

Translated by David Malcolm

Paradoxes of Romantic Folklorism

1. Faith, hope, love, and delusion

There is no doubt that one of the major achievements of Romanticism was an extension of the borders of culture. To the degree that classical esthetics are based on the opposition of high, court art (true to models developed in ancient Greece and Rome) with what is “savage” and “barbarian”, so Romantics permanently brought into the scope of high art phenomena previously considered worse, “lower”, and unworthy of the interest of an educated person. Maria Janion called this process one of “the nobilitation of counter-culture” (26) and demonstrated that that “counter-culture” consisted mainly of medieval, oriental, and folk traditions.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the discovery of folklore led to a genuine revolution in literature, theater, and painting. It allowed Romantics to refresh poetic language; it made it possible to attempt wholly new artistic means of expression; and it also uncovered for them whole repertoires of original figures and subjects. And finally, it contributed to the emergence of a new field of knowledge – folklore studies. The achievements of the generation of Romantics in documenting and, at the same time, saving folk art from oblivion, cannot be overrated. Wincenty Pol’s *Volkslieder der Polen* (1833), Roman Zmorski’s *Podania i baśni ludu w Mazowszu* (1852), Seweryn Goszczyński’s *Dziennik podróży do Tatrów* (1832), and Lucjan Siemieński’s *Rysy górali tatrzańskich* (1854) are just a few signs of the fascination to which almost all intellectuals of the time fell subject. The crowning glory of this inspiration was the monumental, thirty-volume study by Oscar Kolberg, *Lud. Jego zwyczaje, sposób życia, mowa, podania, przysłowia, obrzędy, gusła, zabawy, pieśni, muzyka i tańce* (1857–1890).

However, it is less often remembered that Romantic folklorism (in other words, an interest in folklore in art) and Romantic folklore studies were a much more complex and ambiguous phenomenon. It was accompanied not just by a “struggle” with the school of the classics, but also by disputes and arguments within the camp of the Romantics themselves. These disputes involved purely artistic matters, as well as ideological ones. This was a time when folklore was not only discovered, but also “used”, falsified, and manipulated. For Romantic folklorism was, in reality, a veritable tangle of literary, cultural, and political dilemmas, and the final balance is by no means as obvious as it might

seem and as it is usually thought to be. It produced undoubted masterpieces, but also a flood of second-rate and epigonic texts. It was fueled by a faith in the life-giving power of popular culture, a hope that through it a genuine “national culture” could be created, and a love for a mythical “people” or “folk”. To a large degree, however, these evangelical virtues turned out to be a beautiful delusion, one that covered up numerous artistic defeats and political disappointments for both generations of Polish Romantics.

Thus, the achievements of nineteenth-century folklorism are open to question – and it is difficult to offer an unambiguous verdict on them. So it is necessary to analyze them in a broader context, not just an artistic one, but also a cultural and ideological one. Let us start with this first issue.

2. On naïve poets

Kazimierz Brodziński played an important role in paving the way for the discovery of romantic folklore. We more frequently remember him as a publicist and theoretician; he is less well remembered as a writer. As is well-known, Brodziński was a cautious supporter of the literary innovations perpetrated under the banner of the Romantic school (although he criticized its “dark”, frenetic variant). He himself attempted to reform the dusty classical poetics of the idyll. The clearest example of his reforming approach is the “Kraków idyll” *Wiesław*, the characters of which have their own names (Stanisław, Halina, Bronisława), and the action of which takes place not on idyllic meadows, but among the huts of mountain-folk. As Alina Witkowska write:

“The atmosphere fostered that general change in the costumes of the characters of the idyll that was made by Brodziński. In the place of the tender shepherd, there appeared a peasant from outside Kraków, the conventional landscape was replaced by a description of the surroundings in a specific region, and schematic gestures and turns of phrase became a stylization of language that had ambitions to authenticity” (196).

Following Brodziński’s example, Romantics placed the action of their works in a defined geographical space. Józef Bohdan Zaleski opted for Ukraine; Teofil Lenartowicz and Roman Zmorski chose Mazovia; Seweryn Goszczyński set his works in Podhale. They also conjured up characters typical for the given region, and the conventional language of the sentimental idyll was replaced by a stylization of local dialect. In a word, in place of literary convention they proposed the authentic. They believed that, via folkloric inspiration, it would be possible to create a new, original national poetry. However, from several points of view, their project of raising folklore to the level of high literature (or bringing it closer to its popular roots) was a utopian undertaking. It ran into a variety of obstacles, and, in practice, turned out to be exceptionally difficult to achieve.

