. Со своей точки зрения, Вяземский прав: Пушкин отклоняется от логики развития сюжета, впадает в идеологический и политический «анахронизм». Но это замечание справедливо только при условии, если считать поэму и ее автора целиком включенными в политические и литературные идии, новейшие и наиболее прогрессивные на данный момент, — так как в них включен сам Вяземский. Проблема, однако, состоит в том, что Пушкин никогда и ничему не принадлежал полностью; его творческая мысль устремлялась одновременно по разным направлениям, стремясь исчерпать все многоразличные валентности той или иной идей, образа, выражения. Ibid., 299-300.
The publication of Pushkin’s next “Southern Poem,” The Fountain of Bakhchisarai in 1824, gave Viazemsky another excellent opportunity to propagate the principles of the Romantic camp. Prompted by a request from Pushkin, he wrote an introduction to the poem in the form of a dialogue: “A Conversation between the Publisher and a Classicist from the Vyborg side of Vasilievsky Island.” In the “Conversation,” which followed the ongoing dispute between the two warring literary camps, the Publisher represents the views of the Romantics, and the Classicist, of course, opposes him. In the introduction Viazemsky focuses on the vital question of, “what is narodnost’ in literature?”

We don’t yet have the Russian literary cut; maybe we won’t have it, because there isn’t one; at any rate the modern so-called Romantic poetry is as much akin to us as to that of Lomonosov or Kheraskov, which you’re trying to present as Classical. What is national in “Petriada” and “Rossiada” but the names? “Viazemsky acknowledges the fact that narodnost’ and ‘nationality’ are discursive constructs, susceptible to definition and change,” but they certainly are not defined by Russian-sounding names and Russian themes alone: Mikhail Khersakov’s historical Rossiada (Россиада) and Lomonosov’s Petriada (Петриада) are about Russian history, but they rigidly follow Classical rules, and Viazemsky argues, ‘narodnost’ is not found

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150 Мы еще не имеем русского покров в литературе; может быть, и не будет его, потому что нет; но во всяком случае поэзия новейшая, так называемая романтическая, не менее нам сродна, чем поэзия Ломоносова или Хераскова, которую вы силились выставить за классическую. Что есть народного в "Петриаде" и "Россиаде," кроме имени? Ibid., 153.

in rules but in feeling.” This argument is crucial in the context of Pushkin’s *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, a poem set in the exotic Oriental medieval Crimea under Tatar rule in the Khan’s harem. Viazemsky asserts the right of a Russian poet to choose any subject that inspires him:

> History mustn’t be gullible; poetry is the opposite. It often cherishes what the former rejects disdainfully, and our poet did well by assigning the Bakhchisarai legend to poetry and by enriching it with life-like imaginings; and better yet that he has used both with wonderful skill. The local color is preserved in the narration with all imaginable freshness and brightness. There is an oriental impression in the images, in the feelings themselves, in the verse.  

Unlike history, poetry should not be an exact science, so the poet has right to use legends rather than historical facts as an inspiration of his work. Viazemsky also praises Pushkin for enriching the legend with creative imagination, for conveying the authentic oriental character of Bakhchisarai. Thus, Viazemsky’s “Conversation” further demonstrates how Russians at the time still disagreed about what constituted the “narodny” character of their literature. Pushkin’s “Southern Poems” were hailed by his circle as prime examples of their own, Russian, Romantic poetry, but their content had very little to do with the tenets of those critics who argued that Russian poetry should be based on Russian history and folklore alone.

During its formative years in the first half of the 1820s, the Romantic Movement in Russia was represented by a group of individuals who were not organized in one

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153 История не должна быть легковерна; поэзия - напротив. Она часто дорожит тем, что первая отвергает с презрением, и наш поэт очень хорошо сделал, присвоив поэзии бахчисарайское предание и обогатив его правдоподобными вымыслами; а еще того лучше, что он воспользовался тем и другим с отличным искусством. Цвет местности сохранен в повествовании со всею возможною свежестью и яркостью. Есть отпечаток восточный в картинах, в самых чувствах, в слоге. Ibid., 154-155.
unified group or society. Some former members of Arzamas, like Viazemsky, gathered around Pushkin. This group known as “The Pushkin Pleiad” included representatives of the generation of Pushkin’s contemporaries such as Baratynsky, Anton Delvig, Nikolai Yazykov, and Petr Pletnev. The term “Pleiad” “does not, however, designate a group who wrote under Pushkin’s influence, but rather a group of poets who shared an “art-for-art’s-sake” philosophy and upper class origins.”\(^{154}\) Another branch of Russian Romanticism in the first half of the 1820s, was represented by Alexander Bestuzhev (Marlinsky) and Konrad Ryleev, future Decembrists, who between 1823-1825 published and co-edited the very popular almanac *Polar Star* (*Полярная звезда*). That literary almanac advocated, “the new, the modern, the so-called Romantic” Russian literature of contributors such as Pushkin, Zhukovsky, and Delvig, but its socio-political orientation represented the Decembrists’ views on the civic function of literature in society, and this set them apart from Pushkin’s circle of “literary aristocrats.”

Bestuzhev, became an important critic and commentator on Russian literature, expressing his ideas in the editorials which opened each of the three published issues. In the last one, “A Glance at Russian Literature in the Course of 1824 and the Beginning of 1825”\(^{155}\) he, like many other proponents of Romanticism, lamented that “We suckled a lack of *narodnost’* with our mothers’ milk and are awed only by what is alien.”\(^{156}\) Bestuzhev claims that such an upbringing results in the “characterlessness of our very

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\(^{154}\) Mersereau, “The Nineteenth Century: Romanticism: 1820-1840,” 143

\(^{155}\) A. A. Bestuzhev, “Vzgliad na russkuiu slovesnost’ v techenie 1824 i nachale 1825 goda,” *Poliarnaia zvesda na 1825* (S.-Peterburg, 1825), in *Russian Romantic Criticism*, 69-76.

\(^{156}\) Ibid. 69
learning,” which has led to the Russians being, “overcome by imitation,”\textsuperscript{157} of French and German models. He is also critical of, “The young man of our times [who] hastens from his carefree studies to a ball; and scarcely does he reach the true age of intellect and study when he enters the civil service, becomes a man of affairs – and thus all his intellectual and vital strength are killed in their full bloom.”\textsuperscript{158} This is a fairly accurate, if slightly oversimplified description of Eugene Onegin’s empty life, the first chapter of which had just been published by the poet in booklet form. As Leighton has observed, the editors of \textit{The Polar Star}, “were disappointed that Byron’s rebellious outsider was turned in the character of Onegin into a modish fop and dandy.”\textsuperscript{159} According to Bestuzhev, the “silence of seclusion” is what makes a poetic genius; citing the example of the “fathomless Byron,” he argues that true poets, “proudly cast off the golden fetters of fortune and despise all the enticements of high society.” This is indeed an image of a Romantic rebel (soon to become a courageous Decembrist who would turn his words into action); however, Bestuzhev’s words are also an indictment of the “literary aristocrats” of Pushkin’s circle, who like Pushkin himself, lived in and created for high society.\textsuperscript{160} At the dawn of the Decembrist revolt Bestuzhev demanded that Romantic literature should speak to all people, regardless of their social class, that it enlighten the reader in a civic spirit – these were the very qualities, which his own and Ryleev’s verses conveyed.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid. 72

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 71

\textsuperscript{159} Leighton, \textit{Russian Romantic Criticism}, 9n, 81.

\textsuperscript{160} Cf. Lauren. G. Leighton, \textit{The Esoteric Tradition in Russian Romantic Literature. Decembrism and Freemasonry} (University Park, PA: Pen State University Press, 1994), 118-119. Leighton suggests that in the early 1820s, “the relationship between Pushkin, Ryleev and Bestuzhev was shaped by the Decembrists’ sense that Pushkin’s frivolity did not accord with their civic sense and lofty mission of poetry.” Ibid.
Despite the fact that the Romantic Movement in Russia did not represent a well-organized and united front, its poetry and criticism, which attempted to define Romanticism, were met with opposition from the so-called “young archaists,” whose leading theoreticians and critics included Pavel Katenin and Wilhelm Kuchelbecker. The young archaists' literary position is not easy to define, as they seem to simultaneously advocate Classicism and Romanticism. However, as Boris Gasparov observed, from Katenin's and Kuchelbecker's perspective it was more a battle for “true” vs. “false” Classicism; such a distinction is justified by the “Synthesis of the aesthetical principles of Classicism and of the Baroque in Russian high poetry of the eighteenth century,” which “validated the juxtaposition of Russian and French Classicism as two different Classicisms, and which in the context of Romantic polemics were viewed as Classicism ‘true’ and ‘false.’”

Tynianov, in his analysis of Pushkin’s contemporaries points out that many of those who tried to classify Katenin’s poetic and theoretical works within the context of the literary battles between “Romanticism” and “Classicism” of the 1810s and 1820s, often arrived at contradictory conclusions: to some Katenin is a Classicist; to others a Neoclassicist; to others he is a “half-Romantic” (“полуромантик”). Such contradictions result from Katenin’s views on literature, which were based on Classical ideas of the division of high and low genres in poetry and the Classical form of tragedy (such as in his Andromakha, 1827). On the other hand, Katenin wrote ballads, such as

161 The distinction between “old archaists” i.e., the group gathered around Shishkov and his “Beseda” and the “young archaists” as a different, more complex movement was first made by Yurii Tynianov, Pushkin i ego sovremenniki, (Moskva: Izdatelstvo Nauka, 1969), 25.

162 Gasparov, Poeticheskii iazyk Pushkina, 67.

Olga (1816), an adaptation of Burger’s Leonore, to counter what he considered
Zhukovsky’s not truly Russian, not “narodnye” adaptations. Katenin was also one of the
Romantic proponents of narodnost’ in Russian literature and Tynianov observes that
Pushkin acknowledged him as, “one of the first apostles of Romanticism who introduced
into high poetry language and subjects from the Russian folk tradition.” But he was
also the first to reject Romanticism when it became popular with the general public. For
Pushkin and his contemporaries all “new” poetry was Romantic and all “old” was
“Classical.” That is why Tynianov proposes that in analyzing the literary battles of the
1810s and 1820s, the terms “young archaists” and “young Karamzinists” should be used
instead of “Romantics” and “Classicists.” Such an approach, Tynianov argues, allows us
to better understand why, for example, the Romantic Katenin opposed the works of a
Romantic like Bestuzhev: it was because Bestuzhev’s style was too close to that of
Karamzin and not Romantic enough.

Similarly, to Katenin, the, “literary position of Wilhelm Kuchelbecker was
idiosyncratic: he called himself a ‘Romantic in Classicism.’” He was a close friend of
Pushkin at the Lyceum at Tsarskoe Selo and they remained friends even though their
literary positions, ideas, and opinions in time diverged. In the first half of the 1820s,
Kuchelbecker’s ideas were the most radical within the young archaist’s camp. In 1824 he
published an article, “On the Trend of Our Poetry, Particularly Lyric, in the Past

164 “Pushkin, when summing up in 1833 on the results of Katenin’s literary activity, mentioned that “having
been one of the first apostles of Romanticism, and the first one to include a lower-class language and
objects in the sphere of a sublime poetry, was the first one to renounce the Romanticism and turn to
classical idols, when the reading public began to like the literary novelty.” (Emphasis in the original),
Ibid., 53.

165 Ibid.

Decade,” ("О направлении нашей поэзии, особенно лирической, в последнее десятилетие”), in which he presented his literary program and at the same time directly and harshly attacked Pushkin, Zhukovsky and others whom he considered representatives of the Elegiac Movement in Russian poetry:

With us everything is a dream or an apparition, everything seems and appears and is imagined, everything is as if, as though, somehow, someway. Wealth and diversity? Read any elegy of Zhukovsky, Pushkin, or Baratynsky, and you will know them all. (emphasis in the original).

To many contemporaries, Zhukovsky and Baratynsky were the heirs of Karamzin’s school, the poets who took credit for creating modern Russian verse, and Pushkin was considered their worthy descendant. For Kuchelbecker, however, both Zhukovsky and Pushkin were mere imitators of Western models. His dislike of the elegy as a poetic genre comes from a very strong conviction that the highest, the only true poetry, can be found in the ode. Everything else is just a false, boring, and repetitive imitation of true feeling and the real depiction of the world. His belief in the supremacy of the ode over the elegy is a result of the poet’s attitude: an elegiac writer, by definition, “speaks of himself, his own sorrows and joys,” while, “above all, the poet is selfless in the ode.” That selfless attitude allows him to “prophesize the truth and the judgment of Providence and to celebrate the majesty of his native land.” That is why the ode is, “carried away by exalted subjects, it transmits to the ages the deeds of heroes and the glory of the Fatherland.”

For Kuchelbecker the national, patriotic spirit of the ode, as opposed to the private and meditative mood of the elegy, is the essence of true Romantic poetry. The true, as

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168 Ibid., 57.

169 Ibid., 56.
opposed to the “false” poetry of the Elegiac Movement of Zhukovsky and Pushkin, “is nowadays passed off as Romantic.” 170 Like Somov, Viazemsky and Katenin, Kuchelbecker also calls on Russian poets to create a truly Russian poetry, based on the, “beliefs of our forefathers…chronicles, songs, and folk legends,” because these are, “the finest, purest, most reliable sources of our literature.” 171 This is, according to Kuchelbecker, what constitutes narodnost’ in Russian literature. Therefore, his views on the importance of national literature seem very similar to those of other Romantics, as is his rejection of the, “so-called Classical poetry of the modern Europeans,” i.e., the French, who, “make frequent sacrifices to the deformed idols which they call, ‘taste,’ ‘Aristotle,’ and ‘nature.’” 172 At the same time, Kuchelbecker’s strong conviction that the ode, the foremost Classical genre of poetry, is the only true lyrical genre of Romantic poetry, and the only depository of Russian national tradition, of narodnost’, seems contradictory, if not wrongheaded. However, Kuchelbecker’s seemingly contradictory ideas are explained by the belief that he was defending the “true” i.e., Russian Classicism against “false” French Classicist influence. That is why Kuchelbecker and other young archaists who considered themselves “true” Romantics, found Lomonosov and Derzhavin, rather then Goethe and Byron, to be the models they wanted to follow. Such a paradox could exist only in the Russian cultural tradition and such a paradox also validates Kuchelbecker’s oxymoronic self-definition as a “Romantic in Classicism.”

170 Ibid., 57.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid., 58.
In his article Kuchelbecker explains that he is, “a personal friend of Pushkin,” and that their friendship allows for an honest criticism of the poet, who should, “have no doubt that no one in Russia would be more delighted by his success then I.” Yet, the same friendship prompts Kuchelbecker to accuse Pushkin and his circle of literary snobbery: “From the Russian word, rich and mighty, they strain to extract a small, decorous, sickly, artistically emaciated language suitable for the very few, `un petit jargon de coterie.'” “For the very few,” in German, Für Wenige, is the title of Zhukovsky’s 1818 collection of poetry which symbolically reflects the hermetic character of Pushkin’s circle to which a select few were admitted. Kuchelbecker’s criticism also reflects the young archaists’ view that even though Pushkin and the members of his circle were generally considered innovators and proponents of the Romantic Movement, they were, in fact, still trapped in the salon-oriented mentality and style of Karamzin’s school. In view of the decisively Romantic character of Pushkin’s “Southern Poems,” which were very different in style and content from the light, refined, and witty verses of the Arzamas period, Kuchelbecker’s accusation is injudicious but from an institutional point of view it was a well-founded observation. Pushkin’s circle of the 1820s still operated on the principle of “poetic brotherhood,” and relied on the tradition of Arzamas, and the circle of intimate friends, which earned them the ironic title of “literary aristocrats.”

“References to that secret sphere, to which outsiders have no access, penetrated all the literary activity, style and actions of Pushkin and his circle in the 1820s.”

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174 Ibid., 58.
175 Gasparov, Poeticheskii iazyk Pushkina, 56-57.
the, “hermetic, cameral substrata of Arzamas determined many features of the innovators’ movement and made it different from West European Romanticism,” in which the lonely individual, a rebel against the accepted, and thus boring, order of the world, became the paradigm for the Romantic poet. If the literary identity of Byron as a Romantic poet was defined precisely by his separation from the rest of the world, by the tragic loneliness and uniqueness of his Romantic heroes, the identity of a Russian Romantic from the Pushkin circle was defined by the exact opposite: by close relations to others locked in a hermetic “poetic brotherhood.”

The literary debates in Russia in the 1810s and more intense journal battles in the 1820s reveal the often paradoxical complexity that determined the course of Russian Romantic literature. Some trends, including the struggle of the young proponents of Romanticism for a new literature, new style, new aesthetic, and for a national identity of literature, i.e., narodnost, were similar to the phenomena that occurred in other European countries. However, it appears that in the accelerated process of change from Classicism and Sentimentalism to Romanticism, in which the same author could be a representative of several, often opposing, movements, authors and critics simply did not have enough time to establish individual identities and consequently, to find their true voices. That is why some, like Pushkin and his circle, held on to their collective identity as defined by Arzamas traditions, while others such as Kuchelbecker and the young archaists considered themselves, “Romantics in Classicism.”

I will argue that in order to determine their own identity, the Russian Romantics needed the Other: a Romantic poet whom they could measure themselves against; who was close enough to their cultural, Slavic tradition so that they could understand him, yet,  

\[176\] Ibid., 57.
different enough so that they could define themselves against his identity. They found such an Other in the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz and were thus able to construe for themselves an image of the poet, albeit a very complex multifarious image, which reflected the very complex process of the Russian transition from Classicism to Romanticism discussed in this chapter.
III. From the Naïve vs. the Sentimental to the Romantic Dialogue: Mickiewicz as Pushkin’s Poetic Other

Adam Mickiewicz might just have been another great foreign Romantic poet whom the Russians translated, read, admired, and argued about from afar (much like Byron), had he not lived among them. Mickiewicz resided from November 9, 1824 until May 15, 1829 in the Russian Empire, albeit involuntarily. During that time he met and got to know many of Russia’s leading writers, intellectuals and critics, some of whom became his friends. They became acquainted with his poetry and with Mickiewicz himself. The physical and cultural closeness of a fellow Slav allowed the Russians to perceive Mickiewicz as the Other; a concept that helped to define their emerging self-identities at the time.

The role of Mickiewicz as the Other is perhaps nowhere more visible than in the works of Alexander Pushkin. Much has been written about the friendship of these two poets during Mickiewicz’s time in Russia, and about the subsequent rift between them following the failed November Uprising of 1830 and Mickiewicz’s publication of *Forefathers Eve (Dziady)* Part III with *Digressions (Ustęp)*--a very critical portrayal of Russia as an oppressive state ruled by a tyrant Tsar. Pushkin responded with *The Bronze Horsemnan (Медный всадник, 1833)*, and in his introduction professed his love for the capital of the Empire (“Люблю тебя, Петра творенье”), which Mickiewicz presented as a symbol of tyranny. The political controversy between the two poets also caused a personal rift: Mickiewicz closed the *Digressions* with the poem, “To My Russian Friends” (“Do przyjaciół Moskalí”) in which he mourned the loss of Ryleev and other
Decembrists, but condemned those, who, “forever sold their free soul for the favor of the Tsar” (“Duszę wolną na wieki sprzedał w łaskę cara”) and became his paid flatterers (“Może płatnym językiem tryumf jego sław”)]. These severe accusations were aimed primary at Pushkin who in 1831 had written the anti-Polish odes, “To the Slanderers of Russia” (“Клеветникам России”) and “The Anniversary of Borodino,” (“Бородинская Годовщина”) in which he condemned the Uprising and praised the Russian retaliation. Pushkin’s final response to Mickiewicz is the farewell poem, “He Lived Among Us…” (“Он между нами жил…”) in which he remembers their friendship, but also denounces Mickiewicz’s betrayal of his Russian friends: “our peaceful guest became our enemy,” (“Наш мирный гость нам стал врагом”).

The literary exchanges and personal relationship of the two poets are a well-researched and documented literary and historical fact that inspired a vast body of scholarly literature. As early as the last decade of the nineteenth century Józef Tretiak – professor of Polish and Russian literature at the Jagiellonian University – published several papers on Mickiewicz and Pushkin’s poetry, as well as Mickiewicz’s influence on the Russian poet, which were published in 1906 in a single volume *Mickiewicz and Pushkin. Studies and Essays (Mickiewicz i Puszkin. Studya i szkice).*

Probably the most significant contribution to the study of Mickiewicz-Pushkin was made by a distinguished Polish-American Slavist Waclaw Lednicki. During his professorate at the Jagiellonian University he published several books on Pushkin, including *Aleksander Puszkin. Studja* (1926), of which a revised French edition appeared as *Pouchkine et la Pologne*

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177 *Mickiewicz i Puszkin. Studya i szkice* (Warszawa: Księrgarnia E. Wende i Spółka, 1906.)

178 *Aleksander Puszkin. Studja*, 2 vols (Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1926.)
In these works Lednicki delves into the historical-political background of the Russian poet’s creative achievements as well as deals with the particular issues of Pushkin’s three anti-Polish poems, along with his friendship with Mickiewicz. His works on Pushkin and Mickiewicz appeared in English following his appointment as professor at Berkeley in 1945 including an important book on *Pushkin’s Bronze Horseman: The Story of a Masterpiece* (1955), and a monumental symposium: *Adam Mickiewicz in World Literature* (1956), which he edited and which includes his authoritative study “Adam Mickiewicz - Stay in Russia and His Friendship with Pushkin”.

There are other studies on Pushkin and Mickiewicz, which I refer to in this chapter, however, what has been overlooked so far is Mickiewicz’s place in Pushkin’s paradigm of the creative poetic personality. It is a model that Pushkin created to find his own literary identity, his own role and place during the tumultuous years of the 1820s, when Russian literature was making the transition from Sentimentalism and Neoclassicism to Romanticism. In Pushkin’s paradigm, Mickiewicz the poet appears not as an enemy or as an author of anti-Russian and anti-Pushkin poems, but rather, as the poetic Other--a fellow poet who represents an opposite type of creative poetic

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179 *Pouchkine et la Pologne* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1928.)

180 *Puszkin 1837-1937* (Kraków: Polskie Towarzystwa dla badań Europy Wschodniej i Bliskiego Wschodu, 1939.)


182 *Pushkin’s Bronze Horseman. The story of a Masterpiece* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978.)

183 *Adam Mickiewicz in the World Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956.)
personality. Pushkin defined the two personalities as “певец” (bard, singer) and “пророк” (prophet). He indicated that he considered himself the latter and identified Mickiewicz and several other poets from antiquity to modern times as the former, and then proceeded to engage in an intense dialogue with them as the Other(s) in his poetry. Even though this paradigm emerges in various Pushkin works written between 1820-1830, the categories of “bard” and “prophet” parallel Schiller’s categories of “naïve” and “sentimental” poets, set forth in his 1795 treatise, *On the Naive and Sentimental in Literature* (*Uber naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*) \(^{184}\).

In Schiller’s time the definitions of “naïve” and “sentimental” were free of negative connotation and quite different than what they are today. At the end of the eighteen century, the word “naïve” denoted a sense of noble simplicity unspoiled by the artificial influence of art, and “sentimental” meant “of feeling, pertaining to sentiment.” Schiller endowed “naïve” and “sentimental” with his own, unique system of values. The point of departure for his theory is man’s relation to nature: “as long as we were mere children of nature, we were happy and perfect,” but in the civilized, artificial world we are in a state of, “double and very unequal longing for nature, a longing for her happiness and a longing for her perfection” (italics in the original).\(^{185}\) According to Schiller, this is why, the phenomena of the naïve and the sentimental emerged:

> **“Poets everywhere are by definition the preservers of nature.** Where they can no longer be so completely and already experience in themselves the destructive influence of arbitrary and artificial forms or have even had to fight against them, then they appear as the witnesses and avengers of nature. **They therefore will either be nature or they will look for lost**


\(^{185}\) Ibid., 31.
nature. From this stem two quite different types of poetry, by which the whole territory is exhausted and measured. All poets who really are poets, according to the nature of the period in which they flourish or according to what accidental circumstances have an influence on their general education and on their passing mental state, will belong either to the naïve or the sentimental type.” 186 (Emphasis mine)

The naïve poet then “is nature,” i.e., he lives in perfect harmony with nature and he possesses a child-like simplicity. The naïve poet represents an intuitive process of creation: “he is the creation and the creation is he,” 187 therefore, he does not adhere to established principles and rules; rather, he follows his own “sudden notions and feelings.” For Schiller these “sudden notions are inspirations from a god” for, as he notes, “everything that healthy nature does is divine.” The divinely inspired naïve poet represents the ultimate poetic genius: “every genius in order to be one, must be naïve. It is his naïveté alone, which makes him a genius.” 188 Guided only by nature, or instinct, his “guardian angel,” he moves calmly and surely through all the snares of false taste. Modern art, the product of civilization and culture, separates the poet from nature but “genius justifies itself as such by triumphing over complex art by means of simplicity.” A genius “expresses his most lofty and most profound thoughts” with a naïve grace, “they are utterances of a god from the mouth of child.” 189

If the naïve poet lives in unity with nature, his opposite, the sentimental poet who is separated from nature by civilization, culture, and artificiality, has no choice but to seek such unity. He is painfully conscious of the division between himself and nature and

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186 Ibid., 35.
187 Ibid.
188 Ibid., 28-29.
189 Ibid., 30.
it is this longing for his lost unity with nature that makes him a sentimental poet. In the modern world of the sentimental poet, a perfect state of unity and wholeness with nature no longer exists; thus, it becomes an ideal. However, the sentimental poet, instead of weakly mourning this loss, strives to recreate that ideal oneness with nature in his work. It is a noble goal, but “the ideal is an infinite one which he never attains”; thus, the sentimental poet, “can never become perfect in his own way as the natural man is able to do in his.”

The natural correspondence between feeling and thinking, which in the naïve poet results in an intuitive, spontaneous creative process, is lacking in the sentimental poet and therefore is replaced by speculative contemplation. He reflects and uses reason, rather then creating by divinely inspired intuition. The sentimental poet is an idealist and bases his ideas on the ideal, on what he imagines the world should be. The fact that the sentimental poet strives to achieve the unattainable ideal in his work means that he will never truly be satisfied with himself.

Schiller applied these definitions of naïve and sentimental to every era of poetry from Antiquity to his own times. He found the primary example of the naïve poet in Ancient Greece, because the Greeks “lived in true intimacy with nature, their way of life, feeling and their customs lay close to simple, free nature.” Not surprisingly then, Homer is the naïve poet par excellence. However, Schiller also lists several modern poets whom he considers naïve, including Shakespeare, Molière, and most important from his own perspective, Goethe, whom he very much admired but with whom he also had a

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190 Ibid.
191 Ibid., 33.
strained relationship at times. Schiller defines himself as Goethe’s opposite, i.e., as a Sentimental poet. He singles out the Roman poet Horace, “a poet of a civilized and corrupt era,” as the “founder of the type of sentimental poetry” and the “unsurpassed model for it.”

Schiller’s treatise *On the Naive and Sentimental in Literature* belongs to the pre-Romantic era. Thus it lacks the crucial Romantic component—the *dialogue* between the Sentimental poet and his opposite—a concept later to be developed by Friedrich Schlegel. There is no firm evidence that Pushkin ever read Schiller’s treatise but characteristics of his “певец” (bard) and “пророк” (prophet) conceived almost thirty years later closely resemble Schiller’s model: “bard” corresponds to “ naïve,” “prophet” to “sentimental.” However, Pushkin did not establish his paradigm merely to identify the two poets; on the contrary, as a poet-prophet he encounters and recognizes his Other who mirrors his insufficiencies (which are the signs of the modern poet), thus allowing him to understand and establish his own identity.

The concept of dual creative personalities occurred to Pushkin during his exile to the South of Russia ordered by Tsar, Alexander I. During his exile to Kishinev in Bessarabia (1820-1823) Pushkin envisioned himself as following in the footsteps of Ovid, who was exiled to exactly the same place by Caesar Augustus in 8 AD. This historical coincidence became a source of poetic inspiration as, “[this] symbolic meeting with Ovid’s shadow ‘in the Moldavian desert’ became one of the central themes of Pushkin’s poetry as well as his correspondence of that time.” In the long poem *To Ovid*

\[\text{192 Ibid., 35.}\]

\[\text{193 Gasparov, Poeticheskii iazyk Pushkina, 211.}\]
(К Овидию) Pushkin describes how he “followed Ovid with his heart” (“Я сердцем следовал, Овидий, за тобою!”) into “the dark desert, the imprisonment of the poet” (“Пустыню мрачную, поэта заточенье”). The predicament of a poet exiled to a faraway place prompts a certain empathy on Pushkin’s part; it does not mean, however, that he and Ovid are the same. On the contrary—the encounter in the desert highlights the differences between them: Ovid is a, “splendid citizen of golden Italy” (“Златой Италии роскошный гражданин”) who is forced to live alone and forgotten in the land of barbarians (“В отчизне варваров безвестен и один”) and whose dreary lamentations make his place of exile famous (“Твой безотрадный плач места сии прославил”).

Pushkin’s image of himself is the opposite of his image of Ovid:

Суровый славянин, я слез не проливал,
Но понимаю их; изгнанник самовольный,
И светом, и собой, и жизнью недовольный,
С душой задумчивой…

[A stern Slav, I did not shed tears/But I understand them; a self-willed exile/ Dissatisfied with the world/ with myself and life/ With a pensive soul…]

He is a stern Slav who does not cry over his fate: a man with a despondent soul, dissatisfied with the world, himself, and life in general. The contrast between the two poets is made even stronger in Gypsies (Цыганы), begun in Kishinev and completed in 1824. In this poem, an old Gypsy man tells of a legend that exists in his southern tribe, evoking Ovid’s image:

Полудня житель к нам в изгнанье.
(Я прежде знал, но позабыл
Его мудреное прозванье.)
Он был уже летами стар,

194 All of the quotations from Pushkin’s works are from A. S. Pushkin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiaty tomarkh, 4th ed. (Leningrad: Izatel’stvo “Nauka,” 1978). The translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.
The difference between the stern young poet (Pushkin) and the old, heartbroken, weak and meek Ovid is highlighted by the focus on different creative moods. In Pushkin’s poetic language “певец” (singer, bard) signifies a poet who possesses the natural, divine gift of poetry, and who sings his verses spontaneously and effortlessly like Ovid or Homer. This characteristic of Ovid’s creative personality, particularly the ease with which he creates his verses (he “had a marvelous gift for songs” [“Имел он песен дивный дар”]), as well as child-like simplicity (he was “timid like a children” [“робок как дети”]), closely resembles that of Schiller’s model of a “naïve” poet. In Pushkin’s paradigm the figure of the ancient/old poet-bard serves as a mirror in which he, the modern/young poet sees his own creative personality: his work comes not from a spontaneous inspiration, but as a consequence of an understanding that results from an intellectual reflection about life, himself and the world; like Schiller’s “sentimental” poet, he is inhibited, full of contradictions and driven to create an ideal perfection that he never achieves. As Pushkin explains in “To Ovid:” “With the world, with myself, with life dissatisfied/ with a soul given to reflection” (“И светом, и собой, и жизнью недовольный/ С душой задумчивой”). Pushkin places himself in the same category as

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Byron, whom he described as a, “stern martyr, who suffered, loved and was damned,” and the new generation of Romantic poets.

The encounter motif between the younger/modern poet with his poetic Other - the ancient/older poet-bard that reappears in several of Pushkin’s poems from the 1820’s and 1830’s (for example in “Andre Chenier” [“Андрей Шенье,” 1825], “On Translation of The Iliad” [“На перевод Илиады,” 1830], “To Gnedich” [“Гнедичу,” 1832]) enables Pushkin to define his evolving poetic identity in relation to old and modern literary models. Most importantly, “the poetic myth of a meeting with the shadow of the older poet, played a crucial role in how Pushkin formulated his image of the poet-prophet” in famous poems such as “The Prophet” (“Пророк,” 1826) or “The Poet” (“Поэт,” 1827). In “The Prophet,” drawn from The Old Testament Isaiah, 6:1-10, a poet “tormented by a spiritual thirst” (“духовной жаждою томим”) encounters in “a gloomy desert” (“в пустыне мрачной”) seraphim, God’s messenger, who transforms him into a prophet, by touching his eyes and ears with his “fingers light as a dream”, (“Пе́рстами легкими как сон”) and then replacing his tongue and heart with new organs. Significantly, “‘light fingers’ are an attribute typical of an ancient poet-bard (particularly

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196 In a poem “Who knows that land” (“Кто знает край,”1828):
И Байрон, мученик суровый,
Страдал, любил и проклинал.

197 For a detailed analysis of the theme of the encounter between the young/modern poet and his ancient/old predecessor and its significance in the formation of Pushkin’s poetic self-consciousness see Gasparov, Poeticeskii iazyk Pushkina, 218-230.

198 Ibid., 230.

199 Like the poem “To Ovid” written during Pushkin’s exile to Bessarabia, “The Prophet” also has a strong biographical subtext as it was written during poet’s exile to his Mikhailovskoe estate.
Homer) who performs his verses on a cithara; similarly, in “The Poet,” in which Pushkin “projects the role of a poet-prophet on to ancient mythology,” “Apollo, who calls upon his priest-poet, performs two roles simultaneously: that of a bearer of ‘god’s word’ (‘божественный глагол’) and of a bard-citharist.”

Those ancient poet-bards characteristic of seraphim and Apollo, as well as the fact that the poet-prophet encounters both of them in a desert wilderness (in “The Prophet” in a “gloomy desert,” in “The Poet” Apollo’s call prompts the poet to run to “the shores of desert-like empty waves” and into the “wide-humming forests” [“На берега пустынных волн/В широкошумные дубровы”]), evoke Pushkin’s earlier encounter with Ovid’s shadow in the Moldavian desert, and reveal how the poet developed the “bard vs. prophet” paradigm. Despite this dramatic transformation, the poet-prophet’s creative personality retained the character of a modern Romantic poet, particularly visible in “The Poet”: still “inhibited and stern” (“дикий и суровый”), “full of confusion” (“смятенья полн”) and melancholy (“тоскует он”). Pushkin’s self-image of the poet-prophet stands in opposition to that of his poetic Other - the old, weak and humble, divinely inspired poet-bard who effortlessly creates his song. To be sure, the creation of the poet-prophet is divinely inspired by definition, but the difference between their poetic gifts, the different natures of their inspiration, exemplifies the opposite creative moods of “bard” and “prophet” in Pushkin’s paradigm. The divine poetic gift bestowed on the poet-bard is harmonious and natural like nature itself: in The Gypsies Ovid’s “voice sounds like a ripple of water” (“голос шуму вод подобный”) and he effortlessly sings his verses “charming people with his stories”

200 Gasparov, 246.

201 Ibid., 244.

202 Ibid., 246.
(“Людей рассказами пленяют”). In contrast, there is nothing harmonious and natural in the way seraphim transforms poet into prophet: his tongue is torn out and replaced with the wise serpent’s fang; then the seraphim cuts open his breast, takes out his throbbing heart and puts in a burning coal. This torturous experience leaves the poet nearly dead - he lies like a corpse in the desert. As Stephanie Sandler observed, “in ‘The Prophet’ Pushkin explores the violence done to one who takes on the burdens of creative work.”

Those are emotional, psychological and intellectual burdens of the Romantic poet-prophet who hears God’s command to go forth and “burn human hearts with the Word” (“Глаголем жги сердца людей”). This kind of divine inspiration does not change the self-reflective and stern creative personality of a poet-prophet into that of a spontaneous and effortless one of a divinely inspired poet-bard, rather – it seems to intensify the struggle.

Since the divinely gifted bard is represented by poets of the past such as Ovid and Homer, one might suppose that in Pushkin’s poetic paradigm, Adam Mickiewicz, a contemporary and fellow Romantic poet, would be placed in the category of a stern and pensive poet-prophet. However, the image of Mickiewicz presented in Pushkin’s poem “He Lived Among Us…” (“Он между нами жил…” 1834) dedicated to the Polish poet, proves otherwise:

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Он между нами жил
Средь племени ему чужого; злобы
В душе своей к нам не питал, и мы
Его любили. Мирный, благосклонный,
Он посещал беседы наши. С ним
Делились мы и чистыми мечтами
И песнями (он вдохновен был свыше
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He lived among us/Amidst a tribe foreign to him; in his soul/he did not have anger against us, and we/Loved him. Peaceful, benevolent./He attended our gatherings./With him/ we shared our pure dreams/ And songs (he was inspired from above/ And looked at life from on high.).]

The image of Mickiewicz strikingly resembles that of Ovid in *The Gypsies:* they both live in exile in foreign lands (М: "Он между нами жил"/ Средь племени ему чужого;" O: “сослан был/ Полудня житель к нам в изгнанье”) and in both cases the narrator presents the exiled poet as a stranger (foreigner) in the local community (М: “Он между нами жил”/O: “сослан…к нам”). Nevertheless, both were loved in those places (М: “мы/ Его любили;” O: “И полюбили все его”) for their humble, peaceful characters (М: “Мирный, благосклонный;” O: “душой незлобной”). Most importantly both poets shared the same gift of poetry: Ovid, as the divinely inspired poet-bard, had the “marvelous gift of song” (“песен дивный дар”). Mickiewicz “was inspired from above” (“он вдохновен был свыше”) and like poet-bard sung his verses: in “Fragments from Onegin’s Journey” (“Отрывки из путешествия Онегина”) Pushkin writes, “then Onegin visits Tavrida/. . .There inspired Mickiewicz sung” (“Онегин посещает потом Тавриду/. . . Там пел Мицкевич вдохновенный”). By placing Mickiewicz in Tavrida (ancient Greek name of Crimea) Pushkin points out to yet another connection between the Polish poet, Ovid and himself. Mickiewicz spent the first months of his “Russian exile” in 1825, in the south, mostly in Odessa but he also traveled to the Crimean peninsula. This biographical fact of Mickiewicz’s life was well known in Russia thanks to the *Crimean Sonnets* published in 1826 in Petersburg.}

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204 A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiatii tomakh,* vol. 2, 388. This is the first part of the poem where Pushkin remembers time when Mickiewicz lived in Russia; the second part refers to the political controversy and personal rift between the two poets, which I do not discuss.
The striking similarities between images of Mickiewicz and Ovid discussed above, particularly the description of both poets as inspired bards who sing his verses spontaneously, suggest that Pushkin, as the Romantic poet-prophet, deliberately created the image of the Polish poet as his opposite. To find Mickiewicz categorized as an ancient poet-bard in Pushkin’s creative paradigm inevitably prompts the question: why? For it would at first seem, that there were more similarities between Mickiewicz and Pushkin (besides the obvious difference of their nationalities), than between the Polish poet and Ovid. They were almost the same age: Mickiewicz was born on 24 December 1798, Pushkin on 6 June 1799. They knew each other personally from many literary and social gatherings, at which they were both admired. The young, good-looking, talented and brilliant Polish poet hardly seems to correspond to an Ovid-like, old, meek and humble poet-exile. Moreover, many Russians compared Mickiewicz the Romantic poet to Byron, and considered him equal if not greater than the English writer of verse. Yet, in his poetic paradigm Pushkin presents Byron as a poet-prophet like himself, while Mickiewicz represents the opposite creative personality.

The first, most natural reason for Pushkin’s perception of Mickiewicz as an inspired poet-bard must have been Mickiewicz’s unique, and many believed divine gift of improvisation, a talent Pushkin himself did not possess. Mickiewicz was able to instantly, create beautiful and powerful poetic narratives, often on a subject suggested by one of his listeners, with performances that at once captivated and moved his audiences. He liked to improvise with a musical accompaniment, thus the image of Mickiewicz who, in a moment of inspiration, effortlessly, literally sings his verses, parallels Schiller’s intuitive, spontaneous, “naïve” model, and can certainly be seen as an embodiment of the divinely
inspired poet-bard. However, in the Romantic era the phenomena of poetic improvisation in general, and in particular as a part of Mickiewicz’s poetic personality in Pushkin’s “bard vs. prophet” paradigm, in itself contained two contradictory approaches to creating poetry, which consequently require further clarification.

The figure of the poet-improviser who can instantly create verses was a phenomenon well known in nineteenth century Europe. Wiktor Weintraub, in his study of the prophetic qualities of Mickiewicz’s poetry,\textsuperscript{205} points out the difference between a poet-improviser and a true poet whose improvisations, i.e., moments of sudden poetic inspiration, result in written verse. A poet-improviser was more of a performer than a poet, and he entertained large audiences in theaters and salons by composing rhythms and rhymes on any given subject (frequently proposed by spectators) on demand, in his head rather than on paper. A poet-improviser rarely produced work of serious poetic value, thus, “such a spectacle existed only on the fringes of literature.”\textsuperscript{206} For the Romantics, sudden, spontaneous creative outbursts were the sign of true inspiration, but contrary to the public display of the talent of a poet-improviser, real poets experienced their creative improvisations only in solitude. Weintraub cites, among many examples, Alphonse de Lamartine’s, “Improvisée à la Grande-Chartreuse” from his \textit{Méditations poétiques} (1820). It is a meditation on God’s attitude towards man and the very title “Improvisation on Grande-Chartreuse” suggests how the poem came to be created. In his commentary, Lamartine explains how, during a hiking trip to the famous monastery, the overwhelming beauty of nature suddenly inspired him to write down, right on the spot, the poem: “C’est


\footnotetext[206]{Ibid., 81-82.}
Significantly, for Lamartine, one of the first French Romantic poets, improvisation is synonymous with a sudden state of ultimate poetic inspiration. Wordsworth related a similar experience in *The Prelude* (1805) when, “to the open field I told/ A prophecy: poetic numbers came/Spontaneously to close in priestly robe/ A renovated spirit singled out.” Wordsworth calls his poetic outburst a “prophecy” which comes forth spontaneously in poetic meters: the “priestly robe” of poetry underlines the spiritual, religious character of the experience. For both Lamartine and Wordsworth the moment of poetic inspiration seems to be divinely inspired; it is a state of grace that comes unexpectedly, never on demand. There are no spectators, the poet is alone, in nature, not in a salon or theatre. For a Romantic poet, spontaneous inspiration was a sacred experience, irreconcilable with the profane show of a poet-improviser who sold his dubious talent for money.

Pushkin addressed that very contradiction, between the nature of the divinely inspired improvisation of a Romantic poet who creates poetry in solitude and the pedestrian, profitable performance of a poet-improviser as in *Egyptian Nights* (*Египетские ночи*); an unfinished novella, written around 1835 and published posthumously in 1837. In this text the Romantic poet is a young nobleman, Charsky, who at times of poetic inspiration, withdraws from Petersburg’s *beau monde* and writes poetry in the solitary confines of his study. Pushkin juxtaposes the figure of the poet Charsky with that of an Italian improviser who comes to Petersburg with hopes of earning some money for his talent. However, Pushkin does not simply set up the two characters in

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opposition to each other, rather the Italian improviser embodies the two irreconcilable opposites: he is at once a pathetic performer who creates verses on demand whilst simultaneously a great poet, not unlike Mickiewicz, capable of wonderful poetry. The Italian improviser thus could seriously undermine the argument in which Pushkin, the poet-prophet, perceived the Polish poet as his poetic Other, because of his divinely inspired improvisation; especially that a scholar such as Waclaw Lednicki believed that Pushkin’s literary character was in fact inspired by Mickiewicz.208

In *Egyptian Nights* the image of Mickiewicz as a humble, peaceful, inspired poet-bard loved by all is offset by the Italian improviser’s loathsome, petty character and his shabby appearance: he looks more like a robber or a charlatan,209 than a great poet. Moreover, he is clearly uneducated (he does not know what aspect of Cleopatra story he should improvise on, and speaks horrible French), and what is even worse, he exhibits an unrestrained greed for money. In his hands, poetry becomes an object of trade like anything else.210 If indeed Pushkin had wanted to undermine Mickiewicz’s image as a poet, *Egyptian Nights* would have been a malicious, ill-founded, personal attack. However, Weintraub convincingly argues that Pushkin never lost his admiration for Mickiewicz’s talent and work; rather the Italian improviser is the result of the literary/political polemics between the two poets, which followed the publication of


209 “If you have met this man in the woods, you would have taken him for a robber; in society, for a political conspirator; and in an anteroom, for a charlatan peddling elixirs and arsenic.” Translated by Paul Debreczeny, *Alexander Pushkin. Complete Prose Fiction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983), 251.

210 “The occasion revealed so much unbridled greed in the Italian, such a simplehearted love for profit, that Charsky became disgusted with him…” Ibid, 255.
Pushkin’s *Bronze Horseman* and his anti-Polish odes, and Mickiewicz’s anti-Russian

*Forefather’s Eve* Part III:

The volume [*Forefathers* Part III] includes a scene in which a poet in an improvisational trance demands from God the right to “reign over souls”. Visible herein was the author’s support for the prophetic aspirations of the improviser. The scene of the Great Improvisation triggered the memory of Mickiewicz's improvisational appearances in Saint Petersburg and their specific atmosphere. This is also the scene that provoked Pushkin's polemic: the improviser, even when the product of his improvisation is great poetry, does not have to be someone spiritually superior, his gift for improvisation is not a sign of God's anointment. *Egyptian Nights* is not a personal attack on Mickiewicz; it questions the conviction... about the prophetic character of the gift of improvisation, as expressed in the third part of *Forefathers.*

In *Forefathers Eve* Part III, Konrad, an imprisoned poet (an autobiographical reference to Mickiewicz’s imprisonment in Vilnius in 1823-1824) challenges God in the monologue titled “Great Improvisation.” It is truly a great improvisation because, in what appears to be a spiritual/religious ecstasy, Konrad reveals his great poetic powers, which are synonymous with his spiritual supremacy. In magnificent verse, he challenges a silent God who is indifferent to human suffering, while he, Konrad, willingly suffers for millions of men. Konrad is convinced that he can save his own nation and the whole of humanity but first he needs God’s power over human souls. Therefore, he demands that God transfer to him “rząd dusz”—dominion over the souls of men. The “Great Improvisation” then takes the status of the poet-improviser to a new level: Konrad’s poetic powers make him the Supreme Being, equal to God himself.

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As Weintraub notes, Pushkin’s Italian improviser is a response to the character of the Konrad-improviser and his alleged spiritual supremacy over the rest of mankind. The Italian improviser’s performance also has spiritual dimensions: just before he begins his improvisation he feels a closeness of God (“Но уже импровизатор чувствовал приближение бога…”), but that does not make him a better human being. On the contrary, he is like everyone else, if not worse. In *Egyptian Nights*, Pushkin observes that a great improviser can be a divinely inspired poet, but he certainly cannot be greater than God, and thus, directs his criticism at the aesthetic stance embodied in Mickiewicz’s literary character rather than towards the poet himself. Pushkin’s polemic with “the prophetic character of Konrad’s gift of improvisation”\(^{212}\) in the *Egyptian Nights* does not therefore contradict the fact that Mickiewicz, as a great improviser was also a great poet.

Mickiewicz’s unique position, that of a poet able to reconcile his image of a Romantic poet with the role of an improviser who performs poetry in the salons of the Russian elite, was observed by his friend and admirer Prince Viazemsky:

Mickiewicz was not only a great poet, but also a great improviser. Although it seems that these two talents must be closely related, they in fact aren’t. Oral improvised poetry, and poetry that’s written and thought-through are not the same thing. He was an exception of that rule. The Polish language doesn’t have the characteristics of Italian, it isn’t as melodious or picturesque; his improvisations were all the more so a new victory, victory over the hardness and intractability of such a task. His improvised verse flowed out freely and swiftly from his lips as a sonorous and brilliant stream. His improvisations expressed thoughts, feelings,

\(^{212}\) Ibid.
images and highly poetical expressions. One would think that he was
inspiringly reciting poetry he had written beforehand from memory.213

Viazemsky agrees that an “improvised, oral poetry” and “written, thought-through
poetry” are not the same and thus, the talent of a poet and the talent of an improviser are
two different things. Even though he considers Mickiewicz “an exception to this rule,”
i.e., the embodiment of both, poet and improviser, Viazemsky’s distinction between two
kinds of poetic talent recalls the opposites of “bard vs. prophet” in Pushkin’s paradigm.
An ancient bard sings his verses, thus, his is by definition an “oral poetry,” the product of
a spontaneous inspiration; moreover, Viazemsky’s description of Mickiewicz’s
improvised poem, which “freely, swiftly broke out of his lips in a sonorous and brilliant
stream” parallels the harmonious sound of Ovid’s voice as the “ripple of water,” the
attribute of an ancient bard. Similarly, Viazemsky’s category of “written, though-through”
(“обдуманная”) poetry, equates with the creation of a poet-prophet, the result of a more
strenuous, reflective intellectual process. The Book of Isaiah, as a subtext of Pushkin’s
poem “The Prophet”, also suggests that a poet-prophet has to write down words given to
him by God, thus he creates a “written poetry.”

Viazemsky’s distinction between “improvised” and “thought-through” poetry
implies that the quality of the latter, the result of a laborious writing process, is superior
to that of the former, an instantly created improvisation. However, the quality of

213 Viazemsky, “Mitskevich o Pushkine,” (1873), in vol. 2, Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, (S.Petersburg,
1882), 328. “Мицкевич был не только великий поэт, но и великий импровизатор. Хотя эти два
dарования должны, по-видимому, быть в близком родстве, но на деле это не так.
Импровизированная, устная поэзия и поэзия письменная и обдуманная не одно и тоже. Он был
исключением из этого правила. Польский язык не имеет свойств, певучести, живописности
итальянского; тем более импровизация его была новая победа, победа над трудностью и
неподатливостью подобной задачи. Импровизированный стих его, свободно и стремительно,
вырывался из уст его звучным и блестящим потоком. В импровизации его были мысли, чувство,
картины и в высшей степени поэтические выражения. Можно было думать, что он вдохновенно
читает наизусть поэму, им уже написанную.”
Mickiewicz’s improvised poetry was so impressive that Viazemsky felt the need to prove its authenticity. Viazemsky describes how he witnessed the poet, “draw lots from folded pieces of paper, on which the subjects of the improvisation were written down,”214 and then how after a moment of concentration he began to improvise on the given theme. Drawing a subject at random was a typical device used by professional improvisers-performers (Pushkin also depicted this practice in *Egyptian Nights*) but in Mickiewicz’s case the question of the originality/authenticity of his improvisation was particularly important. Viazemsky writes that had they not witnessed Mickiewicz drawing a lot, “one could think that he was inspiringly reciting poetry from memory that he had written beforehand.” Indeed Viazemsky’s opinion that Mickiewicz was a great improviser and a great poet, i.e., that the quality of his improvised and written poetry was equally good, is well founded. The same equation allows Pushkin as poet-prophet to perceive Mickiewicz as his poetic Other, as a poet bard whose poetry is so different, yet equal to his own.

Viazemsky’s assessment of Mickiewicz’s improvisations is particularly valuable because he knew the Polish language, and translated some of Mickiewicz’s poetry, therefore was able to appreciate the poet’s triumph “over the hardness and intractability” of his native language. The critic observes that the less melodic Polish language (with a stress fixed on the penultimate syllable) is much more difficult for poetical improvisation than Italian, yet Mickiewicz improvised poems flow freely, swiftly. The challenge was even greater when Mickiewicz improvised for his Russian friends, who did not know the

214 *Ibid.* From the folded pieces of paper, on which the subjects for improvisation were proposed, a lot was drawn, [with a subject] which at the time was both poetical and contemporary: the arrival, through the Black Sea to the shores of Odessa, of the body of the Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople who was killed by a Turkish mob. (Из свёрнутых бумажек, на коих записаны были предлагаемые задачи, жребий пал на темы, в то время и поэтическую и современную: приплытие Чёрным морем к одесскому берегу тела Константинопольского православного патриарха, убитого турецкой чернью.)
Polish language, in French. In a letter to his wife of May 2, 1828, Viazemsky described one such occasion, a dinner hosted by Pushkin, which took place on April 30, 1828, in Petersburg:

The other day we spent the evening and night at Pushkin’s with Zhukovsky, Krylov, Mickiewicz, Pletnev and Nikolai Mukhanov. Mickiewicz was improvising in French prose and amazed us, of course, not by the way he was composing the phrases, but by the power, richness and poetry of his thoughts. Incidentally, he was comparing his thoughts and feelings that he had to express [when improvising] in a language that was foreign to him “avec un enfant mort dans le sein de sa mère, avec de matériaux enflammés qui brûlent sous terre, sans avoir de volcan pur leur éruption.” This improvisation produces wonderfully wonderful impressions. He was thrilled himself, as we all were listening to him trembling and tearful.

When improvising French prose Mickiewicz followed the French tradition of rendering foreign poetry in a precise and elegant prose translation. Thus, Mickiewicz’s French improvisations posing as his “translations” (French-style) of imagined improvisations in his native tongue, was a detail, which the Russian audience who read foreign literature, primarily in French translation, could certainly appreciate. Especially since Mickiewicz’s poetic powers, even in French prose, were still very impressive: the composition of his French phrases was not perfect but the power of poet’s imagination, the richness and

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215 P. A. Viazemsky to V. F. Viazemskaya, Petersburg, 30 April 1828, in D. I. Ivinsky, Pushkin i Mitskievich. Istoriia literaturnykh otnoshenii (Moskva: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2003), 177. Третьего дня провели мы вечер и ночь у Пушкина с Жуковским, Крыловым, Хомяковым, Мицкевичем, Плетневым и Николаем Мухановым. Мицкевич импровизировал на французской прозе и поразил нас, разумеется, не складом фраз своих, но силою, богатством и поэзией своих мыслей. Между прочим он сравнивал мысли и чувства свои, которые нужно выражать ему на чужим языке, “avec un enfant mort dans le sein de sa mère, avec de matériaux enflammés qui brûlent sous terre, sans avoir de volcan pour leur éruption.” Удивительное действо производит эта импровизация. Сам он был весь растерзан, и все мы слышали с трепетом и слезами.

216 Due to the rigid Neoclassical poetic rules that still governed French poetry in the first half of the nineteenth century (Alexandrine line with rhyming couplets of alternating masculine and feminine rhymes, enjambment) verse translation of foreign poetry did not make sense. Even Byron’s works, which were very popular in France were published in prose translation until 1874. See Joanne Wilkes, “‘Infernal and Magnetism’: Byron and Nineteenth-Century French Readers,” in the Reception of Byron in Europe, ed. Richard Cardwell, (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2005), 16.
beauty of his thoughts brought his audience to “trembling and tears,” and the poet himself to a state of agitation. Mickiewicz explained to Viazemsky how he felt during the moment of improvisation in French: he compared his emotions to, “a child dead in his mother’s womb, to burning lava under the surface of the earth without a volcano that would allow it to explode.” Viazemsky wrote down Mickiewicz’s words a mere two days after their conversation so there is a good probability that he relates them faithfully. They convey the intensity of the poet’s emotion—the creative tension caused by an inability to fully express all the thoughts and feelings that came to him in the moment of inspiration. This tension was perceptible to his listeners and made a great impression on them. In his article, “Mickiewicz on Pushkin” quoted above, Viazemsky remembered another occasion on which Mickiewicz’s improvisation, also in French prose, made a deep impression on the audience: “Zhukovsky and Pushkin, deeply shaken by such a fiery eruption of poetry, were ecstatic.” Another of Mickiewicz’s Russian friends, the poet Evgeny Baratynsky, displayed similar admiration after hearing a French improvisation at the farewell dinner given in the Polish poet’s honor in Moscow at the beginning of April 1828. Baratynsky went down on his knees and exclaimed: “Ah, mon Dieu, pourquoi n’est-il pas Russe!” (Oh God, why he is not Russian!) The scene is an interesting reversal of Mickiewicz’s image in Baratynsky’s poem “Не подражай…” in which he presents the Polish poet on his knees in front of Byron and calls on him, “to get up and remember you are also a god!” In the context of the improvisations, Baratynsky’s reaction highlights his admiration for Mickiewicz—the god-like poet. (I will analyze Baratynsky’s poem in


Certainly, the Russians had never seen such a phenomenon before. There is no evidence that any of the Russian poets of the time, including Pushkin, could improvise as Mickiewicz did.

Not surprisingly then, Mickiewicz’s unique talent for improvisation led Pushkin to view him as an ultimate poet-bard. The instant, spontaneous creative mode of Mickiewicz’s improvisation reflects the opposite creative process of the poet-prophet. The sight of Pushkin’s manuscripts with endless crossings and corrections, illuminates the creative burdens of this poet-prophet. As such, Pushkin could not help but admire Mickiewicz’s unique gift, which he saw as a sign of grace, a form of divine inspiration. Certainly, the image of Mickiewicz who spontaneously creates his improvisations before his Russian audience can be interpreted as an embodiment of the poet-bard of Pushkin’s paradigm.

Mickiewicz’s improvisations are the most obvious reason, but not the sole basis for Pushkin’s perception of the Polish poet as his poetic Other. The model of “bard vs. prophet” based on two opposite creative personalities has its foundation in Pushkin’s rather idiosyncratic poetic geography, and in particular, in the relationship between North and South in his poetic paradigm. In “To Ovid” Pushkin presents himself as the “stern, severe Slav” from the cold and dark North, while Ovid is a weak, heart-broken inhabitant of the warm South, i.e., from, “golden Italy.” Clearly, the place of origin and its climate determines the creative personalities of the two poets: the “bard” is from the South and the “prophet” from the North. In that geographical/poetic axis Mickiewicz, as a native of Poland/Lithuania, should belong to the category of the “severe Slav” from the North, yet
Pushkin presents him as a bard of the South: “певец Тавриды,” the bard of the Crimea, that is, as his poetic Other.

In “To Ovid,” Pushkin follows in the footsteps of Ovid in the south of Bessarabia where, according to tradition, the ancient poet spent his exile. In Pushkin’s time Bessarabia (present day Moldova) was a newly acquired district at the southern border of the Russian Empire, but during Ovid’s exile (8AD-17AD) the land called “Limes Scythicus,” the furthest outpost at the northeastern part of the Roman Empire, was the end of the known world. In “To Ovid” these two historical/cultural perspectives are juxtaposed as Pushkin, a poet exiled from the northern cities of Moscow and Petersburg, views Bessarabia as the place of exile of the ancient poet from “golden Italy.”

Imagining Ovid’s life during his exile, Pushkin describes the gloomy deserts of Bessarabia:

Ты живо впечатлел в моем воображенье
Пустыню мрачную, поэта заточенье,
Туманный свод небес, обычные снега
И краткой теплотой согретые луга.

…
Там нивы без теней, холмы без винограда;
Рожденные в снегах для ужасов войны,
Там хладной Скифии свирепые сыны,
За Истром утаясь, добычи ожидают
И селам каждый миг набегом угрожают.
Преграды нет для них: в волнах они плывут
И по льду звучному бесстрашно идут.

[Your image is alive in my imagination/A gloomy desert, poet’s imprisonment,/Foggy arch of the sky, snow as usual/ And plains briefly warmed./.../ There grain fields are never covered with shadows, and there are no vineyards on the hills; /There the ferocious sons of cold Scythia, /Are awaiting their booty hidden beyond the Danube/And their raids can at any moment threaten settlements./There are no boundaries for them; they swim in the waves/And they move boldly on a resounding ice.]
This is the image of all that Ovid lost when he was forced to leave Rome: he lives in a
desert land under the “foggy arch of the sky,” in a snowy, freezing climate with so little
sunlight and so few trees that “grain fields are never covered with their shadow,” and
there are no vineyards on the hills. The inhabitants of this land, ferocious Scythians, live
by robbing and killing the local population, so all around live in fear. Ovid, a
representative of the center of civilized world, exiled to the savage land of barbarians,
loses everything that made him a poet: “Here I am the barbarian, and I’m understood by
no one” (“Barbarus hic ego sum quia non intelligor ulli,” Trista). Unable to communicate
with the people around him, he addresses his last two volumes of poetry, Tristia
(Sorrows) and Epistulae ex Ponto (Letters from the Black Sea), to a far away and longed
for Roman audience.

In the paradigm of two opposite creative personalities, Ovid’s image as a poet is
determined by his association with the South i.e., Italy and Rome, while Pushkin’s own
poetic identity of “severe/stern Slav” (‘суровый славянин”) is determined by the North.
In “To Ovid” Pushkin writes about himself:

Суровый славянин, я слез не проливал,
Но понимаю их; изгнаник самовольный,
И светом, и собой, и жизнью недовольный,
С душой задумчивой, я ныне посетил
Страну, где грустный век ты некогда влачил.

…
Но взор обманутым мечтаньям изменял.
Изгнание твое пленяло втайне очи,
Привыкшие к снегам угрызежной полуночи.
Здесь долго светится небесная лазурь;
Здесь кратко царствует жестокость зимних бурь.

[A stern Slav, I did not shed tears/But I understand them; a self-willed exile/
Dissatisfied with the world/with myself and life,/With a pensive soul, now I
visited/Land where once you dragged on your sorrowful time/…/Your exile
secretly fascinated my eyes/Used to snows of a gloomy North/Here the azure sky
shines for a long time/Here the savageness of winter storms reigns but for a short time.]

When Pushkin, the “severe Slav” who “does not shed tears” looks at Bessarabia from the perspective of Ovid, he sees it as a “gloomy desert.” However, when he looks at the same landscape with his own eyes, which are, “used to the snows of the gloomy North,” Pushkin sees not darkness but, “long shining blue skies,” and short winters. For him, the frozen desert of Ovid’s *Trista* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* is the South: when it is winter in Russia, the bright, spring sun shines in Bessarabia (“Зима дышала там—а с весной теплотою /Здесь солнце ясное катилось надо мною.”) The juxtaposition of the two opposite perceptions of Bessarabia highlights the opposite sensibilities of the poets, sensibilities that ultimately determine their creative personalities and poetic identities. It would follow then that Mickiewicz, the native of Lithuania, a country as far north as Pushkin’s native land, would have been formed as a poet by the cold and dark northern climate and landscape. Yet, in Pushkin’s paradigm of “bard vs. prophet” Mickiewicz’s creative personality as a poet-bard is defined by the southern land of the Crimea, the setting and the subject of his *Crimean Sonnets.*

Mickiewicz spent most of his first year in Russia in Odessa and from there he made a trip to the Crimea between August and September of 1825. He first traveled by sea to the Crimean coast (to Artek at the foot of the mountain Ayu-Dag) and then around the southern part of the peninsula. The tour of the Crimea, in the company of Karolina Sobańska, with whom Mickiewicz had a romantic relationship, and her “official lover” General Ivan Witt, governor of the southern Russia province, could have been merely an exciting episode in the poet’s life; a tourist visit to an exotic, beautiful region. However, the cycle of *Crimean Sonnets* presents the travels through southern Crimea as a life-
altering experience: a spiritual journey of self-discovery. The never-named hero of the

Crimean Sonnets begins his journey through the steppes of Bessarabia in “The Akkerman Steppes” (“Stepy Akermanńskie”):

[Into the wide expanse I plunge, waterless ocean:
Deep in the grass the wagon dips, rolls like a boat.
Amid the bending waves, flowers, it seems to float,
Avoiding coral islands, weeds in winding motion.

Stop! Ahh, so quiet. Listen! Hear the calling cranes
(Fleeing the hawk, they seek invisibility);
Butterflies’ moving wings in grass upon the plains;

A snake, slippery-breasted, bends the greenery.
In such quiet, I, excited, take some pains
To hear my homelands’ call…Let’s go. No home for me.]

The opening sonnet introduces themes that run through the whole cycle: voyage
(in the first four poems, voyage by sea), admiration of the captivating beauty of exotic
nature, and a longing for Lithuania, which the Traveler has left behind. The last two lines
describe the intense silence of nature at sunset that prompts the traveler to anxiously
listen for the call from Lithuania, which never comes. Realizing that nothing is holding

Adam Mickiewicz. Crimean Sonnets, translated by Martin Bidney (Palo Alto, CA: Mommsen
him back, the hero continues his journey: “- Onward, no one calls!” (“—jedźmy, nikt nie woła.”) The themes of the journey from the North to the South and longing there for one’s native land, set forth here by Mickiewicz, evoke the famous Pushkin’s stanza 50 from chapter One of *Eugene Onegin*220, in which the poet takes “a flight of the imagination”221 to his ancestral Africa where he envisions himself “pining for gloomy Russia under the skies of my Africa.” His African heritage was a very important part of Pushkin’s identity as a man and writer, and within the context of the bard vs. prophet paradigm it would make him a poet of the South. At the same time however, his desire to flee to the South, so that he could yearn for gloomy Russia seems to reaffirm Pushkin’s creative personality as poet-prophet of the North. Those contradictions and ambiguities of Pushkin’s poetic personality constituted an integral part of his image, that of a modern Romantic poet, who therefore sought to express and interpret them through his bard vs. prophet paradigm.

For Mickiewicz as a poet, the separation from his native country, and travels to the South (Crimea) became a formative experience. He describes the process of becoming a poet in the voyage of the unnamed Traveler (“Podróżny”) whose heart and mind are gripped by, “the hydra of memories” (“hydra pamiętek”), of which he cannot rid himself; when the Traveler reaches the Crimean mountains, the monumental, often overwhelming, beauty of nature transforms him into a Pilgrim (“Pielgrzym”) whose thoughts are now directed towards the mysteries of existence and the Absolute. Finally

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220 Coincidently, Pushkin wrote first chapter of *Onegin* in 1823 in Odessa where two years later Mickiewicz was working on his *Crimean Sonnets.*

the transformation of the hero is completed in the last sonnet “Ajudah” in which the
Traveler-Pilgrim discovers his true vocation—he is a Poet conscious of his creative power:

Lubię poglądać wsparty na Judahu skale,
Jak spienione bałwany, to w czarne szeregi
Scisnąwszy się buchają, to jak srebrne śniegi
W milionowych tęczach kołują wspaniale.
...
Podobnie na twe serce o poeto młody!
Namiętność często groźne wzbura niepogody,
Lecz gdy podniesiesz bardon, ona bez twej szkody

Ucieka w zapomnienia pogrążyć się toni,
I nieśmiertelne pieśni za sobą uroni,
Z których wieki upłotą ozdobę twych skroni.

[I love, when leaning on the rock and looking down,
To see the foaming waves come crowding, black, in rows,
Pushing each other over, lines of silver shows,
With circling rainbows, millionfold, their splendid crown.
...
Young poet! How that scene resembles your own heart!
Passion, so often menacing, a storm will start,
But when you touch the lute, harmless, by force of art.

It flows away, subsiding, sinks in memory,
Leaving behind it songs for immortality,
From which the ages weave a wreath of majesty.]²²²

The poet who, from the top of Mount Ayu-Dag looks down at the sea, is a completely different man from the nameless Traveler in the first sonnet. At the beginning of his journey he was traveling through the endless ocean of the steppes, lost and forgotten; in the last sonnet the metaphor of the stormy sea with its foaming waves represents all the passions and emotions of the “young poet,” but now he has learned to use them as his inspiration, to transform them with his “lyre” into “immortal songs.” His travel through the South of the Crimea, communing with majestic, untamed nature, and making contact

²²² Translated by Martin Bidney, Adam Mickiewicz. *Crimean Sonnets*, 69.
with Oriental culture and philosophy, helps him to discover his talent and vocation and makes him realize that he is a poet.

_The Crimean Sonnets_ were published in Polish in December 1826 in Moscow and were enthusiastically received by Russian critics and poets, who for the first time had the opportunity to read a more substantial sample of Mickiewicz’s work. Of course many Russians were not able to read _The Crimean Sonnets_ in Polish, but soon selected sonnets were translated (by the poet Ivan Kozlov among others) and began to appear in various literary journals.\(^223\) By 1829, the whole cycle of _The Crimean Sonnets_, along with some of Mickiewicz’s other poems, was published in book form in Petersburg in V.R. Romanovich’s translation. One of the first, most enthusiastic reviews of the Polish edition of _The Crimean Sonnets_ was by Viazemsky and appeared in the _Moscow Telegraph_.\(^224\) Conscious of the imperfection of his own prose translations of the sonnets, Viazemsky concluded his article with an appeal to Pushkin and Baratynsky to create verse translations of Mickiewicz’s work and thus, “by their own example illuminate the desirable friendship between Polish and Russian muses.”\(^225\) Pushkin did translate some of Mickiewicz’s works, such as the introduction to _Konrad Wallenrod_ and the ballads _The Watch_ (Czaty) and _The Three Brothers Budrys_ (Trzech Budrysów.) Though he made no known translations of _The Crimean Sonnets_, he certainly read and knew them. In at least two of his own works, _Sonnet_ (1830) and in the already mentioned _Onegin’s Journey_ (1829-1830), Pushkin writes about Mickiewicz in connection with the Crimea,

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\(^{225}\) Ibid., 222.
thus conveying that he particularly associated the Polish poet with that southern part of
Russia. In *Sonnet*, (inspired by Wordsworth’s, “Scorn not the sonnet; Critic you have
frowned”) Pushkin names Mickiewicz—along with Wordsworth, Petrarch, Dante, and
Shakespeare-- the master of that poetic genre:

Под сенью гор Тавриды отдаленной
Певец Литвы в размер его стесненный
Свои мечты мгновенно заключал.

[Neath the canopy of distant mountains of Tavrida/ Lithuanian bard, in tight [sonnet’s]
meter /Instantly immured his dreams.]

Mickiewicz’s name is not mentioned directly, but it is clear that Pushkin has him in mind.
Mickiewicz is the “bard of Lithuania (“Певец Литвы”) who, under the canopy of the
Crimean mountains, was “instantly capturing his dreams in the tight sonnet’s meter.”
Significantly, Pushkin alludes to Mickiewicz’s gift of improvisation by stressing that the
bard was able to “instantly” (“мгновенно”) express his thoughts in a rigid sonnet form.
The description of the Crimea (Tavrida) as “distant” (“отдалённая”) points to the
separation of the bard from his native Lithuania, much as Ovid was exiled from his
beloved Rome. The Ovid-Mickiewicz similarities are even stronger in *Onegin’s Journey*:

Онегин посещает потом Тавриду:
... Там пел Мицкевич вдохновенный
И, посреди прибрежных скал,
Свою Литву воспоминал.

[Later Onegin visits Tavrida/ There inspired Mickiewicz sung/ And, in the midst of
the shore’s cliffs/ longed for his Lithuania.]

In these three lines, Pushkin summarizes the content of the first and last of Mickiewicz’s
*Crimean Sonnets*. Longing for Lithuania in the “Akkerman Steppes” and the image of the
man in “Ajudah” standing on a mountain looking at the sea, conscious of his identity as a
Pushkin acknowledges Mickiewicz’s longing for Lithuania, but it is only in the South, in Tavrida-Crimea that Mickiewicz becomes a poet: there, surrounded by the power of nature, he finds inspiration and is able to sing his verses. In Mickiewicz’s case, paradoxically, it is the place of his exile, the south of Russia that fostered his vocation as a poet.

The South as the place of origin of the poet-bard in Pushkin’s paradigm of “bard vs. prophet” is consistent with Schiller’s model of the “naïve vs. sentimental” poet. For Schiller, Greece, as the land of Homer, was the natural land of the “naïve” poet. Among his contemporaries, Schiller considered Goethe the “naïve” poet par excellence, but as a German, Goethe was obviously a poet from the North. In a famous letter Schiller explains how Goethe was able to overcome his Northern origins and become a “naïve” poet:

Had you been born Greek, even Italian, and had been an exquisite nature and an idealizing art surrounded you from the cradle upwards, then perhaps your path would have been shortened immeasurably, perhaps even been completely superfluous...But, since you were born a German, since your Grecian spirit was thrown into this Northern world, so there was no other choice open to you except either to become a Northern artist yourself or, with the assistance of the power of thought, to supply your imagination with that which reality denied to it and thus as it were from within and by rational means to give birth to your own Greece.226 (Emphasis mine)

According to Schiller a poet born in the South (Greece or Italy), and from his birth surrounded by “exquisite” nature, has an easy path to becoming “naïve” as his poetic talent is nurtured by natural and inspiring beauty. A poet born in the North can either become Northern, i.e., a sentimental poet like Schiller, or, as Schiller declares of Goethe, “give birth to his own Greece” through his own imagination. If for Goethe, the trip to Italy (1786-1788) was a formative experience, so was Mickiewicz’s journey to the

226 Schiller’s letter to Goethe, 23 August 1794, in On the Naïve and Sentimental in Literature, 16.
Crimea. In fact, Mickiewicz noted this comparison himself, using as a motto for *The Crimean Sonnets* lines from Goethe’s *West-Eastern Divan* (*West-östlicher Divan*, 1819):

“To understand a poet/ One must go to poet’s land” (“Wer den Dichter will verstehen,/Muss in Dichter’s Lande gehen.”) This was an invitation to the reader that Pushkin followed and understood perfectly: in *The Crimean Sonnets* Mickiewicz, a poet born in the North, appropriated the South for himself, thus becoming a divinely inspired naïve-poet-bard and Pushkin’s Other.

Pushkin’s paradigm of “bard vs. prophet” and his identification of Mickiewicz as a poet-bard similar to Ovid, illustrates how he sought to establish his own place among all the opposing literary currents and tendencies in the transitional period of Russian poetry in the 1820s. As Boris Gasparov explains:

The antithesis of the two poets and the very contrast between them, which made their mythological “encounter” necessary, became a symbol that allowed him to cut through the knot of oppositions between contrasting epochs and literary parties, and to define the place of Pushkin’s poetic world at the intersection of the polar tendencies fighting each other. That antithesis served Pushkin as one of the figurative instruments, which helped him to interpret and express all the complexity and ambiguity of his own position in the battle between old and new, Classicism and Romanticism, poetry of thought and poetry of “singing.”

Pushkin’s mythological “encounter” with an ancient poet-bard exemplifies the Romantic notion of, and the need for the Other. Within the “bard vs. prophet” paradigm, poet-bard serves as a “mirror” that “reflects” the complexities and ambiguities of the poet-prophet’s literary identity, thus allowing Pushkin to express and interpret them. Mickiewicz’s

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227 Антитеза двух поэтов, самый контраст между которыми делает необходимой их мифологическую «встречу», оказывается символом, позволяющим рассечь узел противопоставлений между контрастными эпохами и литературными партиями и определить место пушкинского поэтического мира на пересечении всех этих борющихся между собой полярных тенденций. Эта антитеза служила для Пушкина одним из образных инструментов, помогавших осмыслить и выразить всю сложность и неоднозначность той позиции, которую он склонен был занять в борьбе между старым и новым, классиками и романтиками, поэзией мысли и «пением».

*Poeticeshkii iazyk Pushkina*, 220.
unique gift of improvisation, and his creative persona of the poet-bard exiled to a foreign land, allowed Pushkin to perceive Mickiewicz as his poetic Other. Through a poetic dialogue with Mickiewicz’s image, of a divinely inspired poet-bard who spontaneously and effortlessly sings his verses, Pushkin was able to express his own position of a stern, inhibited, modern poet-prophet who through the process of intellectual analysis and reflection creates (writes) his poems. However, Mickiewicz was not a distant Other from Antiquity with whom Pushkin had “mythological encounters” in his poetic world, but a contemporary Other who “lived among us.” Mickiewicz allowed Pushkin to determine his identity as a poet-prophet not only in relation to previous generations of poets, but also in relation to his own poetic reality.

By the 1830s Pushkin’s literary reality was evolving towards prose, while he was at the same time turning away from his earlier, animated vision of a poet, particularly of one bequeathed a “divine” gift. The image of the poet becomes more somber and somewhat ominous as can be seen in some of his late poems, such as “The Wanderer” (“Странник, 1835”) or “I remember school at the beginning of my life” (“В начале жизни школу помню я,” 1830), in which Pushkin presents poet’s prophetic inspiration as madness. In his 1833 poem, “God, do not allow me to go insane” (“Не дай мне Бог сойти с ума”), written after Pushkin visited his friend Konstantin Batiuskov in a mental asylum, the poet, deeply shaken by the experience, imagines how he himself, in a state of insanity, “would sing in a fiery delirium/would forget himself in a daze” (“Я пел бы в пламенном бреду/ Я забывался бы в чаду”); poetic gift of “singing” is presented in a manner similar to that of a divinely inspired poet-bard, but now the poet’s inspiration is not bestowed from above, rather it is a result of his insanity. Thus, the loathsome image
of an Italian improviser in *The Egyptian Nights* could also be seen as an expression of that darkened modality in which Pushkin now saw poetic genius; nevertheless, as the poetic Other in Pushkin’s creative paradigm of the 1820s, Mickiewicz, a great poet and improviser, was an important part of the Russian writer’s ever-evolving literary identity.
IV. Between the Classical and the Romantic

Part 1. Mickiewicz’s Evolution from Rebellious Classicist to Romantic National Poet

Mickiewicz as the poet-bard in Pushkin’s paradigm of creative poetic personalities demonstrates only one of the many ways in which the Polish poet filled the role of the Other in the context of Russian literature in the second half of the 1820s. However, while Pushkin focused mainly on Mickiewicz’s creativity, other Russian writers focused on the broader evolution of his image as a Romantic poet, i.e., on the various facets of his poetic personality, which evolved from the Classical, to the Sentimental and elegiac, to the Romantic. Therefore, before discussing how various Russian writers mediated their poetic identities in relation to these different strains of Mickiewicz’s work and personality it is necessary to briefly describe his own transformation, which culminated in the acknowledgment that he was one of the greatest European Romantic poets.

Naturally, Mickiewicz’s Classical roots are most visible in the early poetry written during the time of his studies (1815-1819) at the University of Vilnius and in the period before he published his first volume of Romantic poetry, *Ballads and Romances*, in 1822. After the reforms implemented in 1803 by its curator, Prince Adam Czartoryski, the University of Vilnius became a vibrant, liberal intellectual center in the spirit of the Enlightenment. During his university years, Mickiewicz and his friends eagerly studied and discussed the works of Rousseau, Diderot and Voltaire. Perhaps not surprisingly then, some of Mickiewicz’s first poetic attempts included the 1817 adaptations of *L’Éducation d’un prince* (under the Polish title *Mieszko, książę Nowogródka*), and
Gertrude, ou l’éducation d’une fille (Pani Aniela), as well as an unfinished translation of La Pucelle d’Orléans. Witkowska stresses that Mickiewicz’s adaptations of Voltaire “were not merely an exercise in translation and Classical versification, but also a school of thought.”\textsuperscript{228} For Mickiewicz and his friends Voltaire was, “more than a literary model, even more than a philosopher of the Enlightenment…he was the patron of their youthful rebellion against everything that in their provincial world was considered a norm, for in his criticism and sneeringly scornful gestures they saw the spirit of European freedom and enlightened progress.”\textsuperscript{229}

One of the most important subjects in the school of the Enlightenment was represented by Mickiewicz’s study of the philosophy of history and his “passion for understanding the hidden meaning and mechanisms that moved the great historical theatre of the world.”\textsuperscript{230} These ideas are found in the classically-styled epistle “To Joachim Lelewel” (“Do Joachima Lelewela,”1822) dedicated to a professor of history whom Mickiewicz admired and whom he presents as a sage historian who can show his students not only “that, which was and is,” but also “that, which will be” (“Wskazujesz nam, co było, co jest i co będzie.”) Inspired by Constantin François de Volney’s essay, Les Ruines, ou méditations sur les révolutions des empires (1791),\textsuperscript{231} Mickiewicz praises Lelewel as the ideal historian who can, “break out the truth from lies” (“Z samego kłamstwa prawdę umiejąc wyłamać”) in the broad context of world history. The poem,


\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., 237.

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 241.

like Volney’s essay, presents history as a battle of opposing powers: despotism/tyranny vs. freedom. Significantly, the oppressive, despotic powers are represented not only by tyrannical kings, but also by ancient Rome (“Rome exerts its cruelty over the world, and the tyrant over Rome” [“Rzym pastwi się nad światem, a tyran nad Rzymem”]), and later by the institution of the Church with a pope who has oppressive power over the whole world (“The discharge of a papal bull saw crowns roll off thrones/ Rome embraced the globe with its heinous arms” [“Na wystrzał bulli z tronów spadały korony,/Rzym potwornymi ziemię opasał ramiony.”]). Freedom—as opposed to tyranny—is represented by Ancient Greece, also a symbol of beauty (“The temple of Beauty and Freedom” [“Piękności kościół i Szwobodzie”]), and by the French Revolution, symbolized by “a newly hatched dragon of the Gauls” (“Rewolucyjny Gallów wylągleś się smoku”), which represents “the rage of unchained slaves” (“rozkutych wściekłość niewolników”). Although defeated at present, the Revolution still gives hope for the future victory of freedom (“A choć teraz skruszone olbrzymy zachodnie,/ Jeszcze na ziemię krew ich może działać płodnie.”) The whole epistle to Lelewel is permeated by the belief that the rational human mind of a historian can uncover the truth about the history of humanity, a truth that is universal since “it does not recognize East or West” and “considers all lands and nations as brothers” (“A słońce Prawdy wschodu nie zna i zachodu;” “Wszystkie ziemie i ludy poczyta za bliźnie.”) However, in this universal perspective on history Mickiewicz forgets neither his own nor his professor’s roots, reminding Lelewel that, “he is a Pole from Lithuania and European.” (“Żeś znad Niemna, żeś Polak, mieszkaniec Europy.”) The poem introduces many themes to which Mickiewicz will return again and again in his poetry; most importantly, a historical perspective on the condition of the
individual entangled in the events of history— the subject of his Romantic works
*Grażyna, Konrad Wallenrod* and *Pan Tadeusz*, all of which also owe much to the
Classical historical epic style.

Among the Polish masters of Classical poetry whose works had the greatest influence on the young Mickiewicz’s poetic style, the most important is Stanislaw Trembecki (1735-1812). His Classical odes, epigrams, letters in verse, and fables are characterized by poetic language full of, “colloquialisms and often folk idioms brutal in their conciseness, which introduce live, elemental forces of nature,” as well as “skillful poetic apparatus full of paraphrases, metonymy, inverted word order,” and, “bold use of verbs of motion that endow his verses with great dynamic activism,” all of which are present in both Mickiewicz’s early and mature poetry. Mickiewicz fully displayed his admiration for Trembecki in an extensive commentary on his long descriptive poem *Sofijówka* (1804), which the young poet was commissioned to write in 1822 for a new edition of the work. *Sofijówka*, written in rhymed couplets of thirteen-syllable verse lines, describes the Versailles-like residence of the aristocratic Potocki family and “praises the fertility of the Ukrainian soil, its luxurious vegetation, fat sheep and cattle, while at the same time, it extols man’s will, victorious in transforming the world.” In his introduction, Mickiewicz commends Trembecki’s descriptions of nature for being neither too mundane, nor too lofty and always engaging the reader’s interest, but reserves his highest tribute for Trembecki’s language and style:


233 Witkowska, *Romantyzm*, 244.

Trembecki has specific qualities which give him and his poetry superiority over the poetry of his contemporaries: when the Polish language began to lose its poetic character and take on a foreign, French form, Trembecki retained the characteristics of the golden age of national poetry. (…) Trembecki’s style derives from the nature of Polish speech, and is therefore flexible, capable of rendering sophistication as well as simplicity of thought, and their various combinations and shades, but always in his own way, without losing its national character and intrinsic talent.

Mickiewicz sees the greatest value of Trembecki’s language in its national character, which is based on the best models of the Renaissance “golden age” of Polish poetry. Significantly, Mickiewicz makes a clear distinction between the “true” Polish Classicism of the Renaissance period and the “false” Neoclassicism of the eighteenth century, which he opposed as a Romantic poet. Thus he praises Trembecki’s Classical language, which stands apart from contemporary Polish Neoclassical poetry based on French models. An in-depth knowledge of Polish and Ancient Classical poetry allows Trembecki to use the best models and to “resurrect many words unjustly forgotten, incorporate others from kindred languages, create new ones, to break the syntax, use bold expressions and turns of the speech, simply he possesses an arbitrary and fortunate power over the language.”

An admiration for such an untraditional use of words can be seen in Mickiewicz’s explanation of an unusual combination of an adjective and noun to describe the ploughed soil of the fields as “bodies torn apart” (“ciały podartemi”), a metaphor used for the first time in that context. When reading Trembecki one is reminded of Boileau’s

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235 Trembecki ma przymioty sobie właściwe, które jemu i jego poezji dają wyższość nad poezją poetów spółczesnych: gdy albowiem mowa polska poetycka charakter swój właściwy tracię zaczęła i postać przybierać obcą, francuską – Trembecki zachował cechy złotego wieku poezji narodowej. (…) [S]tyl Trembeckiego wypływa z natury mowy ojczystej, jest więc giętki sposobny równie do wydania górności jak prostopo myśli i różnych w tej mierze połączeń i odcieniów, ale zawsze właściwym sobie sposobem, nie tracąc bynajmniej narodowości i właściwego sobie talentu.

236 A. Mickiewicz, “Wstęp do Sofijówki.”
poem, which says “that in the verses of great poets words are often surprised meeting each other for the first time.”

Mickiewicz’s analysis of **Sofijówka**, a masterpiece of Polish Classical poetry, reveals how deeply his own poetry was rooted in Trembecki’s work, both in terms of language and style and in the broader literary-historical perspective. In Trembecki’s poetry Mickiewicz finds the rich and authentic foundation of the Polish language based on the literature of the Polish Renaissance as well as on ancient Greek and Roman poetry. **Sofijówka** is also an excellent example of how to successfully combine high Classical style with colloquialisms and folk idioms—stylistic devices that Mickiewicz followed in his *Ballads and Romances*. It is also evident how much Mickiewicz’s beautiful innovative metaphors in *The Crimean Sonnets*, not to mention his great historical epic novel in verse *Pan Tadeusz* (1834), owe to Trembecki’s work. Moreover, in addition to being a repository of Polish vocabulary and style, **Sofijówka** is also a compendium of eighteenth-century culture, literature, aesthetics and philosophy with numerous references to ancient Classical Greek and Roman mythology and literature (none of which is lost in Mickiewicz’s extensive footnotes.) With his erudition, his knowledge of ancient and modern European history, philosophy, literature and the tradition of the Polish language, Trembecki was a marvelous model for Mickiewicz during the poet’s formative years. The importance of Trembecki’s influence on the young poet becomes even more significant in the context of the analysis of Mickiewicz as the Other in Russian Romanticism: the qualities of Trembecki’s poetry, which young Mickiewicz mastered in his own verses – particularly the rootedness of his poetic language in the native Polish (not foreign) tradition, with simultaneous appropriation of European literary and cultural achievements

[^237]: Ibid.,
from Antiquity to modern times — were the very qualities that the Russian Romantics related to in the process of establishing their poetic identity in relation to Mickiewicz.

The beginning of the transition from Classicism to Romanticism that took place in Mickiewicz’s own poetry, and consequently in Polish literature as a whole, is well represented by one of his most popular early poems “Ode to Youth” (“Oda do młodości” 1820.) The censors did not allow the “Ode” to be included in the first two volumes of his poetry because of its revolutionary content, but the poem circulated in handwritten copies and became a hymn for young people during the November Uprising of 1830. The very title sounds like an oxymoron: “Ode,” the favorite Classical poetic genre reserved for the most solemn occasions, instantly brings to mind the literature of the past with its rigid poetic norms, while “Youth,” the addressee of the poem, has the power to overturn the fossilized world order and push the world in a new direction. In fact, the main idea of “Ode to the Youth” rests on the binary opposition between young/new and old/dead set forth in the first lines:

Bez serc, bez ducha, to szkieletów ludy;
Młodości! Dodaj mi skrzydła!
Niech nad martwym wzlecę światem
W rajską dziedzinę ułudy:
Kiedy zapał tworzy cuda,
Nowości potrząsa kwiatem
I obleka w nadziei złote malowidła.

[No Heart, no Spirit—Lo! cadaverous crowds!
O Youth! Pass me thy wings,
And let me o’er the dead earth soar,
Let me vanish in delusion’s clouds,
Where many the Zeal begets a Wonder
And grows a flower of novelty up yonder,
Adorn in Hope’s enamellings.]²³⁸

The old world is dead (“martwym światem“), like skeletons (“szkieletów ludy”); it is a world with “no heart and no spirit” left in it (“Bez serc, bez ducha”). The lifeless image of the first line is juxtaposed with the intensely dynamic imperative of the second “Youth! Pass me thy wings!” (“Młodości! Dodaj mi skrzydła!”) Youth has the power to elevate itself over the dead world to the “sphere of imagination” (“kraina uludy”), in which its “enthusiasm can create miracles” (“Kędy zapał tworzy cudy”) and the “flower of newness” (“nowości kwiatem”) gives hope. Throughout the poem the division between the old “them” and the young “us” is reinforced by powerful imagery: a single reptile flying over the cadaverous waters is a lonely, self-contained individual representing old “egoists,” while youth is like a “nectarous drink of life” and the young are united (“Razem młodzi przyjaciele”) by a common and universal goal of the happiness of all (“W szczęściu wszystkiego są wszystkich cele”).

In “Ode to the Youth” Mickiewicz blends the old ideals of the Enlightenment (the period in which he grew up) with the new ideals of emerging Romanticism. The belief in the progress of humanity and the battle against prejudices, the subjugation of the individual to the common good, and the working together towards common goals are the core values of the Enlightenment. Equally strong is the influence of Sturm und Drang found in Schiller’s odes: their ideal of the unity of all humanity, particularly Ode an die Freude (Ode to Joy) with its imperatives: “Be embraced, millions!” (“Seid umschlungen, Millionen!”), “Endure courageously, you millions!/Endure for the better world!” (“Duldet mutig, Millionen!/Duldet für die bessre Welt!”), and the poem Die Freundschaft (The Friendship). From Schiller’s poem Die Künstler (“The Artists”) comes the key

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Romantic concept of *Geisterwelt* ("world of spirit"),\(^{240}\) which "Ode to Youth" introduced into Polish poetry as "świat ducha." The "Ode" addresses Youth with typically Romantic, anti-rational and anti-Enlightenment imperatives such as: "Reach where sight cannot reach,/ Break what mind cannot break" ("Tam sięj, gdzie wzrok nie sięga./Łam, czego rozum nie złamie") and the oxymoronic idea that young people should be "wise with madness" ("rozumni szalem"). What gave the "Ode to Youth" its unprecedented strength of expression was the belief that youth is "a creative, God-like power, part of the universal order of the world. The constant comparative context of Youth and God, the two creative powers who can call entities into being, endows Youth with casuistic ability, makes it an Absolute, in the all-human universe of spirit."\(^{241}\) Stylistically "Ode to Youth" is a mixture of a high, at times pathetic, tone delivered in long 11- and 13-syllable oratory lines, alternating with shorter 3- to 8-syllable, more lyrical and rhythmic lines. The inconsistencies of the formal structure of the "Ode" underline the transitory character of the work: it is a manifesto for the new Romantic generation conveyed with great enthusiasm, and a belief in the new world of imagination and spirit, yet its ideology and poetic genre are firmly rooted in the values of the Enlightenment and the era of Classicism.

In parallel with the rhetorical style of ode, the historical epic, and hymns such as "A Hymn for the Day of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Virgin Mary" ("Hymn na dzień Zwiastowania Najświętszej Panny Maryi," 1820), Mickiewicz developed a more lyrical voice in his poetry, particularly in elegiac forms. One of his very first attempts in this direction was "Memento" ("Przypomnienie" 1819) modeled on Petrarch and

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\(^{240}\) Ibid.

addressed to a prototypical Laura, written as an “elegiac-sentimental sonnet.” A further development of the lyrical I through the elegiac genre can be found in “Sailor” (“Żeglarz” 1821), “To M***” (Do M*** ”’ 1822-1823) and “New Year” (“Nowy Rok”) written in 1823. All three poems have a, “typically Classical, disciplined and lucid form,” and they are “far from tearful sighs of Sentimentalism.” Mickiewicz, however, breaks the elegiac Classical convention in these poems by “showing his personal reactions and feeling with a candid directness,” as in each of them he reflects on a turning point in his life and meditates on passing time and memory.

“Sailor” (“Żeglarz”) presents life as a Classical allegory of sea and sailing, in which the poet ponders whether to “abandon the ship of life” (“A więc porzucić korabżywota?”), which is facing, “high waves and stormy winds,” i.e., life’s adversities. The first part of the poem is written in high Classical style with the personification of “Virtue and Beauty as celestial bodies” who dazzle the Sailor with their “charms and sweet nectar” (“Cnota i Piękność, niebieskie siostrzyce!.../Tamtej widok oświeca, a tej nektar słodzi”). However, in the second part of the poem, he departs from the Classical perfection and harmony in favor of the more personal and direct discourse of a lyrical I, conscious of the individuality/ uniqueness of his feelings (“Co czuję, inni uczuć chcieliby daremnie!”) and makes the final decision to leave his friends behind: “I am sailing forward, you go home” (“Ja płynę dalej, wy idźcie do domu”). With the


243 Ibid,

244 Ibid.

individualistic, Romantic I comes a change from Classical metaphor and personification to more Romantic notions such as the “voice of inner faith” (“głos ten wewnętrznej wiary”), and the “star of the spirit” (“gwiazda ducha”), which “circulates in an immense abyss” (“kręży po niezmierniej głębi“). Thus, the poem well illustrates Mickiewicz’s attempts to find his true lyrical voice, and to make the transition from a Classical lyrical I to a more individualistic and conflicted Romantic version of self.

Similarly, in the poem “To M***”, devoted to the memory of a former lover, and written in a mournful, “at times even somewhat Sentimental style,” Mickiewicz also violates the rules of the Classical genre with the simplicity of his natural, almost conversational, language. In fact the poem opens with an imagined dialogue between a rejected man and his beloved: “Out of my sight!... I obey instantly” (“Precz z moich oczu!... Posłucham od razu”). It is easy to disappear from the sight and heart of the beloved woman but the lovers cannot forget each other: “Out of my memory!... no…that command/ Neither mine nor yours memory will obey.” (“Precz z mej pamięci!... nie… tego rozkazu/ Moja i twoja pamięć nie posłucha“). The power of memory and love is even stronger in the mournful and sentimental third stanza, repeated as a refrain at the end of the poem:

Tak w każdym miejscu i o każdej dobie,  
Gdzieś z tobą płakał, gdzieś się z tobą bawił  
Wszędzie i zawsze będę ja przy tobie,  
Bom wszędzie cząstkę mej duszy zostawił.

[So in every place and every hour/Where I cried with you, and where I played with you/Everywhere and always I will be with you/For everywhere a particle of my soul remains.]

These lines, some of the most popular in the history of Polish love poetry, convey with

246 Ibid., 93.
natural directness the emotions and feeling of the lyrical I. The emotional intensity of the rest of the poem is realized in the speaker’s memories; he remembers his beloved in the ordinary situations in which they once met, and, as he now believes, bring to her mind memories of him. Significantly, these images—the beloved playing a harp and singing, reading a romance novel, or attending a ball—are references to salon culture, thus placing the elegiac Sentimental discourse of the poem in the familiar and concrete context of everyday life. Yet, despite the conventional genre and setting, Mickiewicz is able to find his own lyrical voice in the naturalness and directness of his speech and simplicity of vocabulary and syntax; a voice able to convey to his readers true emotions and feelings, especially the Romantic conviction that two souls united in true love can never be separated, even if physically they are no longer together.

The third poem of the lyrical/elegiac phase in Mickiewicz’s early period, “New Year,” was written on December 31, 1823, in dramatic circumstances. The poet was imprisoned in Vilnius while being interrogated about his participation in the clandestine student organization The Philomath Society. Not surprisingly then, the poem is written in a somber, depressive mode. The idea of New Year’s wishes addressed to oneself (“Czegoż w tym nowym roku żądać mam dla siebie?”) as the subtitle indicates, comes from Jean Paul Richter’s novel Siebenkäs (1797), but the poem owes more to Byron than to the German Romantic writer. Alone in his prison cell, Mickiewicz conducts a dialogue with himself asking: “What do I want for this new year?” – “Perhaps joyful moments in life” (“Może chwilek wesołych?”), “Perhaps love?” (“Może kochania?”), or “friendship” (“Może przyjaźni?”) As he explains to himself, he has tried all those pleasures and joys, but they all disappoint; none of them can satisfy his heart, and thus the only thing he asks
for is solitude (“samotnego ustronia”). The metaphors in the poem: the New Year as Phoenix, Platonic love symbolized by a divine rose, or friendship represented by the palm tree of the witch Armida from Tasso’s *La Gerusalemme liberata* 1581, have Classical roots, as does the formal structure which Mickiewicz interweaves with dialogue and inverted syntax in some sentences. However, the lyrical I in the poem speaks with a, “tone of resignation, disillusion, and bitterness typical of Byronic poetry.” During this time Mickiewicz was reading and translating *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (“Farewell”), *The Dream*, and *Euthanasia*, all of which helped him to liberate himself from, “oversimplification and occasional falseness hidden in Sentimental feelings.” The poem “New Year” with its truthful balance/account of life [“To dream, as I have dreamed through the years of my youth” [“Marzyć, jakem przemarzył moje młode lata”)] demonstrates that through Byron Mickiewicz found his own true lyrical Romantic voice. Moreover, the influence of Western European models, particularly Byron’s, on shaping Mickiewicz’s poetic personality as a Romantic greatly contributed to his role of the Other in Russian literature: that of a Polish poet who, in the process of transition from Classicism to Romanticism, successfully appropriated these Western models as his own, and himself became an example of a European, but simultaneously Slavic poet, with his own national identity, a model that his Russian contemporaries were looking for at the time of their transition to Romanticism.

However, during his first year in Russia, Mickiewicz did not entirely depart from the elegy genre. In 1825, in Odessa he wrote three poems “The Hour. Elegy” (“Godzina. Elegia”), “To D.D. Elegy” (“Do D.D. Elegia”) and “Meditation on the Day of Departure”

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247 Ibid., 94.
248 Ibid., 95.
(“Dumania w dzień odjazdu”). These three elegies are very different from his previous ones; in fact they are much more Romantic than Classical in style and tone as Mickiewicz, “renews the old genre, which Sentimentalism indulged in so mercilessly.”

Significantly, although this was the time when Mickiewicz was already achieving maturity and perfection as a Romantic poet in his Crimean Sonnets, yet he did not abandon the Classical genre of the elegy, but rather adapted it to his Romantic style.

All three elegies surprise with their directness of discourse, which exposes the unclad, often painful feelings and thoughts of the speaker, a man who is thinking about/talking to his lover (in “To D.D” and “The Hour”) or walking around his Odessa apartment, which he is about to leave (in “Meditation on the Day of Departure”). Each of the poems has irregular stanzas; like freely flowing monologues, they begin somewhere in the middle (without a defined beginning or an end), which gives them a typically Romantic fragmentary structure. The “Meditation,” dated: “1825, 29 October, Odessa,” the day Mickiewicz left the city for Moscow, stands out as the most intriguing and unusual of the three poems. It is a melancholic farewell to Odessa, where Mickiewicz spent almost nine months:

Cóż, choć miasto porzucę, choćby z oczu znikli
Mieszkańce, którzy do mnie sercem nie przywykli
Mój wyjazd nie okryje nikogo żałobą,
I ja nie chcę lży jednej zostawić za sobą, -

[Well, though I leave the city, if I lose sight of/ The residents, whose hearts did not warm to me / My departure will leave no one in mourning/ And I don't want to leave a single tear behind.]

The poet is only an unknown foreigner (“Tak ja nieznane imię, cudzoziemskie lice/
Nosilem przez te ludne place i ulice”) who passed through the city chased onward by

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240 Witkowska. Romantyzm, 272.
“strong winds” (“Znowu go wichry zedrę i dalej pogonią.”) Different images, such as: walking around the empty rooms to the rhythm of a ticking clock, aimlessly wandering through the streets, or seeing intrusive coachmen waiting to pick up his belongings are loosely connected with each other by the theme of departure. The memory of the tearful farewell when he left home is juxtaposed with the final image of his departure from Odessa: the poet, stripped of any illusions or hopes, feels like an old man whose coffin leaves town unnoticed by anyone (“Wsiadamy, nikt na drodze trumny nie zatrzyma,/ Nikt jej nie przeprowadzi, chociaż oczyma”). The fragmentary composition of an elegy without a defined beginning or an end perfectly illustrates the unknown hero/speaker’s temporary and aimless state of life, thus, reiterating his Romantic character. All these elegies written in 1825, with their first-person, freely flowing, natural discourse of the lyrical I, their irregular, fragmentary structure, and the theme of a man disillusioned with love and life, demonstrate that, despite being seemingly Classical works, they belong to the Romantic genre.

In Odessa, simultaneously with the elegies, Mickiewicz was writing Sonnets, which is considered one of the greatest achievements of Polish lyrical Romantic poetry. The book has two parts: the first called “Odessa” or “Love” sonnets and the second, The Crimean Sonnets. It presents a complex biography of a Romantic hero, yet there is an elegiac current present in some of the sonnets which can be traced to the “Odessa Elegies.” The twenty-two “Love sonnets” consist of two groups; the first (sonnets I-XII) are modeled on Petrarch and are devoted to the elegiac memories of an ideal, albeit suffering, Romantic love personified by “Laura.” However, the Romantic-poet-lover
who once believed in the ideal Laura, and “the marriage of two souls,” in the first part of the cycle, changes in the second to the opposite: a sarcastic Byronic narrator or salon dandy.

The second group (sonnets XIII-XXII), set in a salon or bedroom, conveys the experience and joys of an erotic, playful love, at which the narrator-dandy is an expert. Mickiewicz, much like Byron in *Beppo* and *Don Juan*, takes an ironic, at times even sarcastic, look at the social conventions of love and mercilessly exposes them. In the sonnet “To the Visitors” (“Do Wizytujących”) the narrator employs a didactic tone and teaches his interlocutor how to be a “good” guest when paying a visit at an inopportune time: upon entering, it is not enough to report about matters well known to everyone, such as where and with whom one is waltzing or dining, the price of grain, the weather or the disturbances in Greece, but if you find a couple entertaining each other you should carefully observe their behavior. If they sit far away from each other, check if everything is in place and that their clothes are in order. If the lady pretends to laugh and the gentlemen looks at his watch constantly but tries to be polite, you should greet them with “Farewell” and come back no earlier than a year later.

Even more revealing is the next sonnet “Farewell” (“Pożegnanie”) in which the speaker/poet, an expert in *ars amatoria* ponders why his lover is now rejecting him:

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Odpychasz mię? – czym twoje serce już postradał?
Lecz jam go nigdy nie miał; - czyli broni cnota?
Lecz ty pieścisz innego; - czy że nie dam złota?
Lecz jam go wprzódy nie dał, a ciebie posiadał.
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[Do you reject me? - have I lost your heart?/ But I never had it – does your virtue forbid it?/ You cherish another – because I gave no gold?/ But first I gave nothing, and yet I possessed you.]
Finally he discovers the truth, a “new greediness in her heart” ("Dziś odkrywam łakomstwo nowe w sercu twojem")—his lover now demands “poems of praise” ("pochwalnych wierszy chciałaś") and so she tortures him. But the poet concludes the sonnet with a statement that his Muse (poetry) is not for sale:

Nie kupić Muzy! W każdym śлизgałem się rymie,
Gdym szedł na Parnas z lauru wieńczyć cię zawojem,
I ten wiersz wraz mi stwardniał, żem wspomniał twe imię.

[Do not buy the Muse! I slipped with every rhyme/As I climbed on Parnassus to crown you with a laurel wreath,/And this poem harden, just as I recalled your name.]

This is not only an ironic rejection of the conventional salon poetry that praises a charming hostess, but is a rather blunt statement, presented in very suggestive language, that the only laurel she will receive from him is sexual satisfaction. It is a complement not only to the poet’s own sexual potential but more particularly to his own virtue: his poetic talent is too precious to be exchanged even for the most desirable favors of the woman, (which is an ironic comment on the lack of principles on her part). The belief that a poet’s Muse is not for sale evokes Pushkin’s well-known poem “Conversation Between Bookseller and Poet” ("Разговор книгопродавца с поэтом,” 1824). Even though the ending of Pushkin’s poem seems to be the opposite to that of Mickiewicz’s sonnet – as the poet agrees to sell his manuscript to a bookseller – still the argument of the “Conversation” is that if a poet wants to preserve his freedom he “writes from inspiration, not for pay” (“я писал/ Из вдохновенья, не из платы”). While Pushkin suggests that the mercantile age that he lives in requires some compromises in order to maintain his creative independence, Mickiewicz upholds the principle of his freedom as a poet without any reservations, at least in the context of the salon.
The self-seeking, even mercenary, attitude of women towards love is also the
subject of the next sonnet, Danaides. The title, which refers to the Greek king Danaus’ 50
daughters who married the 50 sons of king Aegyptus and killed their husbands on their
wedding night, is a somber reminder of female perfidiousness. The poet compares the
love of a long gone Golden Age—when a female heart could be satisfied with a bouquet
of wild flowers and a dove served as the messenger of a marriage proposal—with the
present Age of Silver, Bronze and Iron when times are much cheaper but women demand
ever higher payments: “The one whom I give gold, demands songs/ The one whom I give
heart demands my hand/ The one whom I extolled [in my songs], asks if I am rich.” He
cannot find any evidence of ideal love remaining in a woman’s heart, so his own heart
has been changed too:

Danaidy! Rzucałem w bezdeń waszej chęci
Dary, pieśni i we łzach roztropioną duszę;
Dziś z hojnego jam skąpy, z czulego szyderca.

[Danaids! I have thrown in the bottomless well of your desires/Gifts, songs, and a soul
melting in tears; /Today I turn from generous to miser, from tender to scoffer.]

The abyss of woman’s desire transformed the poet from “[a] generous [person] into a
miser.” He was once a tender lover, but now he is a scoffer (“szyderca”), an ironic
observer and participant in love-games whose heart remains indifferent and cold (“Lecz
dawniej wszystko dałbym, dziś wszystko - prócz serca”). The transformation of the poet-
narrator is completed in the last sonnet of the cycle: “Ekskuza” (“An Excuse”), which
follows “Danaides:” in a gesture of total disillusionment with himself and his audience

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250 Dzisiaj wieki są tańsze, a droższe zapłaty.
Ta, której złoto daję, prosi o piosenki;
Ta, której serce daję, żądała mej ręki;
Ta, którą opiewałem, pyta, czym bogaty.
(“Taki wieszcz, jaki słuchacz”) the poet breaks the strings of his lyre and throws it into Lethe, the river of forgetfulness and oblivion.

Most of Mickiewicz’s contemporary readers considered the second half of the book, *The Crimean Sonnets*, to be his finest poetic achievement and treated it independently from the “Love sonnets” cycle. Many critics, both Polish and Russian, simply ignored the second half of the “Love sonnets” cycle, as the overtly erotic content and complicated, sarcastic hero-narrator offended their Romantic sensibility. The Traveler-Pilgrim-Poet who wanders through exotic Crimea on a journey of self-discovery responded to all Romantic expectations. However, the “Love sonnets” cycle is necessary to fully understand and appreciate the hero of *The Crimean Sonnets*. As Czesław Zgorzelski observed, “the sonnet ‘Danaides’ does not represent the final phase of the hero/narrator’s evolution,” rather, “it continues into *The Crimean Sonnets*.”251 In fact, the hero of the love sonnets constitutes the first part of biography of the Traveler who begins his journey in the Crimea with a “Byronic sardonic smile of disbelief.”252 The connection between the seemingly different heroes of the *Sonnets* is symbolically underlined in the last sonnet of each cycle: the lyre thrown away by the poet in the final sonnet “An Excuse” is picked up in the final sonnet of the Crimean cycle when the poet re-discovers his identity.

The hero of *The Crimean Sonnets*, an unnamed Traveler-Pilgrim-Poet journeying through the Oriental East, and the beauty of the poems’ innovative poetic language contributed hugely to the image of Mickiewicz as a great Romantic poet in the eyes of his contemporaries.

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252 Ibid.
Russian contemporaries. Nevertheless, a strong elegiac current is still present in some of the Crimean Sonnets, particularly in “Bakhchisarai” (“Bakczysaraj,”) “Ruiny zamku w Bałakławie” (“Ruins of Castle in Balaklav”) or “Grób Potockiej” (“Potocki’s Grave”). The sonnets offer an existential meditation on how short-lived and fragile the symbols of human creation and power are—nothing but ruins are left of the Crimean Khans’ palace (in “Bakhchisarai”) or of the once mighty fortress of Balaklav. “Potocki’s Grave” brings thoughts on passing time and life closer to home. As Mickiewicz explains in a commentary, according to local legend the “monument was build by Kerim Girai [eighteenth-century Crimean khan] for his slave, a Polish woman from the Potocki family whom he loved very much.” Mickiewicz is well aware that in Russia the legend is well-known but that the woman’s nationality is questioned; in the commentary to the sonnet he argues against Muravev-Apostol’s assentation made in his Journey Through the Tauride in 1820 (Путешествие по Тавриде в 1820 году, 1823) where he claims that the woman was not Polish but Georgian. Mickiewicz writes: “I don’t know what [facts] he [Muravev] based his opinion on; an objection that in the mid-eighteen century Mongols would find it difficult to take a Potocki woman into captivity proved insufficient.” He further explains that in Ukraine there are many less prominent Polish noble families with a Potocki name and that the woman could have been one of them. To support his claim Mickiewicz refers his readers to Pushkin’s work pointing out that “the uniquely talented Russian poet wrote a poem titled ‘The Fountain of Bakhchisarai’ based on the same folk legend.” Indeed, Maria, the captive woman in Pushkin’s poem is Polish and Mickiewicz’s character shares many similarities with her, also significantly, a longing for her native country. In “Potocki’s Grave” Mickiewicz turns his eyes to the stars which
point the direction to Poland and imagines how the tragic “Polish woman” also once gazed at the heavens and wishes to be buried next to her, so that he can hear their native language, because fellow Polish “travelers often talk near your grave” (“Podróżni często przy twym rozmawiają grobie”). Thoughts about a distant native country connect “Potocki’s Grave” with the one of the main themes of the Sonnets: the poet’s separation from his longed for Lithuania.

Sonnets then reveals the two sides of the Byronic character: the sarcastic narrator of “Love sonnets” whose mockery exposes the empty conventions of the society in which Mickiewicz’s readers live and the Traveler-Pilgrim who rejects that same society and, full of contradictions and self-doubt, sets off on a journey of self-discovery through the exotic Crimea à la Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage. The ultimate transformation of the Traveler-Pilgrim into a Romantic Poet (in the final sonnet “Ajudah”) solidified Mickiewicz’s own image as that of a great Romantic, Byron-like poetic figure in Russia. Critical responses to The Crimean Sonnets, which I will analyze in the second part of this chapter, demonstrate that contemporary Russians not only considered Mickiewicz’s work as a major achievement of Romantic poetry but also perceived the Polish poet as equal to the English bard.

Mickiewicz continued to develop the Byronic hero in the second major work of his Russian period, Konrad Wallenrod. The title character of Konrad Wallenrod is considered the most Byronic of Mickiewicz’s heroes but it was the seemingly secondary figure of Halban, Wallenrod’s inseparable companion who became a model of the national poet in Polish Romantic literature. Mickiewicz referred to Halban as “wajdelota,” (an old Lithuanian bard/singer), and modeled him on Homer, but also on
Osian and the Russian Boian. Halban takes center stage when he performs a song called “Tale of the Bard” (“Powieść wajdeloty”), which constitutes the central element of the narrative structure, and also serves to define the mission of the national poet according to Mickiewicz.

Halban’s performance takes place during a solemn banquet given by Wallenrod as the Grand Master of the Order for Teutonic knights, and the Lithuanian prince Witold who, “Once was their foe, now is the guest of the Order/Allied with them against Lithuania” (“Dawniej by był wrogiem, dziś gościem Zakonu./Przeciwko Litwie sojuszem związany.”) Wallenrod invites wajdelota to entertain the Lithuanian guests, pretending in front of the German knights that he does not understand the Lithuanian language, but still he “likes the sound of Lithuanian song,” as much as he likes “the sound of the surging waves/or gentle ripple of a spring rain” (“Jak lubię łańcuch rozłuczanego fal/włozikutego wiosennego deszczu”). The association of a poet’s voice with the sound of water is identical with the description of Ovid’s voice in Pushkin’s “The Gypsies”: “he had a marvelous gift of songs/and voice, like ripple of water” (“Имел он песен дивный дар/И голос, шуму вод подобный”). Pushkin himself takes inspiration from Dante’s description of Virgil’s voice. In Pushkin’s paradigm, a water-like-sounding voice is synonymous with divinely inspired ancient poet-bards such as Ovid or Virgil.253 In Konrad Wallenrod, the sound of Halban’s voice endows his character with greater depth: he is a divinely inspired poet-bard like Ovid in Pushkin’s paradigm, but he is also Walter-Wallenrod’s guide and mentor, as Virgil was for Dante. Prompted by Wallenrod, the old bard first sings an introduction, (“Pieść wajdeloty”), in which he explains the significance, the meaning of his art:

O wieść gminna! ty arko przymierza
Między dawnymi i młodszymi laty:
W tobie lud składa broń swego rycerza,
Swych myśli przędzę i swych uczuć kwiaty.
Arko! tyś żadnym niezłamana ciosem,
Póki cię własny twój lud nie znieważy;
O pieśni gminna, ty stoisz na straży
Narodowego pamiętka kościoła,
Z archanielskimi skrzydłami i głosem –
Ty czasem dzierżysz i miecz archaniola.

[O native song! between the elder day,
Ark of the Covenant, and younger times,
Wherein their heroes’ swords the people lay,
Their flowers of thought and web of native rhymes.
Thou ark! no stroke can break thee or subdue,
While thine own people hold thee not debased.
O native song! thou art as guardian placed,
Defending memories of a nation’s word.
The Archangel’s wings are thine, his voice thine too,
And often wieldest thou Archangel’s sword.]^{254}

The folk song/poetry (“wieść gminna”) functions as the “ark of the covenant” between
the past and the present; it is a depository of national courage, thoughts and feelings. As
the guardian of “national memories” the folk song is indestructible as long as it is “not
desecrated” (“nie znieważy”) by its own people, that is, as long as it is not forgotten. The
folk/national song also speaks with the voice of an archangel, and, like St. Michael,
wields the sword in defense of God’s people and brings just defeat to their enemies.

Having thus defined the role of national poetry, which ultimately rests in his own hands,
wajdelota proceeds to describe his own mission as a poet:

Gdybym był zdolny własne ognie przelać
W piersi słuchaczów i wskrzesić postaci
Zmarłej przeszłości; gdybym umiał strzelać

^{254} Translated by Maude Ashurst Biggs, *Konrad Wallenrod. A Historical Poem by Adam Mickiewicz.*
Brzmiącymi słowy do serca spóbraci:
Może by jeszcze w tej jednej chwili,
Kiedy ich piosnka ojczysta poruszy,
Uczuł w sobie dawne serca bicie,
Uczuł w sobie dawną wielkość duszy
I chwilę jedną tak górnę przeżyli,
Jak ich przodka niegdyś całe życie

[O could I but this fire of mine impart
To all my hearers’ breasts, the shapes upraise
Of those dead times, and reach the very heart
Of all my brothers with my burning lays!
But haply even in this passing hour,
Now when their native song their hearts can move,
The pulses of those hearts may beat more strong,
Their souls may feel the ancient pride and love;
And live one moment in such noble power,
As lived their forefathers their whole life long.]²⁵⁵

The bard’s mission, the purpose of his singing, is to instill in the hearts of his fellow
countrymen the “past heartbeat and greatness of the [nation’s] soul,” so “at least for a
moment they will live as nobly as their ancestors lived all their life.” The passage begins
with the conditional, “If I could only…” because the Lithuanian bard addresses his song
not only to Wallenrod (to remind him of his mission), but also to prince Witold and to his
warriors who shamelessly beg for German assistance in fighting the internal, Lithuanian
enemies who have captured Vilnius.

After the introductory “Song of the Bard” the narrator explains that wajdelota will
now change his song from a “hymn to a simple tale” on a different subject, “changing his
voice to a much slower cadence/hitting the strings [of his lyre] lighter and fewer times.”
In this way Mickiewicz tells his readers about the poetic hexameter which they have
never read or heard before in the Polish language. In fact, the “Tale of the Bard” was the
first successful instance of the transplantation of the Homeric meter into Polish poetry,

²⁵⁵ Ibid.
and, “because of its faithfulness to the ancient original, Mickiewicz’s hexameter has been
named classical,” in the history of Polish versification.\(^{256}\) Such an achievement was
possible not only because of Mickiewicz’s knowledge of language theory and of the
history of Polish poetry, but also thanks to his excellent knowledge of Homer and other
ancient authors. Mickiewicz, anticipating surprise and possibly criticism from his
prospective readers, provides in a footnote a detailed explanation not of why he used
hexameters (as he does not “wish to prejudice the reader’s own opinion”), but rather how
he used Greek meter in his Polish poem. He gives samples of his verse with the
appropriate stress pattern, explaining that he replaced the spondee used in the original
Greek with the trochee, and occasionally the dactyl with antibacchius. The poet also
refers his readers to a well-known work on Polish prosody, *Polish Prosody that is about
Melodiousness and Meters of the Polish Language with examples in musical notes
(Prozodia polska czyli o śpiewności i miarach języka polskiego z przykładami w nótach
muzycznych*, 1821) by the Neoclassical critic and theoretician Józef Królikowski, who
laid out the theoretical foundations of hexameter in the Polish language, which
Mickiewicz brilliantly realized in *Konrad Wallenrod*.

The “Tale of the Bard” is an epic story about Konrad Wallenrod’s past as much as
it is about Halban-wajdelota himself. Halban sings about a Lithuanian man kidnapped as
a little child by German knights, who changed the boy’s identity by giving him the
German name Walter with the surname Alf, and raised him in their Christian faith as a
future knight. However, from the beginning of Walter’s captivity, an old Lithuanian bard,
(also a captive who once served as a translator for the Teutonic knights), takes care of

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him, secretly “telling him about the beauty of Lithuania, refreshing his longing soul/with endearments, the sound of native tongue and song.” The old man (the reader quickly realizes that it is Halban himself) restores and preserves Walter’s true Lithuanian identity and at the same time instills in his heart a deep hatred of the Germans and an even deeper desire for vengeance. The bard also teaches the boy how to defeat the powerful enemy:

“You are a slave, the only weapon of slaves is deceit” (“Tyś niewolnik, jedyna broń niewolników – podstępy”), a lesson that determines the tragic fate of Konrad Wallenrod as well as of future generations of Poles who follow his path. As a young man Walter, now a German warrior, takes the first opportunity to defect with Halban to the Lithuanian side where they are welcomed by Prince Kiejstut. Walter falls in love and marries the Prince’s beautiful daughter, Aldona, but their happiness ends soon: the German army grows in strength and continues to devastate Lithuania despite the courageous efforts of Kiejstut, Walter, and their troops. The hero can no longer “find happiness at home, because there was no happiness in his homeland.” The “Tale of the Bard” ends with Walter (who is about to once again change his identity, this time to Konrad Wallenrod) leaving his beloved wife and country and departing with his inseparable companion Halban to execute the treacherous plan to defeat the enemy.

Of course, this brief summary does not do justice to the bard’s song, which brings back to life the might of Lithuanian warriors of old and movingly conveys the tragic fate of the hero. Nor does it do justice to Mickiewicz’s poetic talent: the hexameter he uses functions not only as a metric reincarnation of an old epic folk tale, but also skillfully

creates an illusion for the bard’s listeners (and readers) that the events in Wallenrod’s earlier life occurred centuries earlier than the rest of the story that Mickiewicz describes. Moreover, the very content of the “Tale of the Bard” validates Halban’s assertions about the role of national poetry and the mission of the national poet: his “resounding words fired at young Walter’s heart,” awaken his identity and transform him into a brave Lithuanian warrior who renounces his personal happiness for the sake of his country. However, the real power of Halban-wajdelotā’s art is revealed in the reaction of his audience. The song about the “glorious deeds of Lithuanian heroes,” awakens Prince Witold’s consciousness; he and his knights secretly disappear after the banquet and on their way back to Lithuania raid and defeat many German forts, thus, “putting the powerful Teutonic Order to shame.”

The ultimate “triumph of Halban-wajdelotā’s creative power” materializes when his song, like “the sword of the Archangel Michael,” descends on the Teutonic Order in the person of Konrad Wallenrod. As the Grand Master, Wallenrod leads the powerful armies of united Christian Europe to total defeat at the hands of the pagan Lithuanians. In reality, poetry is also transformed into deeds: first in Mickiewicz’s work, and then during the first days of the November uprising in Warsaw when young insurgents wrote on the city walls, *The Word became flesh, and Wallenrod became Belweder* (Słowo stało się cialem, a Wallenrod Belwederem). This slogan, the first part of which is a quotation from the Gospel of John (1:14), gives Mickiewicz’s work, “an

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259 Belweder (Itl. Belvedere) is the name of a place in Warsaw, which from 1818 was the residence of the Russian Grand Duke Constantine. The November Uprising began with the attack on Belweder during the night of November 30, 1830.
overtly religious consecration of a poetry transformed into action. Poland became a
country of poetry literally incarnated.” By creating Halban-wajdelota, Mickiewicz
defined for himself (and for future generations) the role of national poetry and the
national poet: “it is not a creation of a collective national tradition but a creation of one
individual, in whose heart the spirit of the whole nation lives.” Henceforth such an
individual would be called a “wieszcz” (national bard) in Poland. For Russian readers the
sound and meaning of Polish “veshch” (“wieszcz”) could easily bring to mind the
familiar figure of the ancient national bard “veshchi Boian” (“вещий Боян”) from The
Tale of Igor’s Campaign (Слово о полку Игореве.) In the history of Polish literature, the
term wieszcz was used by Wallenrod and the narrator in reference to Halban, but since
then has been applied to Mickiewicz, and later to Słowacki and Krasiński, the greatest of
Poland’s national poets.

Mickiewicz’s evolution towards Romanticism was based on, “skillful selection
rather than a total elimination of the achievements of the past.” Mickiewicz was able to
appropriate “certain proprieties of Classicism such as poetic discipline and versification,
an inclination towards poetic genres favored by Classicism particularly philosophically–
historical, and epically-descriptive long poems and tales” and give them a new
Romantic content and program of beliefs and values. Simultaneously with the evolution
of the poetic discourse, Mickiewicz’s poetic persona, the poet-narrator, was also

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260 See Janion, Życie pośmiertne Konrada Wallenroda, 198. “Trudno bardziej udostojnić Konrada
Wallenroda, nadać mu wyższą, religijną wprost sakrę przekształcenia poezji w czyn. Polska stawała się
krajem dosłownie ucieleśnionej poezji.”

261 Kleiner. Ibid. 73.

262 Alina Witkowska, Romantyzm, 237.

263 Ibid.
undergoing a transformation from the Sentimental-elegiac lyrical I, through the reflective philosophical Traveler-Pilgrim, and to the powerful national bard. However, even in *Konrad Wallenrod*—the most Romantic of his works, Mickiewicz remains faithful to his belief that the true Classical models, i.e., ancient Greek poetry and Homer’s epic, are the foundation of Romantic poetry, (as is seen in Homeric figure of Halban and his “Tale” which is delivered in hexameter.)

In the second part of this chapter I will argue that it was this unique combination of modern Romantic and Classical tradition merged in one poet that prompted his Russian contemporaries to perceive Mickiewicz as their poetic Other. In a way, Mickiewicz’s work embodied in one Romantic unity, elements of different literary currents and ideas, which in the context of Russian literary battles of the 1820s were opposites fighting each other: Classicism and Romanticism, national history, folk tradition, and Western European ancient and modern literary models. The Polish poet’s reception in Russia shows how Russian poets and critics used Mickiewicz as a point of reference in order to validate their own, very different, often contradictory literary positions – from Viazemsky’s ardent Byronism, through Polevoy’s *narodnyi* (based on Russian tradition) Romanticism to Shevyrev and brothers Kireevskys’ “poetry of thought.” I will thus seek to demonstrate how Russians were able to use Mickiewicz’s multifarious body of work and his poetic personality as a multi-dimensional mirror in which they could see reflections of their own poetic identities; a mirror that in a larger sense reflected all the complexities and paradoxes of Russian literature of that time.

During the transition period towards Romanticism many Russian poets and critics took Mickiewicz as the model of the Romantic poet and frequently compared him to Byron. In a variety of sources, including reviews of his works, memoirs, and poems dedicated to Mickiewicz, which I will examine in this chapter, contemporary Russians discuss the Polish poet and his work in relation to Byron claiming that he is as great, if not greater, than his English predecessor. Yet they were careful to stress his Slavic, Polish, and Lithuanian roots, and to note that his poetry was written in Polish, which Russians viewed as a “brotherly Slavic language,” thus creating his image as the “Slavic Byron.” Russians found their Romantic Other in Mickiewicz as the “Slavic Byron”, the poet whose image reflected, and thus helped them to see and define, their own Romantic identities, precisely because they felt a closer cultural affinity to him and his poetry than to the English bard’s image and works.

Mickiewicz was perfect for this role not only because he was a Polish-Lithuanian poet but also because of his own role in the transition from Classicism to Romanticism in Polish literature. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, the elegiac theme of longing for the lost homeland (Lithuania/Poland) in Crimean Sonnets drew the attention of Pushkin who used it in creating the image of Mickiewicz as his poetic Other. In Pushkin’s paradigm of the two opposite creative personalities bard vs. prophet, the elegiac current of the Sonnets situates Mickiewicz close to Ovid, the model of the ancient poet-bard who laments his separation from his beloved Rome. Significantly, while

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casting Mickiewicz as an Ovid-like, ancient poet-bard, Pushkin places himself alongside Byron, in the opposite category, of the modern, stern poet-prophet. Pushkin’s designation of Mickiewicz as poetic personality opposite to Byron, (who was universally perceived as the model of a Romantic poet), suggest that Pushkin did not perceive Mickiewicz as a modern Romantic. However, other Russians seized on various Classical models present in Mickiewicz’s poetry to demonstrate just how Romantic the Polish poet was. Such a composite image of Mickiewicz reflected their own poetic identities, which were not one-dimensional either. All these different perceptions of the Polish poet had one common denominator: whether they saw him as great as Byron (like Polevoy or Shevyrev), or as a Slavic Bryon like Viazemsky, or whether they argued that Mickiewicz could not, should not be compared to Byron (or anyone else for that matter) like Baratynsky and Nadezhdin, it appears that the great English poet was the only standard against which, the Russians believed, that Mickiewicz could be compared.

The eagerness to hail Mickiewicz as a Romantic poet equal to Byron is very much visible in a lengthy review of the *Sonnets* by Viazemsky, published in the *Moscow Telegraph* at the end of April 1827. As one of the most ardent proponents of Romanticism in Russia, Viazemsky, unlike Pushkin, was not interested in Mickiewicz’s creative personality modeled on ancient poet-bards such as Ovid and Homer, rather he was focused on creating an unequivocally Romantic image of the Polish poet.

Viazemsky’s ardent promotion of Mickiewicz as a “Slavic” Byron and of *The Crimean Sonnets* as a “Slavic brand” of Byronism reveals just how much the development of early Russian Romanticism differed from similar processes in Germany, England and France. Russians were well-versed in the works of the brothers Schlegel and their circle, the

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poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth, and the writings of Madame de Staël and Chateaubriand, which laid the foundation for Romanticism in Western Europe. However, while these Western writers considered various Romantic discourses and genres as the means to express key ideological concepts such as the metaphysics of consciousness to nation and history, the early Russian Romantics were in an entirely different position than their European contemporaries: they entered the literary scene in the midst of the battle between the Classicists and Romantics. Thus they sought first to emulate the already well-developed Western Romantic models beginning with language and genre, developing their own forms of elegy, ballads, and tales in verse. Viazemsky seized the opportunity to present Mickiewicz and *The Crimean Sonnets* to Russian readers as their own, Slavic phenomenon, thus implying that Romanticism was as well established in Russia as anywhere else, and could be considered European literature. Viazemsky’s desire to promote *The Crimean Sonnets* as part of Russian literature could suggest that Russia did not yet have enough adequate examples of truly Romantic poetry, even though just three years earlier the same critic praised Pushkin’s *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* and *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* for their Byronic (Romantic) qualities. However, by the time Mickiewicz appeared on the Russian literary scene in 1826/1827 Pushkin had already moved beyond his so-called “Byronic phase,” i.e., the period when he wrote “Southern Pomes;” Viazemsky’s eagerness to promote *The Crimean Sonnets* as a Slavic (Russian) brand of Byronism, suggests that perhaps Pushkin did not satisfy all the needs and expectations of his readers and critics, expectations that could now be carried through by Mickiewicz as the “Slavic” Byron.
Viazemsky was well aware of the fact that he was introducing Mickiewicz and his work for the first time to a larger Russian audience: at this point Mickiewicz was known among the literary circles of journals and salons, but very few people could understand and appreciate his Polish language Sonnets: “there may be fifty readers who are able to appreciate their value.” That is why Viazemsky provided his own prose translations of only two love sonnets but all of the Crimea Sonnets, because “in each of them one can find integral beauty.” In fact most of the review is focused on the Crimea cycle in the context of Byron’s work and a comparison between Mickiewicz and the English poet. Viazemsky’s review of The Prisoner of The Caucasus was also based on similarities of Pushkin’s text with Child Harold, but significantly, in his article on The Crimean Sonnets the critic goes into the Byron-Mickiewicz comparison much more extensively and more intensely then he does with Pushkin.

Presenting Mickiewicz and his Sonnets, Viazemsky takes the opportunity to point out the need for a closer relationship between Polish and Russian literature: “Polish and Russian journals are given the duty of preparing preliminary measures for a greater family intimacy.” The critic goes so far as to suggest that Russians should learn Polish, “it would help them to study their native language,” because Polish, “preserved many ancestral characteristics we have lost.” By stressing the closeness of the Polish and Russian languages, literatures, and traditions, Viazemsky creates a context in which he presents Mickiewicz and his work not as foreign, but as a poet who is very close to the

266 Ibid., 191. Изящное произведение одного из первоклассных поэтов Польши, напечатано в Москве, где может быть, пятьдесят читателей в состоянии узнать ему цену.

267 Ibid., 193. Журналам Польским и Русским предоставлена обязанность изготовить предварительные меры семейного сближения.

268 Ibid., 192. Изучение Польского языка могло быть бы вспомогательным дополнением к изучению языка отечественного. Многие родовые черты, сохраняющиеся у соседей, утрачены нами;
Russians, almost one of them: “our tribesman” (“наш соплеменник”). Moreover, *Crimean Sonnets* describe the experience of the author’s journey through “our poetic peninsula” (“по нашему поэтическому полуострову”) thus, the subject of the book should not be foreign to Russian readers.

Viazemsky presents *Crimean Sonnets* as “poetic travel memoirs” in the fashion of Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and states “that some of the Polish sonnets equal the best stanzas of the English bard,” but he quickly adds that this does not mean that Mickiewicz imitates him (“Из этого не следует, что наш соплеменник подражал ему”). Viazemsky draws a distinction between imitation and influence and explains that if Byron’s poetry influenced *Crimean Sonnets* it is because his influence is omnipresent:

> Poetry of the Scottish bard is a star of our time, and like a beam of daylight it penetrates imperceptibly, or better to say, undetectably, where the effects of its rays are not obvious, nor possible to detect. It seems that in our century it is impossible for a poet not to resound with Byron, as it is impossible for a novelist not to resound with W. Scott, no matter how great and even original his talent may be, and no matter how different his calling and his means are, offered or chosen by each, by circumstances or free will.

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269 Ibid., 195.

270 It seems that Viazemsky treats Crimea as part of the Russian empire, despite the history of the Crimean Tatars and their claims to the land, an assertion somewhat surprising in the context of his vehement opposition to Pushkin’s praise of Russia’s conquest of the Caucasus in the epilogue of *Prisoner of the Caucasus*.

271 Ibid.

272 Ibid., 195. Поэзия Шотландского Барда, светило нашего века, как светило дня проникает нечувствительно, или лучше сказать, не исследуемо, и туда где неощутительно, неочевидно непосредственное действие лучей его… Кажется, в нашем веке невозможно поэту не отозваться Байроном, как романисту не отозваться В. Скоттом, как ни будь велико и даже оригинально дарование, и как ни различествует поприще и средства, предоставленные или избранные каждым из них, по обстоятельствам или воле.
According to Viazemsky, unnoticeable power of Byron’s poetry, in a mysterious way, reveals that which is hidden in the innermost secret places of the human being. The omnipresent nature of Byron’s poetry has an impact on contemporary poets whether they like it or not, yet, such a dependence on Byron is not an imitation of the English poet, but an accord/ harmony accessible to a few select geniuses:

Such fellow feeling and harmony should not be called an imitation; on the contrary, it is an unconscious, but lofty agreement [стачка] (I can’t find a better word to call it) of geniuses, who, though different from their peers and set in the creative sphere designated for them by Providence, still are to a certain extent driven by the common spirit of time and by some spatial and temporal functions.

Viazemsky describes the Mickiewicz–Byron connection as a deep kind of harmonious understanding (“сочувствие” and “согласие”). Therefore, the Crimean Sonnets are not an imitation of the English poet’s work; on the contrary, Mickiewicz’s poetry demonstrates an involuntary, but at the same time elevated, encounter of two geniuses: “невольная, но возвышенная стачка гениев.” In a footnote Viazemsky explains that “стачка” is a legal term that signifies consent, accord, harmony (“согласие”). The encounter of two geniuses of Mickiewicz and Byron’s stature is facilitated by the fact that, despite the differences between them and their contemporaries, both poets are subjected to (or depend on) the common spirit of the time (“общему духу времени”). Moreover, Byron and Mickiewicz, as members of the highest category of elevated, sublime people (“люди возвышенные”) perceive the spirit of the time before everybody else. Ordinary people (“посредственные люди”) are oblivious to that inspiration and,

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273 Ibid. Такое сочувствие, согласие нельзя называть подражанием; оно напротив, невольная, но возвышенная стачка (не умею вернее назвать) гениев, которые, как ни отличаются от сверстников своих, как ни зиждительны в очерке действия, проведенном вокруг их Провидением, но все в некотором отношении подвластны общему духу времени и движимы в силу каких–то местных и срочных законов.
therefore, in order to understand the world they live in and, what is even more important, to understand their own inner selves, they need a poet like Byron and, by extension, a poet like Mickiewicz. As Viazemsky puts it, “Byron did not create himself [as a poet]: at the time he was chosen to explain man to himself.”

Viazemsky credits Byron with creating a language that was able to describe and convey to his Romantic generation concepts/ideas (“понятия”) and feelings/emotions (“чувства”) that remained hidden and undiscovered until his time. By stressing the closeness and similarities between Mickiewicz and Byron, Viazemsky assures his readers that Crimean Sonnets will have the same kind of influence on them as the poetry of the English bard, i.e., open a whole new Romantic realm of emotions and understanding of reality.

Viazemsky’s long analysis of Byron and his work and Mickiewicz’s affinity with him reveals a clear, if one-sided image of the Polish poet: Mickiewicz, like Byron is a poetic genius, a great Romantic poet, who perceives the need for a new kind of poetry, who recognizes the new Romantic spirit of his time. Russian readers need Mickiewicz if they want to understand this spirit of the new era in literature; if they want to understand themselves they should read Crimean Sonnets. Viazemsky’s praise of Mickiewicz is not only a tribute to the Polish poet, but at the same time an opportunity to advance his goal: the triumph of Romanticism in Russia. The single-mindedness of the critic is visible not only in his creation of the image of Mickiewicz as an unequivocally Romantic poet, but also in his selective treatment of the Sonnets.

Significantly, Viazemsky translated all of the Crimean Sonnets but only two of the love sonnets, “Morning and Evening” (“Ranek i wieczór”) and “Resignation” (“Rezygnacja”). Both are about memories of ideal love, and the sadness and resignation

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274 Байрон не изобрел своего рода: он вовремя избран был толмачом человека с самим собою.
of the rejected lover. Viazemsky acknowledges the existence of the theme of earthly and playful salon love, but only with a brief comment:

The sonnets of Monsieur Mickiewicz are divided into two parts: in the first one there are twenty two, that belong to Petrarch’s erotic sonnets kind, though some of them are more satiric, like, for instance Do wizytujących, Pożegnanie, Danaidy (To the Visitors, Farewell, Danaids); but even there love seems to be the prevailing feeling. The one who mocks women, who is angry with them, loves them.\textsuperscript{275}

Viazemsky does not really differentiate between the two kinds of love and the two very different images of the Romantic lover; he notes only that in some poems, the poet’s attitude towards love is “satirical” (“с сатирическим уклонением”), while in fact it is much more than that. The selective translation of two love sonnets and the omission of all the erotic poems (which were approved by the scrupulous censorship before publication of Mickiewicz’s book in Moscow), deprives Russian readers of the other side of the poet-narrator’s personality. It is significant that such an ardent reader of both Byron and Mickiewicz (as Viazemsky was), fails to acknowledge that the poet-narrator’s posture of Byronic sarcasm indicates a transformation from the Romantic-poet-lover who once believed in the ideal love. The transformation of the poet-narrator in the love sonnets constitutes an important part of the biography of the Traveler-Pilgrim in Crimean cycle.

Viazemsky was uninterested, or simply unwilling, to note the complexities of the hero of the *Sonnets* and instead focused his review of *Crimean Sonnets* on highlighting the typical Romantic image of the lonely Pilgrim-Poet traveling through the exotic Orient à la Byron’s *Childe Harold*. Such a selective approach allowed Viazemsky to create a

\textsuperscript{275} Ibid., 194. Сонеты Г–на Мицкевича разделены на две части: в первой, двадцать два, принадлежат к роду эротических сонетов Петрарки, хотя есть в них иные с сатирическим уклонением, как например: Do wizytujących, Pożegnanie, Danaidy (Посетителям, Прощание, Данаиды); но и тут любовь кажется чувством господствующим. Кто насмехается над женщинами, кто на них сердится, тот их любит.
well-defined image of Mickiewicz as the Romantic Poet—as the poetic Other. *Crimean Sonnets*, like Byron’s works, convey the experience of the poet who travels through exotic lands; however, this is not the poetry of a distant, “foreign” English bard, but the poetry of “our tribesman” (who came from a country that was part of the Russian empire) written in a language that is close to Russian, and thus, it is a Romantic poetry to which all Russians can relate. Understandably, Viazemsky did not want to distort that image by discussing the irony and sarcasm of the erotic sonnets. Also, as Viazemsky’s own lack of understanding of the hero’s enigmatic behavior at the end of *Prisoner of Caucasus* demonstrates (the Prisoner calmly watching as his Caucasian lover drowns herself in the river), the Russian audience was not yet ready for all the ambiguities and complexities of the Romantic character. The image of Mickiewicz in the Crimean wilderness is the image of the Romantic poet *par excellence*, a “Slavic Byron,” that Russian literature needed during the tumultuous period of transition in the second half of the 1820s.

The desire of Russian proponents of Romanticism to present Mickiewicz as a “Slavic Byron” and thus strengthen their position in the literary battles with the Classical camp becomes apparent in the context of a polemical article written in response to Viazemsky’s review by Nikolai Nadezhdin and published in *Herald of Europe*[^276]. After 1820, the journal headed by Mikhail Kachanovsky was the organ of the most conservative writers and critics who ardently opposed any Romantic innovations, particularly Byronism. In his polemics with Viazemsky, Nadezhdin is faithful to the journal’s line; however his own aesthetic-philosophical ideas represented a curious combination of Classical rhetorical taste for clarity and precision with Romantic

ideology of national uniqueness, which also could be seen in the program of Shishkov, and the “young archaists,” such as Griboedov and Küchelbecker. Therefore, Nadezhdin, while arguing against Russian Byronism, rejects the notion that Mickiewicz must be defined by Byron.

Nadezhdin directs his criticism most strongly against the idea that all contemporary poetry must be written in the spirit of Byron because his influence is so omnipresent. He ridicules Viazemsky’s metaphorical description of Byron’s poetry as the “light of the age” which “like a beam of daylight, unnoticeably penetrates all distinctive substances and in a mysterious way reveals that which is hidden in the innermost secret places.” According to Nadezhdin this description lacks clarity as it is full of inconsistencies and he ironically asks: “where exactly and what does this light of our age penetrate? And if this light of our age operates in a secret, unnoticeable manner in unknown places where it cannot be seen, how can it be observed at all? What are these distinctive, mysterious substances and what is their chemical affinity with Byron’s poetry?” For Nadezhdin, Viazemsky’s article is typical Romantic jabber:

This is the usual habit of the alleged Romanticists, who do not want or can’t explain the ideas to themselves and convey them in a suitable light... So it’s all a chaos of dark, contradictory ideas, and as such a heap of words and expressions that are mixed without any meaning, and by sheer luck, just some glimpses of the author’s ambition appear. 277

Nadezhdin does not criticize Byron directly; he aims his attack at Viazemsky’s fascination with the English poet and his influence on Russian poetry. Viazemsky and others who share his views are, according to Nadezhdin, “imaginary/alleged Romantics”

277 Ibid., 283-284. Это обыкновенная замашка мнимых романтиков, которые не хотят или не могут прояснить для себя идей и представить их в надлежащем свете... Так во всем хаос понятий темных, противоречивых, в сей куче слов и выражений, набросанных без связи, на удачу, прорываются только искорки авторского самолюбия.
(“мнимых романтиков”) who are unable to clarify for themselves their own ideas and thus, are unable to present them in an appropriate manner. Viazemsky, while speaking about the significance of Byron’s poetry, uses language and the imagery that represents his Romantic generation: this is the very language that illuminates the innermost-self, the dark side of human nature, feelings and emotions, often contradictory, which so far remained unidentified and unnamed. For Nadezhdin such a discourse is a chaos of dark, contradictory ideas (“хаос понятий темных, противоречивых”) randomly thrown at readers, which represents nothing but the pride of its author. Of course, Viazemsky’s remark that, “the influence of the age reaches at first people of the highest mind and only later ordinary people,” only testifies to that pride.

At the same time Nadezhdin does recognize the importance and value of poets like Byron and Mickiewicz and readily accepts their status as poetic geniuses. He argues however, that Mickiewicz deserves treatment as a poet in his own right, not only, as Viazemsky proposed, in relation to Byron. Nadezhdin points out that Viazemsky tries to elevate Mickiewicz to the status of a “poetic genius” by proving that Crimean Sonnets are not an imitation of Byron, but a testimony to “an elevated encounter of two poetic geniuses.” Nadezhdin rejects the argument that poetry of the present time requires from all poets subordination to only one of them, i.e., to Byron:

And is it possible to subjugate a genius? But this is, we are told, the demand of our century’s Poetry. Have we reached the top of everybody’s ideal and set a border to man’s aspirations? Is it really that in the sphere of
Poetry all the refined sources have dried up, and have all the paths to them been opened, so that a genius has nothing left to create?  

According to Nadezhdin one poetic genius cannot be subordinated to another one by the virtue of his nature. Poetic genius is unique, free, and does not bend to anyone’s will or influence and the supposition that it could is against Nature itself: “Such a suggestion does not agree with the course of Nature, nor with the laws of the free human spirit.”  

Interestingly, Nadezhdin’s demands that a poetic genius should be free of any constraints, should be separate, and as it were, above society, are all the qualities that Romantics considered indispensable for a poet. That it how the Romantics viewed Byron and, by all accounts, how many Russian contemporaries viewed Mickiewicz.  

Nadezhdin opposes modeling the image of the Romantic poet as a Byronic figure because Byron did not have the final word in poetry, did not exhaust all the inspiration that a poet can find, leaving nothing for those who came after him; he did not achieve a universal ideal in poetry, because such an ideal does not exist: “Creation of a poetic genius is unstable, changes depending on circumstance, the demands of a given time or a given nation.”  

This is also why Russians who are close to the spirit of Byron’s poetry are not able to appreciate and understand it as well as his English readers. Byron is a national poet of England, not of Russia. According to Nadezhdin, Byron, a foreign poet,

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278 Ibid., 287. И можно ли гения подчинить другим? Но сего требует, говорят нам, Поэзия нашего века. Не уже ли ныне достигли высоты всеобщего идеала и положили предел стремлению человека? Не уже ли в области Поэзии исчерпаны все источники изящного, открыты все пути к нему, так что ничего уже не осталось творить гению?  

279 Ibid. Такое предложение не согласно ни с течением Природы, ни с законами свободного духа человеческого.  

280 Ibid., 286. Идеал изящного, творение гения, изменяем, срочен и состоит под влиянием потребностей века и народов. Всеобщий идеал есть мечта, которая всегда останется мечтою.
enjoys so much attention in Russia only because Russia has yet to develop her own national poetry:

If the poetry of a foreign Bard has received citizenship rights from us that is only because we don’t yet have our own national Poetry, and thus we can’t have any special devotion or aversion towards ancient and modern Poetry.  

Nadezhdin argues that admiration for Byron’s poetry and adherence to it as the only possible poetic model effectively prevents Russian poets from developing their own national poetry. Without its own national poetry, Russian literature lacks the identity that allows a nation to determine proper relationships with other literatures of the past and present. National poetry should be the point of comparison with poetry written in other languages: only through one’s own poetry can one determine the value of poetry of other nations. Byron then poses a danger to Russian poets; he is leading Russian poetry astray, away from its true self.

In the context of Nadezhdin’s polemics with Viazemsky, which reflect the literary battles between the Romantic and Neoclassical camps, the role of Mickiewicz as the Other in Russian literature becomes even more apparent. Nadezhdin rejects Viazemsky’s idea that every contemporary poet has to write in the spirit of Byron and that the English poet could be a model for Russian writers because he and his work are foreign, alien to the Russian spirit. Significantly, he does not reject Mickiewicz in the same way. Rather, Nadezhdin’s emphasis on Mickiewicz’s position as a great Polish poet in his own right, stresses Russia’s need for such a model in its own national literature. Moreover, Nadezhdin’s other critical articles published around the same time in Herald of Europe—

281 Ibid., 287. Если поэзия Барда чужеземного получила у нас право гражданства, то единственно потому, что мы не имеем ещё национальной Поэзии и следственно не можем иметь особенной привязанности и отвращения к Поэзии древней и новейшей.
in which, influenced by Schelling’s *Philosophy of Nature*, he argues for the “necessity to express in art the divine harmony of nature…and man’s unity with the universe”\(^{282}\)-suggest that the themes of Mickiewicz’s *Crimean Sonnets* are more in harmony with the critic’s own views than his polemics with Viazemsky might indicate. The absence of any direct attack on Mickiewicz, so ardently promoted by Viazemsky, seems at the very least like a silent approval of the Polish poet, and situates him outside the ongoing Russian literary battles.

In fact Mickiewicz, throughout his stay in Russia, managed to maintain a neutral position above all literary polemics, as he explained in a letter from 22 March 1828, to his friend A. E. Odyniec:

> The Russians even extended their hospitality to poetry, and translated my works out of courtesy; the common people follow the leading writers. I have already seen Russian sonnets much like mine. There is enough fame to induce jealousy, even though that fame often originated from behind tables at which we dined and drunk with the Russian writers. I was lucky enough to win their favors. Despite different opinions and literary parties, I live in harmony and friendship with everyone.\(^{283}\)

Mickiewicz modestly credits his popularity in Russia to the kindness of his Russian hosts who translated his poems and published them in their journals. Mickiewicz’s unique position as a man liked by everyone and as a poet whose talent and work were admired by members of opposing literary parties made him an ideal Romantic poet; an Other that


\(^{283}\) Rosjanie gościnność rozciągają aż do poezji i przez grzeczność dla mnie tłumaczą mnie; gmin idzie w ślady naczelnego pisarzów. Już widziałem sonety rosyjskie w guście moich. Owoć sławy dosyć dla obudzenia zazdrości, chociaż ta sława wychodzi często zza stołu, przy którym jedliśmy i pijali z rosyjskimi literatami. Miałem szczęście zyskać ich względy. Mimo różnych mniejań i partii literackich, ja ze wszystkimi w zgodzie i przyjaźni.
the Russian Romantics could relate to, without the danger that he would be attacked by Neoclassicists.

This is not to say that all the poets who supported Romanticism agreed with Viazemsky’s opinion of the Mickiewicz-Byron co-relation. Evgeny Baratynsky, a member of Pushkin’s inner circle and a friend of Mickiewicz, published a poem dedicated to him in Delvig’s *Northern Flowers* in 1828, which presents the image of the Polish poet as much closer to the ideal of Nadezhdin than to that of Viazemsky. In fact the poem reflects a turning point in Baratynsky’s creative life when (after an early phase with Classical, elegiac and Byronic elements), upon his return from Finland to Moscow in 1826, he met the young Lovers of Wisdom. Through them, particularly Ivan Kireevsky, he became acquainted with the philosophy of Schelling and the concept of the artist as “organic genius,” universal and unique at the same time. In the late 1830s and 1840s Baratynsky, together with Tiutchev, Odoevsky, Chaadaev and Gogol, moved Russian Romanticism towards the fundamental questions of philosophy and ideology: the metaphysics of consciousness, historical memory and national spirit, (though by that time Western Romanticism had largely degenerated into rhetorical postures). However, the poem dedicated to Mickiewicz still contains clear references to Baratynsky’s classical French education and Schelling’s idea of the artist as “chosen one”:

Не подражай: своеобразен гений
И собственным величием велик
Доратов ли, Шекспиров ли двойник—
Досаден ты: не любят повторений.
С Израилем певцу один закон:
Да не творит себе кумира он!
Когда тебя Мицкевич вдохновенный,
Я застаю у Байроновых ног,

Я думаю: поклонник униженный!
Восстань, восстань и вспомни: сам ты бог!

[Do not imitate: original genius/Is great with its own greatness/Whether you are a double of Shakespeare or Dorat—/You are annoying: repetitions are not liked./ There is one command for Israel and for a bard:/ Thou shall not create idols for thy-self!/ When I find you, inspired Mickiewicz/ At Byron’s feet/ I think: humbled worshiper!/ Rise, rise and remember: you yourself are a god!]

It is likely that Baratynsky wrote the poem as a reaction to Mickiewicz’s *Konrad Wallenrod*, published earlier the same year in Petersburg and the opening imperative “Do not imitate” (“Не подражай”) warrants such an interpretation. The main character of *Konrad Wallenrod* is—like Conrad, the hero of Byron’s *Corsair* (1814)—“a man of loneliness and mystery,” but Baratynsky conspicuously does not make any reference to the text of *Konrad Wallenrod* itself. Instead his whole attention is focused on the image of Mickiewicz as a poet who needs to free himself from Byron’s influence. Baratynsky’s description of Mickiewicz as an “inspired” (“вдохновенный”) “bard” (“певец”) reminds one of Pushkin’s bard vs. prophet paradigm where the Polish poet occupies the position of “naïve” poet-bard with a divine gift of poetry. In Baratynsky’s poem, however, the image of Mickiewicz as the poetic Other acquires much larger dimensions: much like Nadezhdin, Baratynsky tells Mickiewicz that he is a great poet in his own right: “original poetic genius/is great with his own greatness” (“своеобразен гений/ И собственным величием велик”) and does not need to imitate anyone. Moreover, Baratynsky reminds Mickiewicz that a poet cannot commit idolatry. By comparing the idolatrous veneration of Byron to the sin of the Israelites who forsook their God for the golden calf, the poem

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sends Mickiewicz a warning: for a poet like Mickiewicz who possesses a God-given
talent, it would be a sin to forsake his own talent and imitate the works of an idol such as
Byron.

Of course the image of Mickiewicz kneeling at Byron’s feet (“Когда тебя
Мицкевич вдохновенный/ Я застаю у Байроновых ног”) is an exaggeration, but it
makes the final line of the poem even more forceful: Baratynsky reminds Mickiewicz
that such a humble attitude towards his English predecessor is unjustified for a poet of his
stature, and he calls on Mickiewicz to, “Rise, rise and remember: you, yourself are a god!
("Восстань, восстань и вспомни: сам ты бог!") “Rise” and “god” inevitably bring to
mind the image of Christ’s Resurrection, thus suggesting the redemptive power of the
poet’s own poetry, which alone can make him god-like. The conclusion of Baratynsky’s
poem also resonates with the ending of Pushkin’s “The Prophet” written two years
earlier, where God commands the poet to “Rise” (“Восстань”) and burn human hearts
with God’s word, thus also implying that poetry can change, indeed redeem human
hearts. The possible connection between “The Prophet” and Baratynsky’s poem could be
a sign that he wanted to demonstrate Mickiewicz’s greatness not only vis à vis Byron, but
also Pushkin and his self-image of the prophet chosen by God to fulfill his will.

If Viazemsky, motivated by his own agenda to advance Romanticism in Russia,
builds up the image and importance of Mickiewicz in relation to Byron, Baratynsky
strives to achieve the exact opposite: Mickiewicz can be a great poet only if he separates
himself from his English predecessor. Moreover, Baratynsky’s enthusiastic reaction to
Mickiewicz’s improvisation (he went down on his knees and exclaimed: “Ah, mon Dieu,
pourquoi n’est il pas Russe!”) “Oh my God, why isn’t he Russian” testifies to how
strongly he desired to have a poet like Mickiewicz to be present and a part of Russian literature - a god-like figure they could admire, even on their knees!

In view of the admiration Mickiewicz and his poetry received in Russia, we must not forget the attacks on his work by the Polish Classicist camp during the 1820s, which I discussed in the first chapter. Russian writers and the reading public were well aware of that criticism thanks to Nikolai Polevoy, the editor of the *Moscow Telegraph*, who in 1826 (before Mickiewicz’s *Sonnets* and *Konrad Wallenrod* came out) published the full text of Dmochowski’s article, “Comments on the Contemporary Condition, Spirit and Trends of Polish Poetry” (“О состоянии, духе и стремлении новейшей Польской Поэзий.”)

As a moderate Classicist critic, Dmochowski praised Mickiewicz for creating new national models of Polish poetry in *Ballads and Romances* and *Forefathers* Part II and IV, as much as he scorned him for transgressing the rules of Classical poetry in his language, vocabulary and versification.

As a friend of Mickiewicz, Baratynsky must have also known of other attacks from Warsaw that reached the poet in Moscow; therefore, in 1827 he wrote the poem, “Do not be afraid of scornful judgments…” (“Не бойся едких осуждений…”)

in which he tells Mickiewicz not to be afraid of mocking/scornful blame or censure. Baratynsky advises Mickiewicz not to yield to such criticism, nor to entrancing compliments (“Не бойся едких осуждений,/Ни упоительных похвал”) because in their

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286 F. S. Dmochowski, “O sostojanii, dukhe i stremlenii noveishei Polskoi Poezii,” *Moskovskii Telegraf* 10, no 15 (1826): 183-198. In an extensive editorial note to Dmochowski’s article Polevoy explains that the text is being published to acquaint readers with contemporary Polish literature so far unknown in Russia. To counterbalance negative comments on the poet’s work, Polevoy claims that “the whole of Poland reads Mickiewicz’s work with admiration” and that he is a “young poet who deserves European fame.” Ibid., 184

287 First published in Baratynsky, *Stikhotvoreniia* (Moskva: 1835), 139. Also in *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvoreniia*, vol. 1, Biblioteka poeta. Bol'shaia seriia (Moskva: Sovetskii Pisetel', 1957), 68, where the poem appeared under the title K***, see commentary establishing Mickiewicz as the addressee.
intoxicating fumes even a powerful genius may weaken and fall asleep (“Не раз в чаду их мощный гений/Сном расслабленья засыпал.”) Baratynsky points out that complements arise from ever changing literary trends and fashions and if the poet succumbs to such flattery, he will collect only artificial flowers (made of taffeta) for his Muse’s wreath:

Когда, доверясь их измене,
Уже готов у моды ты
Взять на венок своей Камене
Её тафтяные цветы–

[When, having believed their false words,/ You are ready to take from fashion/
Flowers made of taffeta/To crown your Muse.]

Compliments and flattery can only weaken, so a truly talented poet should not be afraid of criticism. Baratynsky supports his statement by citing the authority and wisdom of Krylov. “Flowers made of taffeta” (“тафтяные цветы”) come from the fable “Flowers” (“Цветы,” 1816) in which the true nature of real and artificial flowers is revealed when a light rain falls: seemingly gorgeous artificial flowers are destroyed and thrown out as litter, while the real ones grow and become more beautiful. The fable is an allegory on the nature of real vs. imitative talent and ends with the following lines:

Таланты истинны за критику не злятся:
Их повредить она не может красоты;
Одни поддельные цветы
Дождя боятся.

[True talents are not angry about criticism:/ It can’t spoil their beauty;/ Only artificial flowers/ Are afraid of the rain.]

It is likely that Baratynsky addressed these words as much to Mickiewicz as to himself. After the publication of his poems in 1827 Baratynsky was increasingly criticized by his young friends (Venevitinov, Shevyrev, Pogodin,) and by The Moscow Herald
(Московский вестник) who perceived him and his elegiac poetry as a relic of the past, irrelevant in the post-Decembrist era. With the allusion to Krylov, whose fables were very popular and recognizable by all Russians, Baratynsky wishes to strengthen Mickiewicz’s position not only among Polish, but also among potential Russian critics. Above all the poem aims to create a powerful image of the Polish poet in the Russian literary context:

Прости, я громко негодую;
Прости, наставник и пророк!
Я с укоризной указую
Тебе на лавровый венок.

[I am sorry, I am loudly indignant;/ I am sorry, my mentor and prophet!/ I point out with rebuke/ At your laurel wreath.]

Baratynsky maintains a humble attitude towards his addressee, apologizing for his indignation at Mickiewicz’s (alleged) sensitivity to criticism, but, as he explains, the reproachful attitude of the poem aims to show Mickiewicz how to achieve the highest poetic laurels: for Baratynsky, Mickiewicz is a “mentor,” “guru” (“наставник”), a prophet of poetry who should be immune to all criticism. The ardent admiration and respect Mickiewicz elicited in Russia reminds one of the famous lines from the

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288 Baratynsky’s position on the Russian literary scene during 1827-1829 is discussed in an interesting article by Dariia Khitrova, “Literaturnaia pozitsiia Baratynskogo i esteticheskie spory k kontsu 1820ykh gg,” Pushkinskie chteniia v Tartu 3; Materialy mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii, posviashchennoi 220-letiiu V.A. Zhukovskogo i 200-letiiu F.I. Tiutcheva, ed. L. Kiseleva (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2004), 149–180. See fn.3.

289 “Prophet” here could be another reference to Pushkin and his poem “Prophet;” even though Baratynsky wrote the poem “Do not be afraid of scornful judgments...” in 1827 and Pushkin published “The Prophet” in 1828, it is possible that Baratynsky read/heard it beforehand.
Scriptures: “Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.”

By the same token only Mickiewicz as a non-Russian, but fellow Slav, could fulfill the role of the Other which would help Baratynsky to establish himself on the Russian literary scene. Thus, Baratynsky should rather have exclaimed: “Ah mon Dieu, quel bonheur il n’est pas Russe!” (Oh God, how fortunate he is not Russian!)

Baratynsky’s individual need to define himself through Mickiewicz as his poetic Other was certainly motivated by the criticism, which came from a representative of the “young archaists,” Kuchelbecker, who in his 1824 essay “On the Trend of Our Poetry, Particularly Lyric, in the Past Decade” (“О направлении нашей поэзий, особенно лирической, в последнее десятилетие”) scorned Baratynsky and his friends with the memorable words: “Wealth and diversity? Read any elegy of Zhukovsky, Pushkin, or Baratynsky, and you will know them all.” It is small wonder that Baratynsky wished to determine his poetic identity in relation to Mickiewicz, rather than to his famous Russian contemporaries (including Pushkin) who, according to Kuchelbecker, were all the same.

Mickiewicz’s image as a god-like figure, a mentor, and a prophet prompts the question: How did Baratynsky specifically establish his own poetic identity in relation to Mickiewicz and how does his own poetry relate to Mickiewicz’s work? Did he see Mickiewicz as a Romantic poet, as great as Byron (as Viazemsky did), or rather, was he trying to create a more complex poetic axis along which he could identify himself? A close analysis of the above-quoted poem, “Do not imitate…” (“Не подражай…”) reveals that in order to identify his own complicated poetic personality, Baratynsky sketches a

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http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_INDEX.HTM

291 Kuchelbecker, Russian Romantic Criticism, 59.
truly multidimensional image of Mickiewicz as a poet, far more complex than the paradigm of Byron vs. the rest of the world, i.e., Romantic vs. Classical.

In his poem Baratynsky states that Mickiewicz is a poet as great as Byron, but in the first stanza he also presents Mickiewicz as a “double” (“двойник”) of two other, very different, poets: “whether you are the double of Dorat or Shakespeare you are annoying: repetitions are not liked” (“Доратов ли, Шекспиров ли двойник/Досаден ты: не любят повторений”). These lines, like the rest of the poem, tell Mickiewicz in a somewhat facetious way that his unique talent is so great that he does not need to “double” anyone else. However the idea, even if it is an overstatement, that Mickiewicz is a “double” i.e., identical to Shakespeare or Dorat, is certainly not accidental and thus is significant on Baratynsky’s part. The invocation of Shakespeare is not surprising. Mickiewicz, like all the Romantics, loved him and found inspiration in his work (which can be seen in the epigraphs of The Romantic and Forefathers Eve Part IV). Moreover, Baratynsky wrote his poem after the publication of Konrad Wallenrod in February 1828, and even though Wallenrod is considered the most Byronic of Mickiewicz’s works it also owes a great deal to Shakespeare. As Stendhal declared in his famous 1823 manifesto, “Racine and Shakespeare,” to write tragedies that give the public “dramatic pleasures” (as opposed to “epic pleasures”) Romantics should follow the “procedures of Shakespeare,”292 i.e., abandon unity of time and place, and Alexandrine lines, and write about their own bloody, even scandalous history rather than that of Ancient Greece as Racine did. Konrad Wallenrod is not a stage drama, but a long narrative poem, yet in many ways it follows Stendhal’s exhortations. It is a story about the bloody and dramatic events of the war

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292 Stendhal, Racine and Shakespeare, 17-18.
between Lithuania and the Teutonic Order; the title character, a man caught up in those historical events and faced with impossible moral and ethical dilemmas, is a tragic figure of truly Shakespearian dimensions. Therefore by casting Mickiewicz as Shakespeare’s “double,” Baratynsky stresses the Romantic features of his work and also pays tribute to the dramatic qualities of his poem.

The choice of Dorat as a “double” is not so clear and is puzzling at first. The Baratynsky scholar, Geri Kejtsaa, suggests that this is Jean Dorat293 (or Daurat) (1508-1588), a French Renaissance poet and a contemporary of Shakespeare. Jean Dorat, a member of the French La Pléiade, was a distinguished scholar and professor of Greek and Latin literature, and wrote his own verse in those languages as well as in French. Mickiewicz also knew both ancient languages very well; K. A. Polevoy remembered how Mickiewicz dazzled his Russian friends with extensive quotations from Latin and Greek authors:

His knowledge of Latin and Greek was fully appraised by Monsieur Ezhovsky, an expert in these languages, a famous philologist, a friend and possibly a fellow-student of his. (...)
I remember him astonishing everyone at one literary dinner by reading various extracts from The Iliad in Greek, and even when one of the company, who was well-versed in Homer, read a certain line, Mickiewicz would recite the next one, as if he had memorized the whole Iliad. 294

Baratynsky attended many such literary dinner parties (also at Polevoy’s house) and the “double of Dorat” could be seen as a nod to Mickiewicz’s erudition and great knowledge

293 Geri Kejtsaa, Evgeny Baratynsky, 445-446.

of Greek and Latin authors. Since Jean Dorat played an instrumental role in introducing into French literature forms cultivated by antiquity such as odes, epistles, satires, tragedy, comedy, epic, which laid the foundation for French Classicism, Baratynsky may also be highlighting Mickiewicz’s Classical roots as a poet.

However, the name Dorat opens yet another possible point of reference to Mickiewicz and his work. Dariia Khitrova claims that Baratynsky had in mind Claude-Joseph Dorat (1734-1780), a follower of Voltaire, famous for erotic salon poetry.295 The connection between that “second” Dorat and Mickiewicz’s love sonnets, which I have discussed above, is quite clear, even if the comparison with Claude-Joseph, a poet of much less stature than Jean Dorat, lessens the image of Mickiewicz somewhat. More significantly, alluding to Mickiewicz’s “Love sonnets,” many of which contain a strong elegiac current, allows Baratynsky to establish another connection between himself and Mickiewicz. Baratynsky was best known for his love elegies, and even if Kuchelbecker and the “young archaist” camp criticized them, many others admired Baratynsky’s elegiac poems; significantly, Pushkin after reading Baratynsky’s “Confession” ("Признание," 1824) declared that he “will never publish his own elegies again.”296

In order to free himself from being identified as merely a member of Pushkin’s circle, Baratynsky needed to establish his image in relation to a great poet who was above

295 Khitrova, “Literaturnaiia pozitsiia Baratynskogo.” “By ‘Dorat’, no doubt, he meant not Jean Dorat, Shakespeare’s contemporary, as G.Kejtsaa and L.G. Frizman write [Baratynsky 1983 : 616], but C.-J. Dorat, Voltaire’s follower, who had made himself famous as an erotic salon poetry master. Baratynsky may have indicated himself when mentioning one of the most famous representatives of ‘light verse’.” (“Под «Доратом» же, безусловно, имелся в виду не Жан Дорат, «современник Шекспира», как пишут Г. Хетсо и Л. Г. Фризман [Баратынский 1983: 616]), а К.-Ж. Дора, последователь Вольтера, прославивший себя в области эротического салонного стихотворства. Возможно, упомянутый одним из известнейших представителей «легкой поэзии», Баратынский указывает на самого себя.”)

296 A.S. Pushkin to A. A. Bestuzhev, 12 January, 1824, Odessa, in Pushkin—Kritik, ed. N. V. Bogoslovskii (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Idatel'stvo Khudozhestvennoi Literatury, 1950), 52. Баратынский – прелесть и чудо. «Признание» – совершенство. После него никогда не стану печатать своих элегий …
all literary battles that were raging in Russia. Thus, Baratynsky’s poem presents a truly multidimensional image of Mickiewicz as a Romantic poet, an “organic genius,” rooted in Classicism through Greek and Latin literature as well as through his elegiac love poems, yet, a “double” of Shakespeare. The complex poetic personality of the Polish poet reflects the complexities of Baratynsky’s own image as a poet, which was making the transition from the poet’s early Romantic phase towards metaphysical “poetry of thought.” A poet of Baratynsky’s talent could not have had a lesser poetic Other.

For the majority of Russians the publication of Konrad Wallenrod solidified Mickiewicz’s image as a great Romantic poet, but the reactions of various literary groups to Wallenrod reflect the different facets of Mickiewicz’s image as the Other in Russia. In Moscow there were two influential literary circles which enthusiastically welcomed Mickiewicz’s work: The Moscow Telegraph (Московский Телеграф) under the editorship of Nikolai Polevoy, and The Moscow Herald (Московский вестник) under the editorship of M. P. Pogodin. The Herald was founded in 1827 by a group of former Lovers of Wisdom (Любомудры) including Dmitry, Venevitinov, Stepan Shevyrev, the brothers Piotr and Ivan Kireevsky, and Aleksey Khomiakov. Both journals published Russian translations of Konrad Wallenrod soon after it came out and both used the work to advance their own particular agenda regarding the role of Russian Romantic poetry and the poet in Russian society.

Nikolai Polevoy, the son of a merchant from Irkutsk, was one of the first Russian ideologists and literary critics not to come from an upper class background. Along with his brother Ksenofont, Polevoy befriended Mickiewicz soon after the poet arrived in Moscow in December 1825. As Ksenofont remembers in his memoirs, the “sincere
friendship, intimacy with Mickiewicz was for my brother a true gift of fate,” and adds that in their circle the poet was treated as a “family member” (“как родной”). Ksenofont Polevoy also claims that he and his brother were the first people in Moscow to “welcome Mickiewicz, show him sympathy” and only later was the poet, “received in aristocratic salons, where everybody wanted to make his acquaintance.” Even though the brothers Polevoy ran an influential journal, which published works of “literary aristocrats” such as Viazemsky, Pushkin, Baratynsky, Yazykov, Odoevsky and others, socially they were still perceived as outsiders. Mickiewicz, as the son of an impoverished nobleman who made a living as a lawyer at the Novogrodek court, was to the Polevoys “one of them,” even if the aristocratic literary establishment received the Polish poet with open arms. In the eyes of Nikolai Polevoy, Mickiewicz’s humble origins certainly added value to his greatness as a poet.

Nikolai Polevoy was probably the most ardent admirer of Mickiewicz in Russia, and he considered Konrad Wallenrod the highest poetic achievement. Reviewing Kozlov’s narrative poem, “Princess Natalia Borisovna Dolgorukaia,” Polevoy argues against comparing Russian literary works to Byron (or any other Western model) but sets Mickiewicz up as an example of an equal relationship between a contemporary poet and his English predecessor:

First of all, why must one always be compared to Byron? Who would argue that Byron could have done it better. But Homers, Dantes, Lope de Vegas, Shakespeares, Goethes and Byrons live once in a thousand years; whom may we add to the six poets whom we mentioned? Not so long ago, talking to Mickiewicz about Coleridge and Southey, I heard him confess honestly that he would have given up all his works, and all those written by Coleridge and Southey, without any doubt, for one of Byron’s poems; I see him biased, and I must confess I wouldn’t give up Mickiewicz’s

297 Polevoy, Zapsiki, 174.
Wallenrod for *Beppo*...; but Mickiewicz’s words show us what people with a unique, great talent (and therefore those, who can understand great Byron better than us) think of Byron.\(^298\)

Polevoy, like Viazemsky, was eagerly championing Romanticism in Russia, but unlike Viazemsky, he refused to measure all Russian poets against Byron: “no one will argue that Byron could have done that better,” but that is not the point. Likewise, it would be useless to compare contemporary Russian poets to the greatest western predecessors.

Significantly, Polevoy places Mickiewicz in the context of six poets that he considers most important in the history of European literature, declaring that he “would not give up *Konrad Wallenrod* for Byron’s *Beppo*.” Polevoy sees partiality in Mickiewicz’s own attitude towards the English poet, but explains: “Mickiewicz’s words show how Byron is perceived by people with unique, great talent, therefore better than us able to understand the great Byron.” The plural “us” seems to refer not only to Polevoy but also to his readers, i.e., Russians in general; thus, Mickiewicz’s understanding of Byron implies a close affinity between the two poets, a relationship that should inspire Russians.

In his review\(^299\) of *Konrad Wallenrod*, Polevoy stresses the Romantic features of Mickiewicz’s work, such as the mysterious character of the hero, the Grand Master of the Teutonic order, who, according to Medieval chronicles, died in 1394, and “whose origins,

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actions and death puzzled his contemporaries.” Equally mysterious is Wallenrod’s companion, the Lithuanian bard Halban, of whom even less is known than his master. Dark and tragic historical events “gave rise to strange rumour, legends and popular beliefs”; perfect material for a Romantic hero, whose portrait, “in Mickiewicz’s poem amazes with the greatness, diversity, power of his soul, expressed in all its parts and all details.” Polevoy regrets that “we Russians, we who are closer than all other nations to the Polish language, we do not know that rich, beautiful and native, for us, language and thus, deprive ourselves of the pleasure of reading this magnificent work of Polish Poetry.”

Not only is the Polish language “native” but Polevoy writes: “With a joyful feeling of pride we follow sublime flights of genius, our countryman.” (“С радостным чувством гордости преследуем величественный полет гения, нашего соотечественника!”) The image of a Polish poet who is also a Russian compatriot, allows Polevoy to present Mickiewicz as the Russian Other in the context of Russian literary battles and, using the success of Konrad Wallenrod, to level a charge against both Polish and Russian Classicists:

Great knowledge and in depth study of the theory of languages gave Mickiewicz, in his new poem, the means to prove the victory of an outstanding talent over all the complications of language. He has already surprised his compatriots by choosing the most difficult kind of verse in his Sonnets; now he has written a lengthy “Wajdelota’s Tale” in Wallenrod in hexameter. Until the present day that kind of verse was considered impossible in the Polish language because in Polish the accent is fixed on the penultimate syllable. Mickiewicz has splendidly proved that those who considered Polish hexameters to be impossible were wrong. Poor Classicists are in trouble with such people: these people do

300 Ibid., 436. Грустно думать, что мы Русские, мы которым ближе всех других народов Польский язык, по малоизвестности у нас сего богатого, прекрасного и родного нам языка, лишаемся наслаждения читать новое, превосходное произведение Польской Поэзии.” (Emphasis mine)

301 Ibid., 437.
not argue with them, but in practice prove what the Classicist critic only thinks about and thinks about but never actually realizes!”

Polevoy praises Mickiewicz’s deep knowledge of language theory, which allowed him to overcome all the difficulties posed by the Polish language when he was writing his verses in the rigid, demanding form of the sonnet. However, Polevoy finds the crowning achievement of Mickiewicz’s poetic talent, in “The Tale of the Bard” (“Powieść wajdeloty”), written in hexameters. The Russian critic correctly observes that “until the present day that kind of verse was considered impossible in the Polish language because in Polish the accent is fixed on the penultimate syllable.” Therefore Polevoy could, with great satisfaction, point out to the Classicists that “they have trouble with people like Mickiewicz. These people do not argue with them, but in practice prove what the Classicist critic only thinks about and thinks about but…never actually realizes!” These words seem to be addressed as much to the Polish Classicists as to their Russian counterparts. Polevoy’s excitement was not only caused by Mickiewicz’s defeat of his Classicist opponents with their own weapon (by putting their theory into practice in his magnificent Romantic poem). For the Russians, Mickiewicz’s use of ancient Greek hexameter in *Konrad Wallenrod* represented the embodiment of the national ideals they were searching for during the formative battles between the Classicists and Romantics in the 1810s and 1820s.

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302 Ibid., 438. “Обширное знание и глубокое изучение теории языков дали Мицкевичу средства, в новой поэме своей, доказать торжество необыкновенного таланта над всеми неудобствами языка. Он изумил уже соотечественников, избрав самый трудный род стихотворений в своих Сонетах; теперь, обширная Повесть вайделота в Валленроде, написана им гекзаметрами. Сей род стихов почитался до ныне невозможным в Польском языке, ибо ударение в нем всегда находится на предпоследнем слоге. Мицкевич блистательно доказал несправедливость мнения о невозможности Польских гекзаметров. Беда классикам с такими людьми: они не спорят с ними, но доказывают на деле то, о чем классический критик думает, думает, ничего не придумывая!” (Italics original)
As Boris Gasparov explains in his article, “Russian Greece, Russian Rome,” in the aftermath of war with Napoleon, opponents of Russian Neoclassicism, (which followed French models based on the monumental Imperial Roman aesthetic), deemed this style “false” and turned to, “ancient Greece as the model of ‘true’ Classicism, with Russia as its contemporary incarnation.” In that cultural paradigm, Russians identified with ancient Greece as the homeland of Eastern Orthodoxy, a symbol of Slavic unity (sobornost’) as opposed to ancient Rome, a symbol of the Western, pagan/Catholic world of discord and falseness. During the time when the Romantic philosophy of history and national identity was formed, Russians turned to ancient Greece as the source of their spiritual and cultural roots. This was reflected in the literary context by the importance given to creating a Russian hexameter as a continuation of the Homeric tradition. According to Classical rules, the only meter appropriate to an epic, and Homer’s translation in particular, was the Alexandrine verse, a 6-foot iambic line with a caesura after the 3rd syllable, which was the equivalent of a French 12-syllable Alexandrine. When N.I. Gnedich began to translate the Iliad in 1807, he followed that Classical principle; however, as a result of an intense public discussion about Russian hexameters which erupted in the 1810s, he abandoned the Alexandrine verse and in 1829 published a completed translation of the whole text in hexameter, a 6-foot dactylo-trochaic line. Moreover, earlier attempts by Vasily Trediakovskiy to use the dactyl-trochaic meter in the Russian hexameter had proven rather clumsy, and poets generally considered the hexameter as ill-suited to Russian poetry. Gnedich’s successful translation demonstrated


304 Ibid. 253-254.
that the Russian hexameter was the closest possible equivalent of the Homeric line, and could lead to the writing of beautiful verses. Pushkin welcomed Gnedich’s translation as “the ‘resurrection’ of Homeric poetic language on Russian soil,” and his reaction represents the sentiments of critics and poets from different, often opposing literary groups. Pushkin and his post-Arzamas circle, Polevoy and The Moscow Telegraph, Pogodin and The Moscow Herald, Kuchelbecker and Katenin—all of whom were advocating for narodnost’ in Russian literature—perceived the reincarnation of Homeric verses in Russian hexameter as the symbolic return of Russian poetry to its historical and cultural roots.

The Russian views on the importance of ancient Greek culture and poetry as the original model for national literature were consistent with Mickiewicz’s idea that ancient Greek poetry, created for the populace, functioned as the depository of national tradition; hence it formed, strengthened and sustained national identity. (Like his Russian contemporaries, Mickiewicz dismissed ancient Roman models as mere imitations of the Greek, thus lacking true national form and character). Direct connection (through hexameter) with the Homeric tradition reinforces the powerful image of Halban-

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305 Gasparov, Ibid., 255. When Gnedich finished his translation in 1830, Pushkin dedicated a distich to it, in which in a gnomic way there was an idea expressed about the “resurrection” of Homer’s poetic tradition on Russian soil: ‘I hear the silenced sound of heavenly Hellenic speech/My embarrassed soul senses the shadow of the great old man.’ (“Когда в 1830 году Гнедич завершил свой перевод, Пушкин посвятил этому событию дистих, в котором в афористической форме была выражена идée о «воскрешении» гомеровской поэтической речи на русской почве: «Слыши умолкнувший звук божественной эллинской речи/Старца великого тень чую смущенной душой.»”)

306 Gasparov observes: “‘Natural’ perfection of the Greek art, as opposed to the ‘imitating’ Latin one, becomes the initial symbol that Katenin, like Küchelbecker, lay as the foundation of the historical image of European poetry, as well as of judging modern literary events.” (“Естественное” совершенство греческого искусства, в его противопоставлении «подражательному» латинскому, становится иначальным символом, который Катенин, подобно Кюхельбекеру, кладет в основу как исторического образа европейской поэзии, так и оценки современных литературных явлений.”) Ibid. 263. Also, see discussion of Mickiewicz’s introduction to Ballads and Romances in chapter 1.
Lithuanian “wajdelota,” a national bard, whose character defined Mickiewicz’s own mission as “wieszcz,” the national poet.

The image of the national poet-bard created by Mickiewicz in *Konrad Wallenrod* significantly influenced his role as the Other in the context of Russian literature. In his review of Mickiewicz’s two-volume *Collected Poems* (1829)—which included *Wallenrod, Ballads and Romances, Forefathers* Part II and IV, *Sonnets*, as well as many other poems—Polevoy devoted a great deal of attention and space (more than half of the text) to the question of *narodnost’* in literature and the role of the national poet. The critic observes that, “Now, every nation solemnly sits on the ruins of the past creating its own *narodnost,***” but at the same time “People exchanged ideas and opinions, they separated the intellectual heritage of centuries, and the *eclectic* mind became a mind of each and every individual.” (Italics in the original.) According to Polevoy, each nation develops its individual, national poetry, but all of them, as different as they are, belong to one universal idea of humanity (“великая идея человечества”). Similarly, “the more the common/universal spirit of the time penetrates the creativity of a poet, the more strongly, the more effectively can he express his *narodnost’* and his soul” and the greater he is as a poet. Qualities such as unique identity (“самобытность”), *narodnost’,* naturalness (“естественность”) testify to the greatness of a national poet and, simultaneously, to the universality of his work. Consequently, the poet “is awarded a laurel wreath not by his

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308 Ibid., 196. Presently every nation solemnly sits on the ruins of the past, thus creating its *narodnost’*. People have exchanged opinions and ideas; they have divided the intellectual inheritance of centuries past, and an *eclectic* mind has come to belong to all and each one of them. (“Теперь, каждый из народов восседит на развалинах прошедшего, и создает свою народность. Люди обменялись мнениями и понятиями; они разделили умственное наследие веков, и эклектический ум сделался умом всех и каждого из них.”)
fellow countrymen, but by the nations.” The next paragraph of Polevoy’s review begins, “Here, with joyful pleasure, we turn to our Mickiewicz.” The critic proceeds to glorify the poet’s creative genius, raving about everything he has ever written, placing him above all his contemporaries: “Wallenrod, Forefathers, Sonnets, Farys, are the essence of the creative imagination, which none of the living poets of England, Germany, France and Italy can counter with anything.”\(^\text{309}\)

In his review Polevoy presents Mickiewicz as the ideal model of the national poet: he captures the essence of his own national and individual spirit at the same time as his poetry, particularly *Konrad Wallenrod*, represents the universal ideal of the time. Having defined Mickiewicz as a national and a universal poet, Polevoy can present him as “ours”—a perfect Other for Russians, who can establish their own national identity in relation to Mickiewicz and still be a part of a transcendent idea, which connects an individual poet with the universal whole.

The Romantic concept of national poetry and of the national poet created by Mickiewicz in *Konrad Wallenrod* was so appealing to many Russians because Halban-wajdelota and his songs captured the essence of their own idea of *narodnost’* and the national poet. Those values were also dear to the former members of the Lovers of Wisdom who, after 1825, gathered around *The Moscow Herald*. The group, which included several of Mickiewicz’s personal friends (he was especially close to Shevyrev, and the brothers Kireevsky), turned to Schelling and the “poetry of thought,” after the tragically failed Decembrist revolt. Some members of the group, such as Odoevsky, later became leading figures of Russian “philosophical Romanticism” and the Slavophile movement (Kireevsky), but in the late 1820s their fascination with, and dissemination of

\(^{309}\) Ibid., 199.
Schelling’s thought still aimed at turning Russian literature away from French-oriented literature and culture.

Schelling’s influence on their approach to poetry is clearly visible in Shevyrev’s review of Byron’s *Manfred* (1817), which was published in Russian translation in 1828. Shevyrev identifies two opposite directions existing in poetry: “one depicts human life with all its elements such as, ‘characters, events, actions, feelings and so on,’ to the last detail;” the other, “uses an event only as means,” to convey a “great idea, or a powerful feeling, or a few rich/intense moments of our life, in which we live with all the powers of our soul.” This approach to poetry parallels the mission of the national poet outlined by Mickiewicz in *Konrad Wallenrod*: the bard’s songs instill in the hearts of his fellow countrymen the past greatness of the nation so “at least for a moment they will live as nobly as their ancestors lived all their lives.” The power of the poet’s word and the ability to turn it into deed, as demonstrated by Mickiewicz, was simply fascinating to the Russian Romantics. As Piotr Kireevsky noted after a farewell dinner for Mickiewicz in Moscow: “For a long time I have been convinced that the most important way for a Russian [poet] should be the word, which according to its destiny ought to become flesh and the redemption.”


311 Ibid. 57. Один род её изображает жизнь человеческую с ее стихиями, как–то: характерами, действиями, случаями, чувствами и проч., до последней черты ….”

312 Ibid. Другая Поэзия употребляет происшествие одним средством, одной рамкою, для того только, чтобы вместить в нем идею высокую или сильное чувство или несколько богатых минут жизни, минут, в которых мы живем всеми силами души нашей.

In his review of *Manfred*, Shevyrev places Mickiewicz as the author of “poetry of thought,” in the same category as Byron: a “poet-philosopher.” In the aesthetic-literary program of *The Moscow Herald* group as represented by Shevyrev, Mickiewicz’s image as the Other represents “a genius poet-philosopher…who by his very nature is predestined to reveal the essence of the nation” as his “poetry becomes the source of national consciousness.”

The image of Mickiewicz as the model of the national poet as depicted in the articles of Shevyrev and Polevoy reflects just one of many ways in which the Polish Poet fulfilled the role of the Other in the context of Russian literature. Depending on their individual needs (such as in the case of Baratynsky) or programs they advocated (Viazemsky, Polevoy, Shevyrev), Russian poets and critics constructed Mickiewicz’s image according to their own, very diverse ideas of what the Romantic poet should be. I hope I have demonstrated how the many-faceted image of Mickiewicz as a poet in the eyes of his Russian contemporaries reflected the complex process of establishing their own poetic identities during the complicated, but also fascinating, period of the second half of the 1820s.

Shevyrev, “Manfred…” 56. In the same category as Mickiewicz and Byron, Shevyrev also lists Schiller, Moore, Zhukovsky, while authors such as Goethe, Walter Scott, Washington Irving, James Fennimore Cooper and Pushkin are in the first. The critic notes that works of one poet can belong to two categories, as for example with Goethe, whose *Goetz von Berlichingen, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* and *Hermann and Dorothea* belong to the first category while *Faust* to the second; also Pushkin in *Prisoner of Caucasus* and *Fountain of Bakhchisarai* crosses to the second category, but he adds that in those poems Pushkin is “more of an imitator than the original poet.” Ibid., 57-58.

V. A Lithuanian Bard and a European Poet: Mickiewicz’s Polishness as the Mirror of Russian Identity

Mickiewicz as the model of the Romantic national poet in the Russian literary context inevitably prompts the question: national poet of which nation: Poland or Lithuania? Or perhaps even of Russia, as Viazemsky considered the poet “our tribesman” and Polevoy considered him “our countryman?” Pushkin perceived Mickiewicz as a Lithuanian poet – bard and a poet of Lithuania, while other Russian poets and critics frequently referred to him as the “Polish poet,” “the greatest poet of Polish literature” and discussed the Polish language of his poetry. Konrad Wallenrod, the work that solidified Mickiewicz’s image as national poet, is written in Polish, but Poland and Poles are not even mentioned once in the whole text, it is, “a tale from ancient Lithuanian history.” Moreover, while from the 10th century Poland was a Catholic country, which culturally always gravitated towards Western Europe, the Lithuanians in Konrad Wallenrod are presented as brave pagans, oppressed by the Christian Teutonic Order; Wallenrod himself was forcibly raised in the Christian faith, while Halban, the old bard, embodies national history and the pagan Lithuanian tradition. Therefore, before analyzing how the Russians, in their dialogue with Mickiewicz as the Other, construed the poet’s national identity for themselves, and how they related to his Polish and Lithuanian identity, it is worthwhile to examine, at least briefly, how Mickiewicz himself perceived his own national and poetic identity.
Born on December 24, 1798, in Nowogródek, (or in Zaosie, a near-by town), Lithuania, (which was incorporated as a province into the Russian Empire in 1795), Mickiewicz was from birth a Russian subject. His father Mikołaj came from an impoverished Polish noble family which for several generations had not owned land, thus he made a living as a lawyer at the Nowogrodek court. The poet’s mother, Barbara Majewska, is of uncertain background: her origins were (and still are) a subject of dispute among scholars and biographers—already during Mickiewicz’s lifetime some claimed that she was Jewish. Documents found in the court archives in Minsk in the late 1990s prove that the Majewski family had a coat of arms, and was part of the impoverished Polish gentry. Thus some biographers consider the issue closed; however others still insist that “[w]e are left with uncertainty—until scholars undertake a more thorough investigation of archival traces.” What we know for certain is that Adam Bernard Mickiewicz was baptized in a Catholic church in Nowogrodek on February 12, 1799, according to his baptismal certificate. Between 1807 and 1815 he attended a local district school in Nowogrodek run by Polish Dominican priests where he received a rather standard education; the program covered Polish language, grammar and literature, Latin, rhetoric, history, math and science, in addition to religious education, catechism, and, as electives, the French, German and Russian languages. As I have already mentioned, the most important years for Mickiewicz’s intellectual formation were spent at Vilnius University (1815-1819), which, after reforms in 1803 supported by its curator, Prince

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316 It is unclear if poet’s date of birth was recorded in Gregorian (new style) or Julian (old style) calendar, so it is either Dec. 24 1797 or Jan. 4 1798. Cf. Mickiewicz: Encyklopedia, 101.


Adam Czartoryski, became a vibrant intellectual center in the spirit of the Enlightenment. Mickiewicz studied in the Literature and Liberal Arts Department, where he had the opportunity to work with and was influenced by some of the most brilliant minds of the time: Godfryd Ernest Groddeck (professor of Greek and Latin literature), Leon Borowski (theory of poetry, rhetoric and aesthetics), and Joachim Lelewel (history.) The faculty at the university was international and Mickiewicz attended lectures in Polish as well as in German, French, and Latin. For Mickiewicz’s formation as a poet equally important to his studies was the time he spent in the city of Vilnius itself. As Tomas Venclova, an American scholar and a Lithuanian poet who studied in Vilnius in the late 1950s observed:

> He was also fortunate to be brought up in Wilno, since it was a civilized European city with a large Western community yet at the same time the epitome of “otherness” and exoticism. To a degree, it was even Oriental (St. Petersburg was more Westernized, even though it was geographically farther east). Marked by conservative Catholicism and Baroque architecture, the city preserved much of the Baroque carnivalistic tradition. The heritage of the Middle Ages and remnants of paganism were also visible. And Wilno was surrounded by an unusual and picturesque landscape that, by a small stretch of the imagination, could be construed as “wild.”

> The cultural and historical milieu of the city represented a unique combination of Western and Eastern cultural traditions which influenced the formation of the young poet’s identity. As a Pole he identified with the Catholic tradition which was part of his upbringing and with the Polish cultural heritage, which historically had always gravitated

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towards the West; but at the same time Lithuania was his birthplace and his motherland (“Litwo, Ojczyzno moja!”) “Mickiewicz, as all the Poles of his milieu and his generation, differentiated between ród (gens) and naród (nation): one might at the same time belong to the Lithuanian ród and the Polish naród.” The poet explained the same concepts in his epistle to Lelewel: “That you are a Pole from Lithuania and an inhabitant of Europe” (“Żeś znad Niemna, żeś Polak, mieszkaniec Europy.”) These words summarize Mickiewicz’s own identity as well: he was from Lithuania (from the river Niemen), he was a Pole, and he was an inhabitant of Europe. That Mickiewicz should consider himself a European testifies as much to the cosmopolitan character of Vilnius as to his sense of belonging to the Western tradition of the Enlightenment, which he appropriated through his studies. However, the equation “from Lithuania=Pole” was not so simplistic, and as Venclova observed Mickiewicz was fully aware of this:

There was an old tradition of juxtaposing “sylvan” Lithuania to “agricultural” Poland and also of opposing Lithuanian backwardness to Polish civilization. (…) In the context of Mickiewicz’s times, all of this provided a splendid chance for Romantic imagination. Lithuania was patterned as “the other half” of the civilized country, one of those fascinatingly different lands that promised the chance of reassessing the entire European culture. For Mickiewicz (who, incidentally, never visited Warsaw or Krakow), his native periphery presented a world which was equal and even superior to that of Poland proper, that is, of the West. 320

As a Polish language poet Mickiewicz needed Lithuanian “otherness” to hone his own poetic identity as a Romantic. Lithuania as he describes it in his Ballads and Romances, Forefathers Part II and IV, is a mythical world of legends, ghosts, and ancient folk tales that fed his poetic imagination. As Venclova aptly points out, Lithuania was a world that could not have been grasped and explained by the Polish Classicists from Warsaw, represented by the rational, wise man from Mickiewicz’s ballad “The Romantic.” It could

320 Ibid.
only be understood by the poet-narrator who, like the simple people, “feels and believes” in the other world seen by the mad maiden. Thus the poet-narrator becomes the mediator between the Lithuanian world that can be seen only with “his mind’s eye” and his Polish language readers. My argument that Russians needed the Polish poet as the familiar Other to establish their own poetic identities applies to Mickiewicz as well: throughout his poetry he is in constant dialogue with his Lithuanian otherness, which allows him to become a Romantic poet. I believe that such an approach also explains why Mickiewicz construed his identity as the Polish national poet in relation to the pagan Lithuanian bard rather than in relation to a strictly Polish model: Halban was Mickiewicz’s Other who allowed him to establish his identity as a Polish poet.

The image (paradigm) of Mickiewicz as a Polish poet vs. a Lithuanian bard included various, opposing elements, which were associated with Polish (Western-Latin-Catholic) and Lithuanian (pagan and, from the Russian perspective, also Eastern Orthodox) culture, literature and tradition. These opposing values allowed the Russians to simultaneously perceive Mickiewicz as the Other and to feel affinity and closeness to him, which made his otherness more familiar.

Before analyzing the complexities of Mickiewicz’s Polish-Lithuanian image as the Other it is necessary to put them in historical perspective by examining Polish and Lithuanian relations with Russia in the 1820s (as well as discussing the political climate before the Polish Uprising against Russia in 1830). Contemporary Russians also felt the need for such analysis, as demonstrated by a review of Kozlov’s translation of The Crimean Sonnets by the author and critic V. A. Ushakov, published in The Moscow

Telegraph in 1829. Ushakov, who lived in Warsaw from 1815-1820 and knew the Polish language as well as the history and literature of Poland,\textsuperscript{322} observes that Mickiewicz and his work were, “much more praised in our country than in his own homeland,” and that paradox (“странный случай”) prompted him to “investigate the spirit of political and historical relations between the two nations, which for such a long time were irreconcilable enemies, but at last enjoy prosperity under the one Sovereign.”\textsuperscript{323} Ushakov justifies the long historical digression, which he feels is inappropriate for a critical review of a poetical work, by saying that it is the “sweet sound of Mickiewicz’s lyre that begets an irresistible desire to briefly look at the past battles (“распри”) and the new, firm union of two common-language tribes (“единоязычных племен”).\textsuperscript{324} The critic assures his readers that the only purpose of his historical digression is to explain how and why the Polish poet was so unjustly treated by his own countryman.

The historical analysis that follows blames all the misfortunes suffered by the “brave Polish nation” on the unfortunate lack of a strong monarchical power. During the Enlightenment, the neighboring absolutist monarchies were growing in strength, while the Polish state was disintegrating because Polish monarchs weakened by the lack of absolute power had to fight with their insubordinate subjects. The Russian critic justifies the reasons for the end of the Polish Kingdom—the partitions which annihilated Polish statehood—as necessary measures for the security of the neighboring powers: “Poles

\textsuperscript{322} V. G. Berezina, “Mitskevich i Moskovskii telegraf,” Adam Mitskevich v russkoi pechati 1825-1955, 472
\textsuperscript{323} Ushakov, “O russkom perevode sonetov Mitskevicha,” 336.
\textsuperscript{324} Ibid., 337.
became victims of the judicious and circumspect politics of the next-door states.” The descendants of the “heroic Sarmatians” (old Polish nobility) “could have shared the fate of the ancient Israelites who, deprived of their own country, led a meager existence preserving the laws of their ancestors.” However, Providence willed otherwise and the brave Polish nation survived: “The spirit of the nation, love to the fallen fatherland, comforting memories of past glory did not die in Polish hearts and they carried on the moral existence of the deceased nation like a secret flame.” From the Russian perspective, as represented by the writers gathered around The Moscow Telegraph, Poland was an unfortunate country, a spirited, brave nation that, although divested of its statehood, was striving to preserve its national identity. Therefore Ushakov looks with sympathy and understanding at the Polish hopes for independence awakened by Napoleon. Although the critic compares Napoleon’s conquest of Europe to “an attack of Asiatic barbarians on civilized Europe,” he stresses that the Polish legions under General Dombrowski, who he also describes as “Kosciuszko’s courageous followers,” “saw in the brave Corsican the resurrection of their fatherland.” Thus, the Poles served Napoleon “in the full sense of the word, with faith and honesty, as the only hope to restore the fallen state of the ancient Poles (“древних Ляхов.”) Ushakov does not mention that the Polish hopes for independence were at least partially fulfilled for a time when Napoleon created the Duchy of Warsaw (1807-1815). This small, but self-governed, Polish state quickly ceased to exist after Napoleon’s downfall.

325 Родимый край его [польского народа] разделился на участки, подпавшие под чужеплеменные Державы, чего требовала особенная безопасность соседних государств. Ibid. 337. Поляки были принесены в жертву благоразумной и осмотрительной политике близь-лежащих стран. Ibid., 338.

326 Ibid.

327 Ibid.
From the Russian point of view, Polish dreams of independence were finally realized when the Polish Kingdom “like a Phoenix, rose from ashes.” This miracle was not accomplished by the “power-thirsty” Napoleon, who died imprisoned on an island in the middle of the ocean, but by the “grandson of Catherine the Great, the Blessed Peacemaker of Europe, who took under his protection the Polish nation,” despite the fact that “it had been for so long an irreconcilable enemy of Russia.”

Ushakov refers here to the Kingdom of Poland created by the agreement of the Vienna Congress in 1815. Czar Alexander I was crowned as the King of Poland and under his “benevolent rule Poland regained its due place among the European nations.”

Ushakov describes how Poland enjoyed a period of economic and cultural growth under the rule of Alexander, especially in literature, thanks to the efforts of the young generation of Poles, who instead of shedding their blood on the battlefields, worked for the glory of their country by serving the Muses. The most prominent member of this new generation of Poles was Mickiewicz:

On this new and glorious arena there appeared Mickiewicz, who, having made himself a representative, or better still, a hero of Polish Literature, by an amazing coincidence found the first connoisseurs of his talent among Russian Men of Letters, just as his country had found a benefactor in the Russian Tsar.

Mickiewicz most likely would not have agreed with the statement that the recognition of his talent and the reception of his work in Russia equaled the way that Alexander I treated Poland: after all he was arrested for membership of a clandestine student association.

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328 Ibid., 339.
329 Ibid.
330 На сем новом и достославном поприще появился Мицкевич, который, соделавшись представителем, или лучше сказать, героем Словености Польской, по удивительному случаю, нашел первых ценителей своего таланта в среде Русских Литераторов, подобно тому, как его отечество в Русском Царе нашло своего благотворителя. Ibid., 340.
Philomaths and Philarets (Filomaci i Filareci) deemed illegal and anti-Russian by the authorities; he was then interrogated, and deported to the Russian provinces for “re-education” by N.N. Novosiltsev, who acted on Alexander’s behalf. However, even though he was in Russia involuntarily, Mickiewicz certainly appreciated the fact that Russian critics, contrary to the Polish Classicist establishment, valued his work so highly. Significantly, Ushakov claims that the Russians were the first to discover Mickiewicz’s talent and fully appreciate his work. The critic acknowledges that in Poland, “the reading public was carried away by Mickiewicz’s poetry,” and “received with admiration his every new work”; however, Ushakov does not mention the enthusiastic reviews which came from the young Polish Romantic camp, particularly those of Mochnacki, the leading Romantic critic. Instead, Ushakov launches an attack on Mickiewicz’s Polish critics, particularly on Dmochowski, as a representative of the Warsaw Classicist camp.

Ushakov explains the strong tradition of Classicism in Poland from historical and political perspectives. The history of a national literature and the development of the language reflect the history and political development of the nation. The “old Polish literature was simple, expressive and powerful like the eminent Polish kings, Jagiellonians and Sobieski.”331 When the Polish Kingdom began to crumble during the first half of the eighteenth century under the rule of the Saxon Dynasty, literature also began to disintegrate. The rule of Stanisław August Poniatowski, the last king of Poland, introduced French influence on literature: like himself, he also dressed up Polish Literature in a “French caftan.” With the partitions of Poland, its literature disappeared until Napoleon resurrected Polish hopes of independence. The political climate awakened the Polish Muses, but Napoleon’s political power and popularity in Poland fortified the

331 Ibid. 340
French influence on Polish literature: “the code of the French Academy was compulsorily respected as were the formidable Napoleon’s eagles.”332 This gave F. S. Dmochowski, the critic who later became Mickiewicz’s chief adversary, the opportunity to seize leadership and ensure his own position as the “Napoleon of Polish Literature.” Consequently, the norms of Classicism established by the French Academy became the only acceptable norms in Polish literature, and even after the fall of Napoleon and the creation of the Congress Kingdom, Poles were too busy rebuilding their country to pay attention to Dmochowski or challenge his position. According to Ushakov, Polish Classicism [Neoclassicism] was politically motivated; Poles identified with its aesthetics, which symbolized the possibility of resurrecting their country. In fact the popularity of the Empire style in Polish architecture and design until 1830 reflected Polish desires to create strong symbols of state and the government, even if under Russian auspices.

Ushakov further describes how Dmochowski’s dominance was finally contested by Mickiewicz’s poetry, which “put Classicists in a deadlock.”333 Ushakov discusses the polemics between Mickiewicz and Dmochowski in detail, referring his readers to the articles of both: Dmochowski’s comments, “On the Contemporary Condition, Spirit and Trends of Polish poetry,” published in The Moscow Telegraph in 1826, Mickiewicz’s response to it in the preface to his book of poetry (“About the Warsaw Critics and

332 Ibid. 341.
333 Ibid., 343. Литературный Ареопаг Варшавский, как говорится по-Русски, стал в тупик.
Reviewers,” 1829) and Dmochowski’s answer to the poet’s text,\(^{334}\) which was not published in Russia but, which he read and found “curious” (“курьёзное произведение.”) Ushakov attacks Dmochowski’s Classicist views, ridiculing his analysis of *The Crimean Sonnets* (“Смешно читать упреки Дмоховского”), while continually scolding him for criticizing Mickiewicz and his work.

The main purpose of Ushakov’s attack on the Polish Classicists was of course to defend Mickiewicz against what he believed to be unjust and unfounded criticism and to promote his poetry among both Russian and Polish readers: “We can safely assure our fellow compatriots that educated fellow-countrymen of Mickiewicz respect more the opinions of Russian journals than the judgments of Warsaw Classicists.”\(^{335}\) The supportive (if not overprotective!) attitude of Ushakov and *The Moscow Telegraph* towards Mickiewicz was certainly motivated by the fact the Polish poet was living and writing in Russia:

Let us at least be glad that a Poet from a foreign land has found in our country a welcoming shelter for his talent. Mickiewicz wrote most of his poems in the heart of old Russia; his language is little known to our compatriots, but they were touched by the sweet sound of his lyre. Russian Men of Letters greeted Mickiewicz as the new sun on the horizon of universal Literature. \(^{336}\)

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\(^{335}\) Ushakov, “О russkom perevode sonetov Mitskevicha, 349.

\(^{336}\) Ibid. [П]орадуемся по крайней мере тому, что Поэт чужеземный, в нашем отечестве нашел благой приют для своего таланта. Мицкевич большую часть своих стихотворений написал в сердце древней России; его язык мало известен нашим соотечественникам, но сладость звуков его лира была им восчувствована. Русские Литераторы приветствовали Мицкевича, как новое светило на горизонте всеобщей Словесности.
There is a certain pride in Ushakov’s remark that the poet “wrote most of his poems in the heart of old Russia” where he was so welcomed and appreciated, rather than in his native country where he was so severely criticized.

More importantly, Ushakov’s article reveals the importance of Mickiewicz in his role as Polish Poet and the Other in Russian literature. The review does not place the poet in the context of European literature; Ushakov does not compare him to Byron or to other European poets but instead stresses Mickiewicz’s Polish roots by discussing his work in the context of the history and literature of Poland. As a Polish i.e., non-Russian poet who wrote in a foreign language, which had to be translated into Russian, Mickiewicz was naturally perceived as the Other, yet at the same time his Polishness brought him closer to Russians, thus allowing them to more easily relate to him: the Polish poet was simultaneously foreign and Other, yet close and familiar, not only because he lived and created his poetry, “in the heart of old Russia,” but also because of the close political ties between Poland and Russia in the 1820s. Ushakov’s historical review of political relations between the two countries parallels this same simultaneous foreignness and closeness.

Poland was once Russia’s irreconcilable and powerful enemy, a heroic “Sarmatian” nation. Ushakov, who knew Polish history well, uses the word “Sarmatian” deliberately, thus referring to one of the key concepts of Poland’s national identity: the myth of the Polish nobility as the descendants of the ancient Sarmatian tribes of Iranian origin who around 3 BC to 4 AD occupied vast territories from the Vistula river to the
deltas of the Danube and the Volga in Southern Russia. As a cultural and political formation “Sarmatism” developed in Poland in the seventeenth and eighteen centuries, and played central role in forming the Polish nobility’s identity as the brave defensores patriae, (and of the Catholic faith), lovers of freedom and Polish national traditions, customs, and way of life; moreover, the Eastern origins of ancient Sarmatians also influenced Polish Sarmatians’ attachment to Oriental aesthetics. After the partitions, the Poles began to mythologize “Sarmatism” as part of their identity and tradition, a lost paradise. Ushakov casts Mickiewicz as a representative of this tradition, calling him a “Sarmatian bard” (“Сарматский певец”338), which also points to the link between the Polish Sarmatians’ love of the Orient and The Crimean Sonnets as the continuation or transplantation of old sentiments into the new Romantic context.

The partition of Poland orchestrated by Catherine the Great deepened the division between the two countries and intensified the Poles’ hatred of Russia. As Ushakov notes, the Poles courageously fought against Russia during Kosciuszko’s Insurrection (1794), and then under Napoleon. However, everything changed when Alexander I restored the Polish Kingdom, giving Poles a liberal constitution, which guaranteed their autonomy, their own government, parliament (Sejm) and civil rights (which Russians did not yet enjoy), albeit under the Tsar’s control as the crowned King of Poland. Writing his review in 1829, Ushakov perceives Polish-Russian relations as “the firm union of two common-language tribes, enjoying prosperity under the one Sovereign.”339 All Russians who knew


339 Ibid.
Mickiewicz personally must have also known why he was in Russia, but Ushakov wisely never mentions the political circumstances of the poet’s deportation from his native Lithuania. Even if Mickiewicz was once arrested for his (alleged) anti-Russian activities, now all is forgotten and forgiven: the Polish poet creates and publishes his marvelous poetry in Russia and enjoys the same prosperity in Moscow and Petersburg as the Polish nation enjoys under its benevolent Russian ruler.

This understanding of the Poles’ “love of their fatherland,” and sympathy towards their dreams of, and fight for, independence after the partitions, as well as towards their struggle to preserve their national identity is representative of the attitude of the editors of *The Moscow Telegraph* and other liberal-minded Russian intellectuals. However, this is not to say that all Russians shared such sympathetic views of Poland and Alexander’s liberal solution, to the “Polish Question.” It would be enough to quote a statement of state historian Nikolai Karamzin—“Let the foreigners condemn the partitions of Poland—we took what was ours”—to demonstrate how much Russians differed in their opinions of Polish-Russian political relationships and effectively of the Poles as well. The tone and the meaning of Karamzin’s pronouncement stands in striking opposition to Ushakov’s conciliatory, “the Poles became victims of the judicious and circumspect politics of the neighboring states.” However, Karamzin’s conservative views on the partitions of Poland and his attitude towards Polish-Russian relationships were shared by many, if not the majority of Russians. Karamzin expressed these views very directly in his now famous letter to Alexander I, written in Tsarskoe Selo on October 17, 1819, after hearing from the Tsar that he was planning to restore the Polish Kingdom to its borders of 1772, i.e.,

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before the first partition. In an emotional letter, titled “Opinion of a Russian Citizen”
(“Мнение русского гражданина”), Karamzin describes Alexander’s wish to restore
“ancient” Poland as a deeply Christian act, but tells the Tsar that while “Christ orders us
to love our enemies…He did not forbid us to judge villains, and did not forbid warriors to
defend their country.” Alexander can love Poles (as his enemies) but he should love
Russians more: “God gave you your kingdom and with it the duty to care exclusively
about its welfare.” Therefore Karamzin asks the Tsar: “How can you, with a peaceful
conscience take away from us Belorussia, Lithuania, Volynia, Podolia, which were
confirmed properties of Russia before your reign?” Speaking on behalf of the whole
Russian nation ("I hear Russians and I know them" [“Я слышу русских и знаю их”]),
Karamzin warns Alexander that if he takes away these historically Russian properties,
which were temporally carved out by Poland, he will humiliate his people (“унизились
бы перед другими и перед собою”), but above all he will lose their love (“мы
лишились бы не только прекрасных областей, но и любви к царю”). Then comes a
passionate plea from the old historian: he calls on God as his witness and proclaims his
political creed regarding Poland:

In a word... and may God, who knows human hearts, put a stamp of death
on my lips this very minute, if I lie to you... to put it bluntly, Poland’s

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341 First published in Neizdannyе sochineniia N.N. Karamzina, part 1 (St. Petersburg, 1862), 3-8, in N. N. Karamzin, O drevnei i novoi Rossii. Izbrannaia proza i publitsistika (Moskava: Zhizn' i mysl', 2002), 436-438.

342 Ibid., 436. Христос велит любить врагов: любовь есть чувство; но Он не запретил судьям осуждать злодеев, не запретил воинам оборонять государства.

343 Ibid. Бог дал Вам царство и вместе с ним обязанность исключительно заниматься благом оного.

344 Ibid., 437. Во-вторых, можете ли с мирною совестью отнять у нас Белорусию, Литву, Волынью, Подолию, утвержденную собственность России еще до Вашего царствования?
recovery would be Russia’s demise, or our sons will imbue the Polish land
with their blood and will once again carry Praga by storm! 345

A strong and independent Poland and Russia cannot co-exist, it is either or: the full
restoration of Poland would mean Russia’s demise and inevitably would lead to another
war; “the sons of Russia would again imbue the Polish land with their blood and, take
Praga by storm.” Here Karamzin refers to the bloody battles of the Russian forces in the
district of Warsaw called “Praga” during the Kosciuszko Insurrection of 1794, thus
reminding the Tsar of all the sacrifices Russian soldiers made fighting against Poland for
the sake of their country’s peace and prosperity. It is only natural that with such strong
negative convictions regarding Polish-Russian relations, Karamzin’s opinion on Poles in
general is not much more favorable:

No, Sire, the Poles will never be our sincere brothers or faithful allies.
Now they are weak and miserable: the weak do not like the strong, and the
strong despise the weak; once you strengthen them, they will want
independence, and their first deed will be to abandon Russia...
The Poles justified by the law as a separate, sovereign nation are more
dangerous to us than as Polish-Russian subjects. 346

This is a stern warning about the subversive character of Poles. Alexander should not
deceive himself that they will ever be faithful, reliable allies of Russia. Now, defeated
and under his rule, the Poles are weak and under control. However, if Alexander restores
their ancient borders, they will soon demand full independence and will use the first
opportunity to turn against Russia. Karamzin’s statement that “the Poles will never be our

345 Ibid. Одним словом... и Господь Сердцеведец да замкнет смертью уста мои в сию минуту, если
gоворю Вам не истину... одним словом, восстановление Польши будет падением России, или
сыновья наши обагрят своею кровью землю польскую и снова возьмут штурмом Прагу!

346 Ibid. Нет, Государь, никогда поляки не будут нам ни искренними братьями, ни верными
союзниками. Теперь они слабы и ничтожны: слабые не любят сильных, а сильные презирают
слабых; когда же усилие их, то они захотят независимости, и первым опытом ее будет отступление
от России... Поляки, законом утвержденны в достоинстве особенного, державного народа, для нас
есть опаснее поляков-российян.
sincere brothers,” shows a total lack of trust, which goes beyond political considerations. If the Polish people, as the conquered, dislike Russians, the Russians, as the conquering, despise the Poles. Moreover, Karamzin’s belief that Poland as an independent, sovereign nation would be far more dangerous to Russia then “Poles-Russians” (“опаснее поляков-россиян”) i.e., Poles as Russian subjects, prefigures the process of intense Russification to which Poland was subjected after the subsequent uprisings against Russia in 1830 and 1863.

Karamzin’s “Opinion” was expressed in a confidential letter addressed only to Alexander I, but his views on Poland and Poles were disseminated through his widely popular History of the Russian State, the last volume of which was published when Mickiewicz was in Russia (Volume 12 in 1826). As in “Opinion,” in his History Karamzin also “portrays Poland as Russia’s historical Nemesis” and the Poles as “haughty, greedy, mercenary, thieving despisers of Russians and their Faith,” and gives many historical instances in his work to support such a negative characterization. For example, the behavior of the Polish noblemen who, during the wedding ceremony of False Dmitry and Marina Mniszech (1606), “laughed, dozed, leaned with their backs against icons during the liturgy,” and then, “drunk after the wedding banquet, slashed Muscovites on the streets with their sabres, dishonored most noble women dragging them out of chariots or breaking into their houses,” must have been appalling to Russian readers and indeed showed a total lack of respect for the Russian people and the Orthodox church. However, no matter how horrible Polish atrocities were, in the end, the


Russians always found the strength to defend their dignity and their homeland. When describing Muscovy’s survival in 1612, Karamzin claims that, “hatred of the Poles strengthened Russian resolve.” As Frank Mocha observes, “Since it was read by virtually every educated person in Russia, the History became a veritable school of national pride.” The popularity and importance of Karamzin’s History in Russia is well illustrated by Pushkin’s observation in 1827:

The appearance of The History of the State of Russia produced (as it should have) much fuss and made a strong impression. 3000 books were sold in one month; Karamzin himself had never expected it. Society people rushed to read the history of their own motherland. It was a novelty for them. Old Russia seemed to have been discovered by Karamzin, as America had been discovered by Columbus. They never talked of anything else for a while.

Pushkin speaks about Karamzin with great admiration, complaining that, “no one [in Russia] is able to analyze and appreciate the enormous creation of Karamzin,” and he concludes his remarks with praise: “I repeat, The History of the Russian State is not only the work of a great writer, but is also the heroic deed of a worthy man.”

Pushkin’s appreciation of Karamzin and his work was shared by the great majority of his readers who, like Pushkin, did not question his negative opinion of Poland and Poles. Therefore

349 Black, “Nicholas Karamzin’s ‘Opinion,’” 15.
351 Пушкин – критик, 125. Появление Истории государства Российского (как и надлежало быть) наделало много шума и произвело сильное впечатление. 3000 экземпляров разошлись в один месяц, чего не ожидал и сам Карамзин. Светские люди бросились читать историю своего отечества. Она была для них новым открытием. Древняя Россия, казалось, найдена Карамзиным, как Америка Колумбом. Несколько времени нигде ни о чем ином не говорили.
352 Ibid. Повторяя, что «История государства Российского» есть не только создание великого писателя, но и подвиг честного человека.
Karamzin’s *History* constitutes a valuable context for the analysis of the role Mickiewicz, the Polish poet, played as the Other in Russia in the second half of the 1820s.

In view of Karamzin’s widely read anti-Polish sentiments one can better appreciate the sympathetic attitude towards Poland and Poles, and particularly towards Mickiewicz as a Pole, expressed by Ushakov in the review discussed above. Moreover, Karamzin’s historically and politically motivated mistrust of Poles (“they will never be our sincere brothers”) automatically placed Mickiewicz, along with all his compatriots, in the position of a threatening/hostile Other. I will argue, however, that during the time Mickiewicz was in Russia (November 9, 1824 – April 22, 1829), i.e., before the Polish November Uprising of 1830, it was precisely his Polish otherness that attracted his fellow Russian poets and critics to him. In the literary context, the political “hatred” felt so strongly by Karamzin, was subordinated to a fascination, if not an admiration, for not only the Polish poet, but also for Polish poetry and literature in general.

P. A. Viazemsky, who was in Warsaw in the Russian government service between 1818 and 1821, became one of the most ardent promoters of Mickiewicz as the “Slavic Byron” in Russia and, consequently, of Polish literature and even the Polish language. Interestingly, at the beginning of his stay in Warsaw, he was not a great enthusiast of the Polish people, culture or language. In a letter to his friend D.V. Dashkov written in Warsaw on January 2/14, 1818, he observed: “I am here in Jewish Poland, or, if you want, Polish Judea, I begin to be of their faith and await the second coming [of the Messiah].”

represented only about 12% of the total population of the city, and in the rest of the Polish Congress Kingdom just 7.79 %\textsuperscript{354}; the Jewish quarter was established in Warsaw in 1809, but “Jewish bankers, merchants, manufacturers, army suppliers, and doctors were allowed to live there, if they agreed to wear European style clothing and send their children to general schools.”\textsuperscript{355} Therefore Viazemsky’s remark, which gives an impression that there were more Jews than Poles in Poland, testifies more to the alienation he felt in Poland, than to the actual Jewish domination of the city or the country. Asked by Dashkov about his life in Warsaw Viazemsky replied, “I don’t live here but vegetate” ("Я здесь прозябаю, а не живу"), and added that he could, “only breathe the Russian air” ("Я здесь только и дышу что русским воздухом") which comes via correspondence with a fellow Arzamas member, A.I. Turgenev ("Тургенев
my most constant source of air" [“Мой постояннейший отдушник – Тургенев.”])\textsuperscript{356} In 1818, Viazemsky clearly was not interested in Polish culture or literature (which at the time was completely dominated by Warsaw Neoclassicism). He longed for his Arzamas friends and regretted that, “Poland is not a better part of a better world.”\textsuperscript{357} Eventually he became acquainted with Polish poets and critics, such as Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Ludwik Osiński, Franciszek Morawski, as well as liberal political activists and developed an interest in Polish political and literary affairs, but it was only after meeting Mickiewicz in Moscow and reading his work that Viazemsky became an ardent enthusiast of Polish literature and language.

\textsuperscript{354} In 1816 total population was 2,732,324, Jewish 212, 944. Cf.
www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Poland

\textsuperscript{355} www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Warsaw.html

\textsuperscript{356} P. A. Viazemsky to D. V. Dashkov, 300.

\textsuperscript{357} Ibid.,
In the introduction to his own translation of *The Crimean Sonnets*, published in *The Moscow Telegraph*, which I have discussed in the previous chapter, Viazemsky presents Mickiewicz’s work as “an extraordinary and satisfying (“удовлетворительное”) phenomenon…of foreign poetry, a work of one of the prime poets of Poland, published in Moscow, where there are perhaps not even fifty readers able to evaluate it.” To better illustrate Mickiewicz’s predicament as the Polish poet in Russia, Viazemsky compares him to Kantimir who, “in Paris wrote his immortal satires: if Paris was for Kantimir a ‘deserted island,’” as Batiushkov described it, so, “Moscow is almost the same deserted island for Mickiewicz.” This image of the lonely Romantic poet *par excellence* underscores Mickiewicz’s position as a foreigner, the Other in the Russian literary context. Viazemsky stresses that Mickiewicz is one of the selected few who possess the right to represent the “literary glory of their nations,” but that foreign, i.e., Polish literature should not be alien to the Russian readers:

One can’t help but wonder and feel sorry for the fact that this compatriot of our literature [i.e. Polish literature] is so little known here. As much the political bonds that tie us to Poland now, so much the bonds of natural relation and mutual profit, for the Literature must have brought us closer together, so it seems. Studying Polish could be an auxiliary addition to studying our native language. A lot of ancestral features that were lost by us were preserved by our neighbors and co-heirs; in the mutual studying of the heritage that is divided between us, both sides could gain mutual profit from such a peaceful sharing. The brothers, that History often presents as a new example of ancient Thebaid, should commit to oblivion the medieval epoch of their existence, marked by family quarrels, and unite on the basis of their common origins and present union. Polish and Russian journals

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359 Ibid., 193.

360 Ibid.
have the responsibility of preparing preliminary measures for such a family reunion.361

Viazemsky, introducing Mickiewicz’s poetry to Russian readers, is well aware of the political reality of Polish-Russian relations which might influence Russians’ attitude towards the Polish poet and his work. He is equally aware that many of the same readers have also read Karamzin’s History, which “frequently presents brothers,” i.e., Poles and Russians, “as a new example of ancient Thebaid,” a reference to the epic Thebaid by the Roman poet Publius Papinius Statius (c. 45-95 AD) about the mythological brothers Polynoeices and Eteocles, the sons of Oedipus who fought for rule of Thebes.362 Actually, the ancient Greek story which tells of Polynoeices who married the daughter of the King of Argo, and with the support of his army arrived in Thebes to claim the throne, parallels the story of False Dmitry who married Marina Mniszech, the daughter of a Polish aristocrat, and invaded Russia with a Polish army to claim the throne in Moscow; events that Karamzin so eloquently described in the last two volumes of his History. However, Viazemsky, who privately knew Karamzin as a much older brother-in-law and sort of father-figure, goes against the lessons of the old historian and calls on both, Poles and

361 Ibid., 192-193. Нельзя не подивиться и не пожалеть, что сия соплеменница [т.е. польская литература] нашей, так у нас мало известна. Сколько узы политические, соединяющие нас ныне с Польшею, столько узы природного сродства и взаимной пользы в Словесности, должны бы, кажется, нас сблизить. Изучение польского языка могло быть–бы вспомогательным дополнением к изучению языка отечественного. Многие родовые черты сохранившиеся у соседей и сонаследников наших, утрачены нами; в общем рассмотрении наследства, разделенного между нами, в миролюбивой размене с обеих сторон, могли–бы обрести мы общую выгоду. Братия, которых часто представляет История новым примером древней Фиваиды, должны—бы, кажется, предать забвению среднюю эпоху своего бытия, ознаменованную семейными раздорами, и слиться в чертах коренных своего происхождения и нынешнего соединения. Журналам Польским и Русским предоставлена обязанность изготовить предварительные меры семейного сближения.

Russians, to “commit to oblivion the medieval epoch of their existence, marked by family quarrels and unite on the basis of their common origins and the present union.” To that end Viazemsky declares, “Polish and Russian journals are given the duty to prepare preliminary measures for greater family intimacy,” and clearly his article is a first step towards this goal.

To be sure, Viazemsky, like Ushakov, looks at Poland in 1827 from the Russian perspective, seeing it as a country united with Russia under the same monarch. However, while Ushakov emphasized the political union between the two countries in order to present Mickiewicz as a familiar Other in a Russian literary context, Viazemsky stresses the common Slavic origins of Poland and Russia. While it is true that in his call for unity of Poles and Russians as brothers-Slavs, Viazemsky is “resorting to the kind of pan-Slavic pattern that marked the language of the nineteenth-century official imperial ideology,”363 Pushkin’s poem, “He lived among us,” dedicated to Mickiewicz, suggests that the Polish poet also shared at least some of those views:

…Нередко
Он говорил о временах грядущих,
Когда народы, распри позабыв,
В великую семью соединятся.
Мы жадно слушали поэта.364

[Often/ he spoke about future times/ When nations, forgetting, forgetting their quarrels/ Will unite in one family./ We eagerly listened to the poet.]

As I argued in Chapter Three, the opening lines of the poem, “He lived among us/Amidst a tribe foreign to him” (“Он между нами жил/Средь племени ему чужого”) create an image of Mickiewicz as an inspired poet-bard in exile through a parallel with the


description of Ovid in *The Gypsies*. But in the context of the present analysis, Pushkin’s image simultaneously highlights Mickiewicz’s foreignness/otherness in the Russian context, while also evoking a closeness between the poet and his Russian friends: they loved him ("мы/Его любим") and eagerly listened to his words about “the future times/When all the nations, will forget their quarrels/Will unite in one family.”

Mickiewicz’s words suggest that when he was living in Russia, he also envisioned a harmonious coexistence of all the nations including Russia and Poland, similar to Viazemsky’s idealistic view of Polish-Russian unity.

In order to create a stronger image of Mickiewicz as “our” Slavic Byron, Viazemsky stresses the closeness of Russian and Polish literature and languages and expresses regret that Russians know so little of the “literature of a fellow (Slavic) tribe, and goes so far as to suggest that Russians should learn Polish: “it would help them to study their native language…[because Polish] preserved many ancestral characteristics we have lost.”

When speaking about his translation of *The Crimean Sonnets*, Viazemsky explains that he was, “translating as literally as possible” ("как можно буквальнее") because, “I wanted to demonstrate the similarities between the Polish and Russian languages and frequently I translated not only word for word, but I also [used] a Polish word when I could find it in Russian, even if with some alternation, but still with [common] ancestral traits (‘знамением родовым’).” The interest in common Polish and Russian linguistic origins is for Viazemsky a part of the Romantic search for narodnost’, national tradition, in the language itself. Significantly, for Viazemsky

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366 Ibid., 201-202.
learning Polish is a way of exploring the history of his own Russian language; his interest in Mickiewicz’s poetic (Polish) language also reflects Russian struggles to establish their own Romantic literary/poetic discourse. In one of his “Notebooks” Viazemsky observed:

One mustn’t forget that western languages are the heirs of ancient languages and that Western literature has attained the highest degree of knowledge, and therefore absorbed all the colors and shades of refined living. Our language comes from a noble, but poor parentage, that left their heirs neither literature, that they hadn’t had, nor the traditions of fine manners, that they hadn’t known..

Viazemsky is deeply conscious of the limitations of the Russian literary language, which Romantics inherited from the previous generation. This is in contrast to “Western languages, heirs to ancient languages and literatures,” which as a result acquired a high degree of sophistication that Russian lacks. That is why, as I have argued in the previous chapter, Viazemsky considers Byron’s poetic language to be the model for the Romantic poetic discourse, and Mickiewicz uses this type of language in his *Crimean Sonnets*. Viazemsky does not discuss the history of Polish literature, but he knows that “the richness of Mickiewicz’s poetic language” comes not only from the Polish poet’s talent, but also from the literature that the Poles inherited from previous centuries, particularly the Renaissance, which Russia did not experience. Even though the Poles are a fellow Slavic tribe, they appropriated Western sophistication a long time ago. That is why Mickiewicz and Byron “speak the same language understood by their generation.”

Translating *The Crimean Sonnets* as “as literally as possible” and using Polish words in Russian whenever they can be understood, Viazemsky attempts to appropriate for

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367 P. A. Viazemsky, “Staraia zapisnaia knizhka,” vol.8, part1 Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, 39. Нельзя терять из виду, что западные языки наследники древних языков и их литературы, которые достигли высшей степени образованности и должны усвоить все краски, все оттенки утонченного общения. Наш язык происходит, пожалуй, от благородных, но бедных родителей, которые не могли оставить наследнику своему ни литературы, которой они не имели, ни преданий утонченного общежития, которого они не знали.
Russians the richness and sophistication that Mickiewicz’s poetry offers and Russian poetry still lacks.

From the Russian perspective then, Mickiewicz’s Polishness is as Slavic as it is Western. It is significant that Viazemsky never mentions Mickiewicz’s Lithuanian roots, which were so important for Pushkin’s image of the poet-bard. In the Russian consciousness, as Venclova pointed out, Lithuania is located east, not west, of Moscow and Petersburg. Therefore Viazemsky never refers to Mickiewicz as a “Lithuanian bard,” he never mentions the poet’s longing for his native country, which is one of the main themes of The Crimean Sonnets. Instead, for Viazemsky Mickiewicz is a “Polish poet” and “Polish Pilgrim”—a traveler from the West on a voyage through exotic Oriental lands like Byron and his Childe Harold before him. By “traveler from the West” I do not refer only to the geographical location of Poland in relation to Russia, but, more importantly, to the significance of the Polish cultural heritage, which in the Russian consciousness was inevitably connected with Catholicism and Rome and Western cultural tradition. That is why Viazemsky needs a Polish, rather than Lithuanian Pilgrim and poet. Pushkin’s “Southern Poems” revealed the exotic South for the Russians, but his Prisoner came to the Caucasus as an invader with the Russian army. Mickiewicz’s Polish Pilgrim-Poet offered Russians a different perception of their Orient: that of the Western Traveler. As Ushakov observed, Mickiewicz discovered the Crimea for Russian poets: “His delightful Crimean Sonnets especially incited the national pride of our poets who, as if becoming ashamed of domestic lyres ignored the charming beauty of nature in this
country that belongs to Russia. Our best poets began to copy charming pictures, in which Mickiewicz depicted the Tavrida.”

N. A. Polevoy, the editor of *The Moscow Telegraph*, was actually the very first critic to introduce Mickiewicz to Russian readers, not by publishing his poetry, but rather by publishing the translation of Dmochowski’s article, “On the Contemporary Condition, Spirit and Trends in Polish poetry.” Polevoy added along editorial footnote (two pages!) in which he announced his intentions, to “make a permanent section of the *Telegraph,*” with, “bibliographical and critical articles on the newest, and sometimes on earlier and ancient, Polish literature.” As he explained to his Russian readers, they should become acquainted with the “literature of a nation that is gifted with a passionate and powerful imagination, which acquired learning and enlightenment much earlier than we did,” especially now that, “Poland is united with us under the scepter of one monarch.”

Of course the main reason for devoting so much space and attention to Polish literature is Adam Mickiewicz, a “young poet who deserves European fame but is completely unknown in Russia.” Significantly, Polevoy blames the Russians themselves for being ignorant of Polish literature and Mickiewicz’s work in particular:

> And while the author of some tearful French elegy or a classically refined French poem takes several pages of remarks and aaahing and ooohing from the French critics, and thus leads to much talk in Russia, Mickiewicz, the author of *Dziady, Swiezianka, Dudarz, Zaleski,* the poet of domestic reminiscences, Odyniec, rich in feeling and thought, or from the past ones, witty Krasicki, kind-hearted and tender Karpinski all remain unknown in Russia. Unknown, only because we don’t want to study Polish, or that we are sure that there is nothing to read in Polish literature, because *(raison

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370 Ibid., 183.
French magazines don’t write about Polish literature, and we like to repeat what they say in Paris. We translate Byron, W. Scott and Goethe from the French and we read them in French translations, and that’s why our journalists, who can and thus should acquaint us with Polish literature, only translate articles from Polish magazines that have already been translated from a German or French one! (Italics in the original)

Polevoy praises Mickiewicz and other Polish poets as he attacks the French influence in Russian literature—not only the influence of French Classicism, but also the Russian fascination with everything that comes from France in general., Mickiewicz and other great Polish poets are completely unknown in Russia because, as Polevoy upbraids his fellow Russian critics, journalists, and readers, “we do not want to learn Polish, we have convinced ourselves that there is nothing to read in Polish literature, because French journals write nothing about it, and we like to repeat what the French say.” What then did Polish literature have to offer, which so inspired Polevoy that he insisted that Russians should learn the Polish language?

Dmochowski was a moderate Classicist and in his article he offers young Polish Romantics an olive branch and seeks common ground with them by acknowledging the need for establishing “national models” in poetry based on Polish history, religion, tradition, and folk tales, and praises Mickiewicz for doing just that. Polevoy notes that

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371 Ibid., 185. И в то же время, как сочинитель какой ни будь слезливой французской элегии или классически-облаченной поэмы французской занимает по нескольку листов замечаний и аханья французских рецензентов и от того производит громкую молву в России, Мицкевич, сочинитель Дздов, Свitezянки, Дудара [ballad “Dudarz” in Ballads and Romances MD]. Залесский, поэт отечественных воспоминаний, Одынец, богатый чувством и мыслями, или из прежних, остроумный Красицкий, добролюбный и нежный Карпинский – неизвестны в России, от того только, что мы не хотим учиться польскому языку, затвердили себе, что в польской литературе ничего читать, потому что (raison importante!) во французских журналах ничего не пишут о польской литературе, а мы любим повторять что скажут в Париже – и Бейрона, и В. Скотта и Гёте переводим с французского и читаем во французских переводах, и от того, что наши журналисты, которые могут и следственно – должны-бы знакомить нас с польскому литературою – переводят только из польских журналов статьи, переведенные в них из немецкого или французского журнала! ” (Italics original)
Polish literature “almost forestalled ours in originality and narodnost’,” thus implying that it could be an antidote for French influences, and a model for Russian poetry, especially since it is a literature of a “nation native to us in language and origins (“родного нам по языку и происхождению”). It is interesting how, in his desire to promote his national, i.e., folk-based, anti-aristocratic version of Romanticism, Polevoy indiscriminately accepts Dmochowski’s opinions on Polish poets. He recommends Igancy Krasicki (1735-1801), one of the prime representatives of Polish Classicism based on French models, and Franciszek Karpinski (1741-1825), a leading sentimental lyricist of the Enlightenment, while leaving out Trembecki, most likely because Dmochowski says that he was a master of Polish language, but “he did not depict national traditions and spirit.” That Polevoy praises Mickiewicz is of course understandable, however his remarks on Odyniec, a minor Romantic poet and mere imitator of Mickiewicz, whom Dmochowski applauds for his efforts to create a national poetry, show that Polevoy did not really know Polish literature all that well, and/or that he wanted to present Mickiewicz not as a singular phenomenon from Poland, but as a representative of a powerful literary tradition that should be, and in fact was, much closer to the Russian than to the French. Polevoy’s attack on Russian Gallomania is part of his campaign for narodnost’ in Russian literature. Polish poetry has much to offer Russian literature in terms of national models based on a long-standing tradition and the publication of Dmochowski’s article and Polevoy’s editorial commentary were the first steps towards making this poetry available to Russian critics, writers, and readers alike. Three years later Ushakov would attack Dmochowski as the “Napoleon of Polish Literature” for his

372 It is surprising that Mickiewicz, who already knew Polevoy at the time the article was published did not explain to him how unfounded Dmochowski’s opinion of Trembecki was.
criticism of *The Crimean Sonnets*, but *The Moscow Telegraph* remained the most ardent advocate of Mickiewicz as the greatest Polish poet.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Polevoy considered *Konrad Wallenrod* to be Mickiewicz’s greatest poetic achievement and the embodiment of national poetry. The *narodnost’* of *Wallenrod* rests on the content of the work, drawn from ancient Lithuanian history, and particularly on the character of Halban. From the Russian perspective, the Lithuanian pagan past was part of the common Slavic heritage, especially when opposed to a once common enemy—the Catholic Order of Teutonic Knights. The Russians could certainly identify with Wallenrod and the Lithuanians’ fight against the Germans and rejoiced in their victory of 1394 as they proudly remembered Alexander Nevsky’s glorious victory over the same Order on Lake Peipus in 1242. In the context of Russia’s own history, Halban, who so effectively instilled national consciousness in the hearts of his countrymen, thus prompting them to fight against the Germans, represented the ideal model of the national bard. This does not mean, however, that Russian critics and readers perceived Mickiewicz, the author of *Wallenrod. A Tale from the History of Lithuania and Prussia*, the national poet/bard of, or from, Lithuania. On the contrary, for Polevoy and the majority of Russians who knew him and wrote about him, Mickiewicz was a Polish poet.

It may be surprising at first to find that Polevoy, like Viazemsky, never mentions Mickiewicz’s Lithuanian background, and never speaks of the poet’s longing for his native land, as if the Lithuanian content of his poetry had no bearing on how the critic perceived Mickiewicz’s own poetic-national identity. Viazemsky, in his approach to Romanticism based on Western European models, construed the image of Mickiewicz as
the Polish=Western Other in the context of emerging Russian Romanticism; Polevoy, however, clearly rejected such an approach in favor of national, i.e., Russian-Slavic models, so it would seem he should have been particularly perceptive to the Lithuanian side of the poet’s identity. Why then did Polevoy ignore it? The most obvious reason is the language of Mickiewicz’s poetry: his greatest achievement, according to Polevoy, was the “Tale of the Bard” which was written in hexameter and was the first successful transplantation of the ancient Greek meter into the Polish (not Lithuanian) language. In Konrad Wallenrod the narrator tells us that Halban sings his tale in Lithuanian, but readers never actually hear these beautiful sounds “of the surging waves/or gentle ripple of a spring rain” as Wallenrod described them; they would have been as incomprehensible to Mickiewicz’s audience as they were to the German listeners of the old bard Halban. But then, Mickiewicz, even if he had known the Lithuanian language, could not have written the bard’s tale in Halban’s native tongue simply because, as the poet explained in the introduction to Konrad Wallenrod, it did not exist any longer, it belonged to the ancient past:

The circumstances here mentioned are covered by some centuries. Both Lithuania, and her cruelest enemy, the Teutonic Order, have disappeared from the scene of political life; the relations between neighboring nations are entirely changed;…even popular song has not preserved their memory. Lithuania is now entirely in the past: her history presents from this circumstance a happy theme for poetry; so that a poet, in singing of the events of that time, objects only of historic interest, must occupy himself with searching into, and with artfully rendering the subject, without summoning to his aid the interests, passions, or fashions of his readers.373

373 Translated by Maude Ashurst Biggs, Konrad Wallenrod. A Historical Poem by Adam Mickiewicz. Kilka już wieków zakrywa wspomnione tu wydarzenia: zeszły ze sceny życia politycznego i Litwa, i najgroźniejszy jej nieprzyjaciel, Zakon krzyżowy; stosunki narodów sąsiednich zmieniły się zupełnie; … nawet pamiętek nie ocaliły pieśni gminne. Litwa jest już całkiem w przeszłości; jej dzieje przedstawiają z tego względu szczęśliwy dla poezji zawód, że poeta opiewający ówczesne wypadki, samym tylko przedmiotem historycznym, zgłębianiem rzeczy i kunsztownym wydaniem zajmować się musi, nie przywołując na pomoc interesu, namiętności lub mody czytelników.
The majority of Mickiewicz scholars agree that the poet wrote the introduction, which presents the events related in *Konrad Wallenrod* as strictly historical, with no connection or parallels whatsoever to the contemporary political situation of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in order to mislead the censors. Janion points out that some readers and scholars saw the introduction as, “an authorial ‘wallenrodism’” (“wallenrodyzm”), especially in view of a servile paragraph Mickiewicz added to the second edition of Wallenrod in the two-volume *Poems* published in Petersburg in 1829, in which he addressed Tsar Nicholas I as “the true Father of his people.” However, Venclova, while acknowledging that “medieval Lithuania in Mickiewicz’s epic poem figured as a rather transparent pseudonym for the entire Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the resurrection of which was the first article of the author’s creed,” also observes, “Yet, a characteristic ambiguity persisted: if applied to real medieval Lithuania with its separate historical identity, Mickiewicz’s statement had to be taken quite literally.” In the introduction Mickiewicz explains that, “The Jagiellonians and their mighty vassals became Poles; many Lithuanian princes in Rus’ adopted Russian religion, language and nationality.” The Lithuanian language “survived only among the populace,” i.e., peasants, but, “folk songs did not preserve even memories” of Lithuanian history (“nawet pamiętek nie ocaliły pieśni gminne”). Thus, the poet declares, “Lithuania is already completely in the past, but as such it constitutes a happy subject for a poet” (“Litwa jest już całkiem w przeszłości; jej dzieje przedstawiają z tego względu szczęśliwy dla poezji zawód”)—a Romantic poet we should add. Mickiewicz as the author

374 Janion, *Życie pośmiertne Konrada Wallenroda* 41-42.

375 Venclova, “Native Realm Revisited: Mickiewicz’s Lithuania and Mickiewicz in Lithuania.”
of *Konrad Wallenrod* takes on the same role as Halban in his poem; he is literally resurrecting and preserving the distant Lithuanian medieval past, thus bringing back to life Lithuania’s long forgotten identity, her *narodnost’*.

The historical distance that the poet created between himself and the subject of his work was certainly one of the reasons why Polevoy and other Russians would not consider Mickiewicz to be a Lithuanian, but rather as a Polish poet whose poetry explored Lithuanian history and tradition, thus, resurrecting the national spirit of an extinct culture. In his review of *Konrad Wallenrod*, Polevoy stresses that the subject of the poem comes from “medieval chronicles, which tell about the mysterious Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights who died in 1394. His origins, actions and death puzzled his contemporaries… [and] gave rise to strange rumors, legends and popular beliefs.”376 For Polevoy, medieval Lithuania as presented in *Konrad Wallenrod* was indeed part of the ancient past, and thus, a perfect subject for Romantic poetry, as were the folk traditions and beliefs which inspired *Ballads and Romances* and *Forefathers Eve*. In the review of the two-volume edition of Mickiewicz’s *Poetry*, Polevoy writes:

> Small writings and translations by Mickiewicz would have been enough to give him a place of honor among Polish poets. But *The Forefathers*... showed Mickiewicz’s originality and above average talent. He animated people’s beliefs with the fire of poetry; he gave incomprehensible folk symbols life and meaning.377

Polevoy understood perfectly what constituted Mickiewicz’s unique poetic identity (“самобытность”): in his poetry he “animated folk superstitions” and made,

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377 Polevoy, “Poezye Adama Mickiewicza,” 200. “Мелкие сочинения и переводы Мицкевича были бы достаточны для того, чтобы доставить ему почетное место между Польскими поэтами. Но Праотцы…показали самобытность Мицкевича и гений выше обыкновенных. Суеверие народное одушевил он огнём поэзии; непонятным символам простонародных обрядов дал жизнь и значение.”
“incomprehensible folk symbols and rituals alive and meaningful,” understandable and accessible to his readers. Significantly, nowhere in the review does Polevoy acknowledge that those symbols and rituals come from Lithuania. Was it too obvious even to mention? It seems that the Russian critic shared the belief that the Lithuanian folk tradition was the source and inspiration for Polish national poetry with Dmochowski, who in his article published by The Moscow Telegraph declared: “Lithuania, Ukraine, Podolia, Volynia, considered from the point of view of poetry, promise a far richer harvest for our literature than the regions of Great and Little Poland.”

Dmochowski speaks here of Wielkopolska and Małopolska, the two main regions, which (along with Mazovia) constituted the oldest, Polish-speaking territories of Rzeczpospolita. As he explains, “due to various political, social, and geographical circumstances,” literature in those two regions of Poland “never developed its individual [national] character…[unlike] in Lithuania, Rus’ and Ukraine, where poetry of the populace flourishes much more.”

For Polish critics and poets, Classicists and Romantics alike, who were seeking to establish national models in Polish literature, Lithuania and the other “exotic,” eastern regions of the former Commonwealth were the most natural, organic source of inspiration for Polish national poetry. At the same time, from the Russian perspective, as Karamzin explained to Alexander I in his “Opinion of a Russian Citizen,” those very same territories—Lithuania, Ukraine, Podolia, Volynia—were “ours,” they always belonged to Russia even if in the past they were carved out by Poland for a time. Karamzin’s opinion was motivated by reasons of State, but the Russian Romantics were not interested in

379 Ibid. no 15, 191-192.
political disputes; rather they looked at those western Russian provinces from a historical and cultural point of view, and saw them as invaluable sources of national tradition for both Polish and Russian literature.

This apolitical attitude of the Russian Romantics is visible in “Walk beyond the Dnepr: A Letter to a Friend,” a long article by Peter Gabbe380 (1796-ca.1841). Gabbe was a contributor to *The Moscow Telegraph* and a poet, who, as an officer, served for several years in Warsaw where he befriended Viazemsky.381 Gabbe traveled through southwestern Volynia and Ukraine and his article is a travelogue of sorts, with extensive historical, geographical, and ethnographical commentaries. He is particularly interested in the history and cultural development of the region and describes at length the contribution of Polish aristocratic families such as the Czartoryskis, Potockis, Jabłonowskis, Wiśniowieckis, Ostrowskis and others, whose residences functioned as powerful and influential cultural and political centers. Gabbe also admires the Ukrainian folk tales and legends he hears during his voyage, such as the story from Równe about the young peasant woman who, according to local tradition, was attacked by a group of lustful Cossacks. She prayed to the Mother of God to preserve her honor by turning her into a stone. The prayer was granted and the traveler, looking at the stone, observes that such “tales are worth the interest not of simple people alone; they animate every phenomenon of nature, similarly to how the Dryads and Oreads animated rural images of


the Greeks.”382 Then, addressing himself to Russian readers, Gabbe cites the example of Polish poets who “feel the close connection of those legends with the narodnost’ of their art. Not to mention Mickiewicz, known to the Russian audience by his Romantic Ballads.”383 Interestingly, Gabbe draws the same parallel between ancient Greek models and narodnost’ in Romantic poetry that Mickiewicz did in the introduction to Ballads and Romances, but speaking about “Polish poets” he also refers to the so-called “Ukrainian School” (as opposed to Vilnius) of Polish Romanticism. The leading representatives of the Ukrainian school, Józef Bohdan Zalewski, Seweryn Goszczyński and Antoni Malczewski, received recognition for their poetry which was deeply rooted in Ukrainian history and folklore, and the first two men were also praised by Dmochowski. In the broader context of Polish Romantic poetry, the poets of the “Ukrainian School” were always in Mickiewicz’s shadow, but it is to Gabbe’s credit that he recommends them as examples. Significantly, Gabbe tells his fellow Russian poets and readers to look to Ukrainian folk traditions as inspiration for Russian poetry, as Polish poets do for their poetry. There is no contradiction in his statement. The vast, breath-taking Ukrainian steppes are the common heritage of both Poles and Russians:

From here begin those steppes, that is, the open space that since the XVII century belonged to Poland and Russia equally, thanks to Cossack raids and their glorious battles. Here the classic land of Malorossiia [Small Russia] and its glory begins!384

382 Gabbe, “Progulka za Dneprom,” Moskovskii Telegraf 13, no 4, 278.
383 Ibid.
384 Gabbe, “Progulka za Dneprom,” Moskovskii Telegraf 14, no 5, 15. Здесь—то начинаются сии степи, т.е. места открытые, кои с истории XVII столетия равномерно принадлежат Польше и России, набегами казаков и славными их битвами. Здесь начинается классическая земля Малой России и ее величие!
Of course, writing those words in 1826 when Ukraine, like Podolia, Volynia and Lithuania, had been incorporated into the Russian Empire, Gabbe does not refer to the actual political situation. Rather he alludes to the common and equal Polish and Russian claim to the cultural heritage of these territories, where, over the centuries, under changing political domination, the cultural influences of Polish, Catholic and Western traditions mixed with those of Russian Orthodox culture, religion and language.

Mickiewicz acknowledged this in the introduction to *Konrad Wallenrod* pointing out that the “Jagiellonians and their mighty vassals became Poles,” but at the same time “many Lithuanian princes in Rus’ adopted Russian religion, language and nationality.” There are other telling details in Mickiewicz’s poetry which suggest a close connection between the Lithuanian people and the Russian tradition; in the ritual of *dziady* peasants offer food to the suffering souls of the dead to comfort them, which is to this day a common practice in the Orthodox church, but never was in the Catholic faith. Also, in *Forefathers Eve* Part IV, the action takes place in a hut of a Gustaw former teacher and a local priest who is a widower with two little children; thus, clearly he must be a member of the Orthodox, not the Catholic Church. Therefore for the Russian Romantics, Ukrainian and Lithuanian traditions, legends, and beliefs, which survived among local peasant inhabitants and constituted their unique national identities, represented an invaluable inspiration for poetry, a source of *narodnost’* in Russian literature just as they were for Mickiewicz and other Polish poets.

The Polish Romantics construed their individual identities as poets by stressing the uniqueness of their native regions in their works. As Witkowska notes, the very titles, such as Malczewski’s *Maria, A Ukrainian Tale*, or *Konrad Wallenrod, a Tale from*
Lithuanian History, demonstrate diverse sources of national models in Polish literature.\footnote{385}{Witkowska, \textit{Romantyzm}, 213.}

But for the Russian proponents of \textit{narodnost’}, particularly for Polevoy, these local traditions were part of the universal Slavic whole with which they could also identify. In this common Slavic context, Mickiewicz fits particularly well into Polevoy’s ideal of the poet who captures the essence of his own national and individual spirit, while at the same time representing the universal ideal of the time. What made Mickiewicz such an ideal model as a national poet was the fusion of his Lithuanian-Slavic identity with his Polishness, which created his role as the Other in the emerging Russian Romanticism. As a Polish poet in the Russian literary context, Mickiewicz functioned not only as a counterpart to his greatest Western Romantic contemporary, Byron, but also represented centuries of Western literary tradition with which the Russians were so eagerly trying to catch up. His excellent knowledge of ancient and modern languages surpassed that of many of his Russian contemporaries. Above all, his extensive knowledge and understanding of the canon of Western literature from the ancient Greeks to Byron (“It seemed he read all the best in all literatures”),\footnote{386}{K. Polevoy, \textit{Zapiski}, 170.} gave his admirers the sense that he made the Western tradition his own and completely appropriated it for himself. In his memoirs Ksenofont Polevoy remembers how Mickiewicz “amazed one passionate admirer of Jean Paul Richter,” who “studied drop by drop all the abstractness of the German poet (sic!), laboring over and scrutinizing absurdities that sometimes can be found even in Jean Paul Richter:”

Mickiewicz started to prove that it was a drawback, that great writers’ works were clear and light, and when his opponent let him know that he surely must have never worked on the great German genius, Mickiewicz
quickly sketched an explanation on the contents of Jean-Paul’s best novels, quoted many places, notable for their inconsistency, and thus proved that he wasn’t talking off the top of his head.\textsuperscript{387}

Mickiewicz’s interlocutor obviously did not know that \textit{Forefathers Eve} Part IV begins with a quotation from Jean Paul’s novel under the telling title \textit{Biographische Belustigungen unter der Gehirnschale einer Riesin} (\textit{Biographical Recreations under the Brainpan of a Giantess}, 1796): “I lifted all the rotten shrouds laying in coffins….”\textsuperscript{388} As Kleiner pointed out, through his knowledge of Richter’s work, Mickiewicz was able to utilize the style of horror fantasy found in German Romanticism. This fantastical style permeates the ambiguous nature of the main character Gustaw who at one moment appears to be a living man, at another a ghost. Yet, Mickiewicz always transforms these foreign inspirations and seamlessly incorporates them into his own unique style in \textit{Forefathers}, thus creating the first Romantic Polish drama. Polevoy was absolutely right—Mickiewicz “was not talking off the top of his head” (“он говорил не наобум”) about Jean-Paul, he was talking about him as an equal.

An even more revealing insight as to why the Russians perceived Mickiewicz as a representative of Western literary tradition is provided by Ksenofont Polevoy’s observation that “with all his amazing and versatile scholarship, he had an original

\textsuperscript{387} Ibid. Мицкевич стал доказывать, что это составляет недостаток, что у великих писателей все ясно и светло, и когда противник хотел дать ему знать, что он, конечно, не трудился над великим немецким гением, Мицкевич в быстром очерке объяснил ему содержание лучших романов Жан–Поля, стал цитовать многие места, замечательные несообразностями, и тем доказал, что он говорил не наобум.

\textsuperscript{388} I lifted rotten shrouds lying in coffins; I dismissed the lofty consolation of resignation, only so as I could repeat to myself—Oh, but it was not like that!” in Dziady Część IV. (“Ich hob alle mürbe Leichenschleier auf, die in Särgen lagen - ich entfernte den erhabenen Trost der Ergebung, bloss um mir immer fort zu sagen: "Ach, so war es ja nicht!”)
opinion on everything.” To illustrate this, Polevoy relates a conversation about Hoffman’s article on Petrarch, published in Russian translation by Kachenovsky in *The Herald of Europe*. Hoffman, “laughed at Petrarch’s platonic love for Laura, trying to demonstrate that the merit of his sonnets lies in the word-play refined to such an degree that, in the end it is impossible to distinguish whether he is talking about Laura or a laurel tree.” Some in Mickiewicz’s presence praised Hoffman for his wittiness, but the poet was quick to point out that Hoffman’s “article is a mere selection from Sismondi, who with his cold mind judged the most tender and passionate poet [Petrarch].” Defending Petrarch, Mickiewicz explained how each of his sonnets conveys a different memory of love expressed with truth and genuine feeling. To illustrate his point he started to translate into French several of Petrarch’s sonnets from memory and concluded: “There is no poetry in the world if this is not poetry!” Polevoy humbly admits that Mickiewicz spoke so cleverly, so powerfully, so sublimely that he cannot relate it, and is only able to give a general idea of the poet’s thoughts. Needless to say, the related incident not only reveals how well Mickiewicz knew Petrarch’s poetry and understood his feelings, it also explains the mastery of his own Sonnets the ease with which he was able to convey his feelings of rejected and thus platonic love for his own Laura-Maryla.

Of course it could be said that Mickiewicz was simply an incredibly talented poet, who possessed a fantastic memory and who through extensive reading acquired an in-

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389 K. Polevoy, *Zapiski*, 175

390 “статья известного французского остроумца Гофмана,” Ibid. Polevoy refers to François-Benoît Hoffman (1760-1828), a French poet.

391 Ibid.

392 “cold mind” of an economist and historian, i.e., Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi (1773-1842).

393 Ibid., 175.
depth knowledge of literature. However, the image of Mickiewicz as the Polish/European poet construed by his Russian contemporaries reveals how acutely he made them aware of their own deficiencies. Mickiewicz, like all the Romantics, had to struggle to determine his own poetic identity, and had to find the way to make his own transition from Classicism to the new Romantic self. Unlike his Russian admirers, however, he had centuries of Polish literary tradition behind him, from the Renaissance through the Baroque period to the Enlightenment. It was this inheritance that he absorbed and used to his advantage as a poet. He knew where he was coming from and, thus, he was able to approach the overwhelming wealth of European literature with a sense of his own worth and appropriate it for his poetry. Mickiewicz had the right to identify himself as being “from Lithuania-a Pole-a European.” Each part of this equation was an equal part of his poetic identity.

Mickiewicz’s image as a Polish and European poet in the context of Russian literature is perhaps most visible in Ivan Kireevsky’s “Survey of Russian literature for 1829” written and published in 1830. The survey reflects the still fluid state of Russian literature, which unlike Polish literature, had not yet established its true national spirit and character, its narodnost’:

Polish and Russian literature, had until now not only been a reflection of French-German literature, but had also existed uniquely thanks to the power of foreign influence. How could that influence Russia? – For both literary traditions to be joined in a solid union, at least one of them must have had a representation amongst the first-class rulers of European minds; for whoever is in power in Europe has influence over its literature. Mickiewicz, by concentrating his nation’s spirit in himself, was the first one to give Polish poetry the right to have its own voice among Europe’s

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intellectual deputies, and at the same time give it the opportunity to influence our poetry as well. 395

According to Kireevsky, as long as Polish literature, “only functioned through the power of foreign influences,” it could not have any affect on Russian literature, which also had followed and apparently, as his survey demonstrates, still was, following, French and German models. However, the situation changed with the appearance of Mickiewicz who, as the Polish national poet, became one of Europe’s intellectual leaders. Kireevsky, following Shevyrev’s assertion in his review of Byron’s Manfred, lists Mickiewicz along with Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare, Byron, and Moore, as the poets who, “enjoy the lion’s share of the love of our men of letters.” Russia has yet to produce a poet of such European stature, but at present (1830) Mickiewicz, and consequently Polish literature, has “the voting rights among the intellectual deputies of Europe,” and has therefore “gained the opportunity to influence our [Russian] poetry.”

Significantly, Kireevsky, unlike other Romantic proponents of narodnost’ such as Polevoy, Ushakov and Viazemsky, does not view Mickiewicz’s Polishness as a Slavic phenomenon; he does not create the image of “our-Russian” Mickiewicz. On the contrary, the Polish poet can function as the Other in Russian literature precisely because he is Polish and European (not Russian) at the same time, and, as stressed by Kireevsky, this gives him the power and the right to influence his fellow Russian poets, i.e., gives them the opportunity to establish their own identity in relation to him as the Other.

395 Ibid., 41-42. Польская литература, также как русская, до сих пор была не только отражением литературы французско-немецкой, но и существовала единственно силою чуждого влияния. Как могла она действовать на Россию? – Чтобы обе словесности вступили в сношения непосредственные и заключили союз прочный, нужно было хотя одной из них иметь своего уполномоченного на сейме первоклассных правителей Европейских умов; ибо одно господствующее в Европе может иметь влияние на подвластные ей литературы. Мицкевич, сосредоточив в себе дух своего народа, первый дал польской поэзии право иметь свой голос среди умственных депутатов Европы, и вместе с тем дал ей возможность действовать и на нашу поэзию.
In the eyes of his Russian contemporaries, then, Mickiewicz was a Polish poet, which to some made him our “tribesman” or even “a fellow countryman,” while at the same time, often the same people, saw him as a part of the Western-European tradition, all the while praising the Lithuanian narodnost’ of his poetry. All these diverse, often opposing, but yet, intersecting, interpretations of the poet’s identity once again reflect the Russians’ struggles to find their own poetic identities in relation to Russian, as well as European, literary traditions. In the context of these struggles Pushkin’s paradigm, in which, as I have argued in Chapter Three, Mickiewicz occupied a firm place as the divinely-inspired poet-bard is a unique exception. The image of Mickiewicz, who in the southern land of Crimea becomes a true poet— a “bard of Lithuania” (“Певец Литвы”), captured by Pushkin testifies to the fact that the Russian poet, like no one else in Russia, understood the essence of Mickiewicz’s poetic identity: Lithuania was his Other, which determined his consciousness and identity as the Polish poet, as the image of the Lithuanian bard defined Pushkin’s identity as poet-prophet.

I should note for the record that Viazemsky, a close friend of Mickiewicz, in his memoirs also describes Mickiewicz as a Lithuanian: “Mickiewicz, even though he is a prodigal brother who did not come back under his native roof, still he remains our brother: he is Lithuanian.” However, Viazemsky wrote these words in 1873 and was looking at Mickiewicz in the context of his anti-Russian political activities to which he devoted most of his life after emigration to France. In his conciliatory statement, Viazemsky suggests that the Russians should forgive Mickiewicz because, as a Lithuanian, he is our brother who did go astray, but “his political rancour died with him.”

Therefore, Viazemsky’s image of Mickiewicz as a Lithuanian in 1873 has no bearing on the image of the Polish poet as a Romantic Other in Russian literature in the 1820s. As Viazemsky pointed out, “politics—usually is a dividing force: poetry should always be a conciliatory and unifying force.”

In a similar context of journalistic polemics one should view Pushkin’s epigram “On Bulgarin,” (“На Булгарина”) which begins with “It’s not a problem that you are a Pole (“Поляк”): Kosciuszko – is a Pole (“Лях”) / Mickiewicz is a Pole (“Лях”)… The epigram was written in 1830 before the Polish anti-Russian November Uprising and before the Pushkin-Mickiewicz political controversy erupted. Pushkin does mention Mickiewicz alongside Kosciuszko, the hero and leader of the Polish-Russian War of 1794, but the political context of the epigram is secondary to the fact that even in the company of such famous and noble Polish compatriots, Bulgarin is still a “problem”—simply because of who he is. Therefore this notable reference to the poet’s Polish background does not alter the image of Mickiewicz as the inspired Lithuanian bard and Pushkin’s poetic Other.

Pushkin’s paradigmatic image of Mickiewicz as the Lithuanian poet-bard has a beautiful realization in the famous portrait, *Mickiewicz on the Ayu-Dah Rock*, created by the Polish painter Walenty Wańkowicz in 1828 in Petersburg. The painting’s title and its scenery refer to the last of *The Crimean Sonnets*, “Ayu-Dah,” which begins: “My

397 Ibid.


399 *Syn otechestva i Severnyi arkhiv* 11, no 17 (1830): 303.
shoulder at the rock of Ayu-Dah/ and glad, I watch the waves advance.”

The portrait, as described by Anna Frajlich, well illustrates Pushkin’s image of Mickiewicz from the *Sonnets* and *Onegin’s Journey*: “the poet stands amidst the elements, covered with an exotic sheepskin cape, a red kerchief crossed on his breast, his hand on his heart. A pensive lonely figure on the background of this wild and powerful landscape – majestic rocks and clouds...unruly hair, the dreamy gaze directed ahead, the noble profile.”

The painting conveys “the new phase of Mickiewicz’s life—the poet aware of his great powers.” He has completed his journey of self discovery, which is inevitably associated with the South, i.e., Crimea. As Pushkin described it, in “a moment of inspiration,” “instantly” (“мгновенно”) he expressed his dreams (“свои мечты”) in a rigid sonnet form. The beautiful, untamed nature in the background parallels the natural, divinely inspired talent of the poet-bard, yet his noble, pensive face conveys the refinement of a poet-exile, typical for the Ovid-Mickiewicz paradigm.

The Romantic portrait of Mickiewicz on Auy-Dah as the Lithuanian poet-bard has its later, more realistic counterpoint in Grigorii Miasoedov’s painting, “Mickiewicz improvising in the Princess Zinaida Volkonsky’s salon,” from 1907. The very title suggests that Mickiewicz was remembered in Russia for his amazing talent as an

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401 I am indebted to Dr. Frajlich for allowing me to use her unpublished article “Adam Mickiewicz - a Romantic Portrait of a Poet.”

402 Ibid.

403 G.G. Miasoedov was a founding member of the “Товарищество передвижных художественных выставок” (“Society of Traveling Exhibitions) aka. Передвижники (Wanderers.) The painting was exhibited at the 36th exhibition in 1907/8. In the catalogue entry the full title is given as "Москва, декабрь 1826 года. Минкевич в салоне кн. Зинаиды Волконской импровизирует среди русских писателей (справа кн. Вяземский, Барятинский, Хомяков, З. Волконская, Козлов, Жуковский, Пушкин, Погодин, Веневитинов, Чаядев и др.)." Cf. Ia. D. Minchenkov, *Vospominaniia o peredvixhnikakh*, 5th ed., ed. T. Iu. Lovekaia (Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1965).
improviser, but the painting also demonstrates his place in Russian history as a Polish poet and as a representative of Western European cultural tradition. Miasoedov depicted Mickiewicz standing with his arms raised in a moment of inspiration. Zinaida Volkonsky and her guests are sitting around Mickiewicz, listening, seemingly mesmerized, to his performance. Among the guests are Viazensky and his wife, Baratynsky, Khomiakov, Zhukovsky, Pushkin, Kozlov, Venevitinov, Karolina Pavlova, and Piotr Chaadaev, all of whom, with the exception of Chaadaev, were regular members of the salon. In the background of the painting, Volkonsky’s main salon is shown decorated with Greek columns and antique sculptures, endowing the scene with the atmosphere of an ancient temple. The painting conveys the elegance and sophistication so typical of the Volkonsky salon, which she intended to be a temple of art for art’s sake. Mickiewicz fits right in; he is dressed in black evening attire with a white tie and he is improvising in elegant French prose: the image of the divinely-inspired Lithuanian bard in the wilds of the Crimea is replaced by the embodiment of Western literary tradition improvising in the “temple of Western art.” In a letter to a fellow Wanderer, A. A. Kiselev, Miasoedov reveals that in fact he intended to portray Mickiewicz as an apostle of Western civilization in Russia: “the gathering at Volkonsky’s was a meeting of, ‘apostles of civilization’ (‘апостолов от цивилизации’)…Mickiewicz was a delegate from Europe, a kind of apostle Paul, so the gathering was a meeting of ‘Christians of culture’ (‘христиан Культуры’).”

Miasoedov’s painting once again reiterates the importance of Mickiewicz’s role as the Other in the Russian literary and cultural context, while the artist’s letter endows it with a deeper, spiritual meaning. The parallel between the poet and the apostle Paul

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404 Grigorii Miasoedov to A.A Kiselev, April 1906, In G. G. Miasoedov. Pis’ma, dokumenty, vospominanii, ed. V.S. Ogolevets. (Moskva: Izdat’stvo Izobrazitel’noe Iskusstvo Moskovii, 1972), 70.
illuminates the significance of Mickiewicz’s presence among his Russian contemporaries: Paul traveled tirelessly to bring the new faith to pagan nations, not only through his divinely inspired teachings but also through the written word—his many Epistles, which ultimately inspired his followers to adopt a new, Christian identity. Mickiewicz’s sojourn in Russia and the poetry he created there helped his Russian contemporaries to establish their new, Romantic identities. Miasoedov’s 1907 painting suggests that Mickiewicz’s presence in Russia was still relevant at the dawn of the twentieth century.
VI. Afterward. Mickiewicz in the Zinaida Volkonsky Salon.

Originally I planned to focus my analysis of ‘Mickiewicz in Russia’ on the Zinaida Volkonsky salon as a comparative study of Polish and Russian Romanticism in the context of the salon’s specific cultural milieu. However, the project quickly expanded well beyond the walls of Princess Volkonsky’s palace on Tverskaya street in Moscow and the salon was all but forgotten. Now, having completed the principle analysis of my dissertation on Mickiewicz as the Other in Russian Romanticism, I looked back to the place where I started my research and realized that revisiting the Volkonsky salon would be a perfect way of concluding the project.

When I began my research one of the first texts to draw my attention was Princess Zinaida Volkonsky’s Portrait (1828) dedicated to Mickiewicz. It is a poetic prose piece written in French, a tribute to the poet but also a response to his poem, “On the Grecian Room in Princess Zinaida Volkonsky’s house in Moscow” (“Na pokój grecki w domu Księżnej Zeneidy Wołkońskiej w Moskwie,” 1827). This room is depicted in Miasoedov’s painting. Princess Zinaida Volkonsky (1792-1862) was one of Europe’s grand dames, a patron of the arts educated by her father, Prince Alexander Beloselsky-Belozersky, in the tradition of the Enlightenment, and a brilliant and charming hostess whose salon became one of the most influential cultural institutions in Russia during the height of its activity between 1824-1829. The salon was a temple of “art for art’s sake” as the Princess famously forbade pedestrian amusements such as card playing, instead entertaining her guests with musical performances, often staging operas in her home theatre, in which she sang leading parts in her beautiful contralto. Viazemsky notes in his memoirs that “everything in it [Volkonsky’s house] bears the imprint of service to the
arts and [intellectual] ideas.”

Mickiewicz was a welcome addition to this highly intellectual circle, “as one of the most favorite and respected guests,” appreciated for his conversational skills and pleasant manners and admired for his poetic talent and famous improvisations. For the young, still relatively unknown Polish poet, the Volkonsky salon provided an opportunity to meet and interact with Moscow’s “high society, dignitaries and local beauties, young and old men, intellectuals, professors, writers, journalists, poets and artists.” The participants in the salon--among them Viazemsky, Zhukovsky, Pushkin, Kozlov, Venevitinov and many others--were often Mickiewicz’ first audience: before he published Konrad Wallenrod and other poems in Russia he first recited them in the salon, although rendering his verses in French poetic prose translation. The poet had many reasons to be thankful for Volkonsky’s hospitality, not the least of which was the comfort her house offered: Franciszek Malewski, who shared modest lodgings in Moscow with Mickiewicz, wrote to his family: “And how warm it is there! Indeed, it is warmer by the stairs in her abode than it is by the stove at my lodgings.”

Mickiewicz’s poem, “On the Grecian Room,” could be viewed as an expression of appreciation from a grateful guest who praises the beauty of the hostess and of her newly redecorated salon. The style and “the poem’s ekphrastic focus brings it back to the Neoclassical tradition inherent in eighteenth-century panegyrical odes dedicated to the

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406 Ibid.
407 Ibid.
chambers in Warsaw’s Royal Castle, such as J.P. Woronicz’s poem, ‘New Rooms in the Royal Castle,’ or A. Naurszewicz’s ‘On the Marble Chamber.’”\textsuperscript{409} Primarily, however, Mickiewicz’s poem—a mixture of ironic reflections on Neoclassical aesthetics and light erotic allusions addressed to the hostess—represents an example of brilliant salon poetry, especially since it is likely that the first version of the poem was Mickiewicz’s French improvisation in the Volkonsky salon.\textsuperscript{410}

The poem begins with a guest-narrator entering the room as he follows his hostess presented by Mickiewicz as “a nymph” (“nimfa”) and “a guide” (“przewodniczka”). What is unveiled before his eyes is a “whole ancient world” (“cały świat dawny”) rebuilt under the orders – “a word” – of the beautiful hostess (“na piękności słowo/ Odbudował się”). Volkonsky’s visitor, or as he calls himself “a traveler” (“podróżny”) focuses his attention on selected objects: the capital of an unknown column; a hieroglyph on an Egyptian obelisk; a sarcophagus; and the bas-relief image of an ancient god. The room’s décor is fashionable and artistically sophisticated, yet the poet slyly notes that something is lacking. In a facetious manner, he points out that despite the hostess’s best efforts to recreate the “whole ancient world” (“cały świat dawny”) in her “art for art’s sake” salon, she cannot resurrect it: “it does not come back to life anew” (“nie ożył na nowo”). Hope of seeing the “genius of Hellas” (“genijusz Hellady”) resurrected appears briefly when the visitor encounters the only intact object, the altar of Saturn with a Corinthian brass lamp, inside which “a little, pale flame is awaking.” However, the narrator realizes that the former inhabitants of the ancient world should be allowed to rest in peace: “Oh,

\textsuperscript{409} Shallcross, “Intimations of Intimacy,” 216.

\textsuperscript{410} Vinogradov notes that S. Sobolevsky’s archive contains his handwritten note from that improvisation. Cf. A. K. Vinogradov, Merime v pis’makh k Sobolevskomu (Moskva: Moskovskoe khudozhestvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1928), 240. Also, see Kleiner, Mickiewicz. Vol 2, part 1, 22.
may all these deities…doze in eternal, marble and brass sleep!” (“O, niech te wszystkie bóstwa…Wiecznie snem marmurowym i brązowym drzemią!”). Albeit with the exception of Eros, the god of love. The presence of that “smallest of all gods so far worshiped by men” (“Najmniejszy z bogów dotąd uczczony od ludzi”), who is “dozing, sucking on ruby grapes of breasts,” (“Drzemiesz ssąc rubinowe pierś winogrona”), revives the visitor’s hope that that one god “might be awakened by the beautiful guide” (“Ciebie tylko niech piękna przewodniczka zbudzi”). Alluding to the ancient ritual in honor of Eros, the visitor addresses himself first to the god and then to his hostess: “It would be a great sin to pass by this god without any sacrificial offering” (“Wielki grzech bez ofiary minąć bóstwo twoje!”), thus “the poet uses this argument to persuade his guide to worship Eros:”⁴¹¹ “Let us both be pious!” (“O piękna nimfo! Bądźmy nabożni oboje!”).

Unfortunately, the hostess cannot be persuaded to “be pious” and with “one cold glance of her eye” (“Przewodniczka chłodnym rzutem oka”) throws the visitor out “beyond the threshold of hope” (“Wypędza bez litości za nadziei progi”). Chased away from the Grecian room by the guide the poet reflects on his visit to the ancient world and his encounter with his hostess. Unrealized erotic longing leaves the poet in a palpable state of half-satisfaction, which is conveyed by the skillful (and playful) use of the word “pół” (half): the visit in the Grecian room was only a “half-journey to paradise,” which left his soul “half-melancholy, half-joyful.” Despite the initial impression that in her sanctuary of art, Volkonsky had recreated “the whole ancient world,” the poet experienced there only a halfness (not wholeness) of paradise: he heard the “conversation in half-voice,” and he saw only “half-light and half-shadow;” as a result he experienced

⁴¹¹ Shallcross, “Intimations of Intimacy,” 222.
“only half of redemption.” Shallcross, in her thorough and insightful analysis of 
Mickiewicz’s poem, suggests that, “the Romantic dreamer returns to life as half a man
and lover but wholly a poet.”^412 However, I would propose that in the broader context of
his life and work in Russia, at the time when Mickiewicz wrote “On the Grecian Room,”
the poet, as Schlegel would say, was still in the process of becoming a Romantic, of
establishing his Romantic identity. This process is illuminated by Volkonsky’s Portrait
which is simultaneously a response to and a dialogue with Mickiewicz’s poetic persona.

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Portrait, in its style and form, belongs to the artifacts of salon literature and
culture. Władysław Mickiewicz, the son and biographer of the poet, notes that “it was
very much in fashion in the eighteenth century to create such literary portraits. In
aristocratic salons it was a popular occupation up to 1830.”^413 Zinaida Volkonsky
presented Portrait as a farewell gift to Mickiewicz in 1828 when he was leaving Moscow
for Petersburg. ^414 Biographers refer to it as a testament to a long-lasting friendship
between the poet and Princess, yet so far its content has not been analyzed.

What drew my initial attention to this piece was how inconsistent, even
contradictory, Mickiewicz’s portrait as presented by Volkonsky was; as if she was
describing not one, but at least two or three poets, all of whom happened to have the
same name. My observation of this seeming contradiction inspired further research and

^412 Ibid., 225.

^413 Władysław Mickiewicz. Żywot Adama Mickiewicza. 2nd revised edition. Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk:

^414 Original manuscript in Muzeum Adama Mickiewicza in Paris, published in original French and Polish
translation by Aleksander Kraushar. “Adam Mickiewicz i Zenejda Księżna Wołkońska,” Tygodnik
Ilustrowany, no 24 (13 June, 1914): 405-406. Also in Russian translation in Sochinenia kniagini Zinaidy
ultimately led to my thesis on Mickiewicz as the Other in Russian Romanticism. However, the process of the Russians determining their own literary identity in relation to Mickiewicz as the Other was, by its very nature, dialogical—they were looking at him, but he was also looking at them. Thus far my analysis has focused primarily on how Russian poets and critics perceived the Polish poet and how they used various facets of his Otherness to establish their Romantic I. The reverse of this phenomenon, the question of how his Russian contemporaries influenced the formation of Mickiewicz’s own poetic identity lies beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, I believe that Zinaida Volkonsky’s *Portrait* offers a glimpse into that process, at least in the context of her salon. At the same time, (somewhat surprisingly), Volkonsky’s text summarizes the image of Mickiewicz as a Romantic poet in the Russian cultural context.

*Portrait* opens with a question about the subject’s identity: “Quel est cet homme, dont le front semble couronné de regrets, même au milieu des festins et des fêtes?” The question, “who is that man,” uttered in an attitude of admiration, but also surprise, must have been asked by Volkonsky and her guests when Mickiewicz appeared in the salon for the first time. Throughout *Portrait* the question remains unanswered, i.e., Mickiewicz’s name is conspicuously never mentioned. It was a Romantic fashion to conceal the name of the hero; the identities of the Pilgrim from *The Crimean Sonnets*, Byron’s Giaour, or Pushkin’s Prisoner remain a mystery, and Volkonsky clearly follows those models, but her text and my analysis of the multifarious images of Mickiewicz as his Russians contemporaries perceived him prove that in his case the question, “who is that man,” does not yield an easy answer. The opening question of *Portrait*: “who is that man, whose forehead seems to be crowned with regret, even among feasts and festivities?” and
several questions that follow, cast the poet as a Byronic figure surrounded by an aura of mystery:

Is he alone on earth? No—because friendly gazes are directed towards him and stay fixed on him as if he was the center of the light that he is reflecting. Is he tired of life? His glance is sad, his smile sardonic. Is he, like Byron, the subject that envy and passion have chosen to leave their traces on? Is he like a broken lyre that sounds no more? Or does remorse not weigh on his thoughts as heavy chains would restrain a prisoner’s hands?\footnote{Serait-il isolé sur la terre? Non – car des regards amis se dirigent vers lui et y restent attachés, comme s’il était le foyer, dont ils réfléchissent la lumière. Serait-il fatigué de la vie? Son regard est triste, son sourire sardonique. Est-il, comme Byron, le but que la passion et l’envie ont choisi, pour lancer leurs traits? Est-ce une lyre brisée, qui ne rend plus de sons? Ou, bien comme une lourde chaîne sur des mains captives, le remord ne pèse-t-il pas sur ses pensées?}

Volkonsky attributes characteristics typical of a Byron-like Romantic hero to Mickiewicz, but she conveys them in the form of questions, thus this initial Byronic image of the poet can be more easily contradicted in the latter part of the text. At first he seems to be surrounded by the “friendly gazes” of many people and is a shining “center” of attention, yet there is a deep sadness in him that sets him apart from the crowd; he seems to be, “tired of life.” Like Byron he seems to be tormented by “passion and envy,” and like Byron he looks at the world around him with a “sad gaze and sardonic smile.” Unlike Viazemsky, whose review of the \textit{Sonnets} discussed only the image of the Pilgrim-Poet as a Western traveler through the exotic Orient à la Byron’s \textit{Childe Harold} and completely ignored the ironic and sarcastic side of the salon dandy hero, Volkonsky is well aware of that other side of Mickiewicz’s poetic persona, as she experienced it first hand in the way the poet treated her in “On the Grecian Room.” “The heavy chain on the prisoner’s hands,” could be an indirect reference to Mickiewicz’s political situation, his imprisonment in Vilnius, and his virtual captivity in Russia (as he was not allowed to leave the country for several years), but it is also likely that “his mind held captive by
“remorse,” refers to the Traveler ("Cisza morska” “Sea Calm,” one of The Crimean Sonnets) whose heart and mind are gripped by “the hydra of memories” (“hydra pamiętek”), of which he cannot rid himself.

It would seem then that Volkonsky, like many other Russians, created the image of Mickiewicz as a Romantic poet through comparison with Byron, however her perspective is the opposite to that of a professional critic who, depending on his particular agenda, is trying to prove that the Polish poet is—or is not—as great, or greater than Byron. Hers is the point of view of a reader who is projecting the image of Mickiewicz’s Byronic hero onto the poet, or rather reflecting back the image that the poet projects. In fact Volkonsky’s Portrait, in its very title, captures the essence of the Romantic correlation between the portrayed (the poet) and the portrayer (his audience): “friendly gazes are directed towards him and stay fixed on him as if he was the center of the light that they are reflecting” (“des regards amis se dirigent vers lui et y restent attachés, comme s’il était le foyer, dont ils réfléchissent la lumière.”) One can easily imagine the scene in the Volkonsky salon, as Mickiewicz, an admired poetic genius, is reciting, or better yet, improvising, his poetry for the audience and all eyes are fixed on him. He can look around and see his own image reflected in the eyes of his listeners. Of course, that image cannot be homogenous; on the contrary, as Volkonsky’s text demonstrates, the poet could turn towards a different “mirror” to see his Byronic self being contradicted by its opposite:
But no, his soul is free and pure, virtue has no reproach for him. Noble action, generous sacrifice, all that is true, all that is beautiful, moves him and exults in him. Touching and sublime harmony penetrates him with a holy joy, holy – because it is melancholic. Then his soul rests, his genius is filled with harmonious chords, and he himself becomes harmony.

This rather exalted image of the Poet presents him as an ideal: “his soul is free and pure,” he is moved by “everything that is true and beautiful: noble action and generous sacrifice.” The “sublime harmony” that “penetrates him with a holy joy” particularly contrasts with the previous Byronic character full of regrets and contradictions, except for the oxymoronic depiction of “holy joy,” which is “holy because it is melancholic.”

Melancholy is a cliché attribute of the Romantic poet, however Viazemsky also observed that feature of Mickiewicz’s personality: “Though there was a shadow of a melancholic expression on his face, he had a cheerful disposition.” (“При оттенке меланхолического выражения в лице, он был весёлого склада.”) The poetic genius, “filled with harmonious chords” so the poet “himself becomes harmony,” is very characteristic of the divinely inspired poet-bard from the paradigm created by Pushkin. Volkonsky, like Pushkin, admires Mickiewicz’s harmonious “gift of song” as she describes the poet in a moment of inspired improvisation:

But a word has been uttered and his joy is extinguished, his eyes are fixed on an object that he gazes at intensely; his cheeks are shining red. The brightness of a volcano, sudden and grand.

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416 Mais non, son âme est libre et pure, l’aspect de la vertu est pour lui son reproche. Une action noble, un sacrifice généreux, tout ce qui est vrai, tout ce qui est beau l’attendrit et l’exalte. Une harmonie touchante et sublime le pénètre d’une sainte joie...sainte, car elle est mélancolique. Son âme se repose alors, son génie s’abreuve d’accords mélodieux, il devient lui-même harmonie.


418 Mais un mot est proféré et sa joie s’est éteinte, ses yeux se sont fixés immobiles sur l’objet qu’il regardait avec intérêt; une vive rougeur brille sur ses joues; C’est la clarté d’un volcan, subite et solennelle.
The secret word that inspired this instance of Mickiewicz’s improvisation is revealed later, but passage conveys the poet’s ability to take a subject, and then, after only a moment of concentration, begin to improvise verse, is consistent with the accounts of others who witnessed this phenomenon. Moreover, the “sudden, volcanic brightness” that shines on his face at that moment, matches Mickiewicz’s own description of how he felt when improvising in French: he compared the difficulty of conveying his thoughts and feelings in a foreign language “to burning lava under the surface of the earth without a volcano that would allow it to explode” (“avec de matériaux enflammés qui brûlent sous terre, sans avoir de volcan pur leur éruption”). Significantly, Volkonsky connects Mickiewicz’s poetic inspiration with his birthplace:

Some one said a name of a country that is foreign to us but sacred for him. It is there, where his mother wiped off his first tear, where his heart loved for the first time, where the traditions cradle his genius, where memories and motherland made him a poet. How many feelings and memories in one word!

Volkonsky, like Pushkin, understands Mickiewicz’s longing for his native country, the name of which “is sacred for him but foreign to us.” It is the place where “his mother wiped off his first tear,” and where “his heart loved for the first time”; more importantly, the traditions of his motherland “cradled his genius” and “made him a poet.” Thus that one word, which signifies his motherland also signifies his identity:

A young savage brought to Europe, noticed a plant from his island, he threw himself on it and cried out: Tahiti, Tahiti! He embraced it and could

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420 Quelqu’un vient de nommer devant lui une terre étrangère pour nous et sacrée pour lui. C’est là, où sa mère a essuyé sa première larme; C’est là, où son cœur a aimé pour la première fois, où les traditions ont bercé son génie, où la pensée et la patrie en ont fait un poète. Que de sentiments, de souvenirs de vie dans un mot!
not tear himself away. Thus, the foreigner’s soul repeated the name of his native land.\textsuperscript{421}

To illustrate how strongly the poet identifies with the name of his motherland, Volkonsky quotes the story of a young Tahitian boy named Potaveri brought to Paris from his native island in 1769 by Louis Antoine de Bougainville. Jacques Delille (aka. l'abbé De Lille) made young Potaveri famous in \textit{The garden, or, The art of laying out ground: poem} (\textit{Les Jardins, ou l'art d'embellir les paysages: poème}, 1782); Delille describes how the “ingenuous savage transported into our walls/ regretted in his heart his sweet liberty,” which he lost (“Ce sauvage ingénu, dans nos murs transporté/Regrettait en son cœur sa douce liberté”). One day in the Royal gardens he recognized a tree from his native isle and, “suddenly with piercing cries/ He runs towards it, embraces it, washes it with tears, and covers it with kisses” (“Soudain avec des cris perçants/ II s'élance, il l'embrase, il le baigne de larmes,/ Le couvre de baisers”), and “his tender soul/ For an instant retrieved its motherland” (“son âme attendrie/ Du moins pour un instant, retrouva sa patrie”).\textsuperscript{422} In a footnote Delille explains how unhappy Potaveri was walking among unfamiliar trees and plants, pointing at them saying, “Ce n'est pas Otaïti,” but when he saw the one from his homeland he cried: “C'est Otaïti!” Then Delille adds: “Thus this tree and his country were identified in his mind.”\textsuperscript{423}

The experience of young Potaveri parallels that of Konrad Wallenrod, who as a child was carried away from his native Lithuania and raised by the German knights in a

\textsuperscript{421} Le jeune sauvage transporté en Europe aperçoit une plante de son île, s’élance sur elle, en criant: ‘Otaïti, Otaïti!’ Il l’embrasse et ne peut s’en détacher. Ainsi l’âme de l’étranger a répété le nom de sa terre natale.

\textsuperscript{422} M. l'Abbé De Lille De Académie Françoise, \textit{Les Jardins, ou l'art d'embellir les paysages: poème}. (Neuchâtel: De l'Imprimerie de la Société Typographique, 1782), 37-38.

\textsuperscript{423} Ibid., 106-107.
Western Christian civilization. Wallenrod described how, as a young boy, with the help of the old Lithuanian Halban, he used to sneak out on a boat to the Lithuanian shore to “pick up native flowers, and their magical scent… intoxicated me, so it seemed to me…that I was a child again, playing with my brothers in my parents’ garden.”

Significantly, the references to the stories of the Tahitian Potaveri and the young Lithuanian Wallenrod transform the Byronic image of Mickiewicz into that of a “noble savage,” which is concurrent with the image of a bard of Lithuanian wilderness. “Noble savage” also validates the previously discussed noble qualities of his character (free and pure soul, natural harmonious self, etc.) Needless to say, this “noble savage” image casts the poet as the ultimate Other in the Western cultural context of the Volkonsky salon:

Thus, the foreigner’s soul repeated the name of his native land. A Lithuanian wind is vibrating the strings of this Eolian harp. And the bard of the forests begins to chant the song of the forests.

“Lithuania,” the name of his motherland, is finally revealed and pronounced and, as Volkonsky poetically describes it, it becomes the source of the poet’s inspiration:

“Lithuanian wind is vibrating the strings of Eolian harp.” The image of the poet as the “bard of the [Lithuanian] forest,” who “sings (improvises) his song of the forest” re-

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424 Rwałem kwiaty ojczyste, a czarodziejska ich wonia Tchnęła w mą duszę jakoweś dawne i cienne wspomnienia. Upojony tą wonią, zdało się, że dziecięciłem, Że w ogrodzie rodziców z braćmi igrałem małymi. [There I plucked my country’s flowers; Their magic fragrance woke within my soul Some ancient, dark remembrance. With the fragrance Intoxicated, seemed me that a child Once more I grew, and in my parents’ garden, Played with my little brothers] Translated by Maude Ashurst Biggs, Konrad Wallenrod. A Historical Poem by Adam Mickiewicz. It is possible that this passage from “Tale of the Bard” was actually inspired by Delille’s poem.

425 Ainsi l’âme de l’étranger a répété le nom de sa terre natale. Le vent de la Lituanie a fait vibrer les cordes de cette harpe Eolienne. Alors, le barde des forêts a entamé le chant des forêts.
confirms his poetic identity, and parallels Pushkin’s paradigm of a divinely inspired poet-bard, particularly in the context of Mickiewicz’s Lithuanian otherness as emphasized in *Portrait*. Contrary to many other Russians who considered Mickiewicz, the Lithuanian, to be a fellow Slav, thus “ours;” Volkonsky, for the same reason refers to him as a “foreigner”—“l’étranger.” However, the image of the Lithuanian bard inevitably also connects Mickiewicz with his own creation: wajdelota Halban, the model of the national poet:

> His motherland carefully gathers his distant sounds, she gathers his poetic revelations and she is proud of his native talent. Since she is alone, the hearth always brightens and warms her. A pillar of light that leads the people of God through the desert; a flame of the motherland carried by the by Greek colonizers to foreign lands.

*Portrait* closes with the image of Mickiewicz as wieszcz, the national poet, the pride of his motherland who attentively listens to his “poetic revelation.” For the poet, his native land becomes the light which always inspires and guides his talent—a premonition of Mickiewicz’s future life as a Polish wieszcz whose poetry will come to signify the identity of a nation without a state. The comparison with, “God’s people guided by the flame of their motherland in their journey through the desert” sounds like a prophetic vision of the “Pilgrim nation;” thousands of Polish emigrants (among them Mickiewicz) were forced to leave their homeland after the November Uprising of 1830. However, in the very last line, Volkonsky transforms the image of Mickiewicz yet again, from the Lithuanian national bard to the Greek “colonizer” who carries the flame of the civilized world into foreign (Russian) lands. Possibly it was Volkonsky’s *Portrait* that inspired

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426 La patrie attentive recueille ses sons lointains, elle recueille ses révélations poétiques, s’enorgueillit de se talent indigène. Car elle est seule, toujours et partout le foyer qui l’éclaire et l’échauffe. C’est la colonne de lumière que conduisait le peuple de Dieu dans le désert; c’est le feu de la mère - patrie, que les colonies grecques emportaient dans les terres étrangères.
Miasoedov to depict Mickiewicz as an “apostle of culture” in Russia—the embodiment of the ideals and values for which the Russians were striving.

Addressing himself to Mickiewicz’s Polish compatriots, Ivan Kozlov declared: “Vous nous l’avez donné fort, et nous vous le rendons puissant”427 (“You gave him to us strong, we return him to you powerful.”) Kozlov’s pronouncement aptly summarizes the transformation Mickiewicz underwent in Russia: he arrived in Petersburg as a very talented young poet, who was struggling to claim his place on the Parnassus of Polish poetry; he left Russia four-and-a-half years later fully conscious of who he was: a great Romantic poet of not only Polish, but of European literature. However, he could not achieve such a consciousness alone, he needed his Other—his Russian Other—to confirm and reconfirm his poetic identity. To paraphrase Bakhtin, Mickiewicz must have had, “the absolute aesthetic need for the Other, for the Other’s activity of seeing, holding, putting together and unifying, for the Other alone could bring into being his externally finished personality.” The fascinating question of how Mickiewicz established his poetic identity in relation to his Russian contemporaries certainly deserves further consideration.

Bibliography