Indeed, among the Romantics themselves there was no agreement as to the degree to which a poet should remain faithful to the oral utterance, and whether he/she had the right to subordinate it to his/her own particular creative impulses and imagination. Several, for example Michał Grabowski, maintained that the poet should “be at one with the people” and is called only to play the role of “translator” to the people (132). A “translator”, of course, must not indulge in too far-reaching interventions. Others, including Mickiewicz, did not stick closely to any popular/folk original and freely reworked it. Although many of Mickiewicz’s ballads are based on motifs from popular/folk songs, the poet made far-reaching stylistic changes in them. He changed the whole force of the text’s utterance. In *Lilja*, for example, the poet introduced a historical context, something alien to the folk version, by placing the ballad’s action in the times of Bolesław Śmiały, who, according to Wincenty Kadłubek, punished his knights’ unfaithful wives. In *Świtezianka*, he linked the heroine’s fate with that of the legendary Wanda, and, thus, filled it with a patriotic sub-text. Further, in *To lubię*, he engaged in mystification of the reader¹.

Even when, in the introduction to Part II of *Dziady*, he declared that the rites depicted in the text “are for the most part faithfully, and at times literally, taken from the poetry of the vulgar”, he permitted himself to vary these with his own ideas. Lines to the dead that play such an important role in this drama were unfamiliar to Forefathers’ Eve ceremonies (*dziady*) in Belarus. The word “Guślarz”, for example, was also unknown to the people. Mickiewicz owed it not so much to observations of popular ceremonies, but to Linde’s dictionary. Lexicographers note that “Guślarz” comes from the word “gęśle”, which means a fiddle. Mickiewicz saw in the fiddle an indigenous Polish version of the lyre, the attribute of the poet. Here we are dealing with a symbolism that is alien to Belarusian folklore, and, for certain, with a conception of the poet (the leader of the ceremony) and of poetry (taking on ritual and religious meanings) that comes from Mickiewicz (see Krzyżanowski 544–545).

Mickiewicz’s friends from that time and his poetic rivals, too – Tomasz Zan and Jan Czeczot – aimed for something authentic. While Mickiewicz “liberated his ballads from a subservient role in relation to folklore and ethnography, from an ambition to explain regional phenomena of nature and history”, Zan’s and Czeczot’s ballads, Witkowska points out, “were constrained” by contemporary ethnography and “the fondness

¹ A note to *To lubię* reads: “This ballad is a translation of a village song; although it may contain false views and ones incompatible with scholarship about purgatory, we have not dared to change anything, in order to retain more clearly its local character and to present the superstitious ideas of our common people”. Juliusz Kleiner maintains that here we are dealing with literary mystification, since no folk original of the ballad has ever been found (262).

of enthusiasts of the national past" (208–209). That the Philomaths (*filomaci*) were aware of the existence the above-mentioned views on folklore, is attested by the following excerpt from one of Czeczot's poems, one in which he charges Mickiewicz with taking too many liberties in employing popular/folk motifs.

"Boś Ty, Adamie, pobredził,
I mówił, co Ci się śniło,
A powieściś upośledził,
O jakich starym marzyło" (qtd. in Witkowska 210).

("For you, Adam, raved,
And said what you dreamed,
And crippled the stories
Which the ancients dreamed")

With the perspective of time, it can be seen how ineffectual this admonition was. Mickiewicz's "crippled" ballads forever entered the literary canon, while the works of Zan and Czeczot, faithfully imitating folklore, are now only known to a small number of literary scholars. Janion's argument, in her essay *Paraliż słowianofilski*, that the Romantic fascination with folklore often led writers astray and led to "the incapacitation of originality, and not to its awakening" (106), is here clearly confirmed. Positions represented by Czeczot, on one hand, and by Mickiewicz, on the other, match the division that Janion introduces between an orientation that is "mythic-popular" and one that is "esthetic-literary" (101). The former can also be designated in Friedrich Schiller's terms as "naïve" (Czeczot). The poet is "naïve" who is a "guardian of nature", is at one with his/her work, hides behind a described object, and creates without the intermediaries of rules and intellect (Schiller 329). It is, however, worth considering how possible, in general, a "naïve" folklorism is. The feeble artistic effects of its proponents are one thing; its utopian character is another.

In the first place, folklore is anonymous art, collective, and transmitted orally. The literary text, however, has an author and is spread through the medium of print. In the second place, folklore, as Roch Sulima notes, is a syncretic product, as it exists as a polymorphic complex of art employing imagistic-artistic means of expression, oriented toward immediate, audiovisual reception at the moment of performance (7). The literary text, however, functions separated from immediate contact of sender and receiver, in isolation from the "here and now". Therefore, to generalize, the receiver of folklore is different from that of literature; varying rules govern the creation and composition of both kinds of text; and, finally, these differences overlap with another

kind of content (meanings) (8). Thus, one can say that folklore inevitably ends where art, in the traditional meaning of the word, begins – that is, artistic, professional literary, visual, or musical activity. Every folk work, taken from its natural context, loses its “naïvety” and becomes an expression of a “sentimental” consciousness. It is adapted and becomes subordinate to stylistic operations.

This is true even of an anthology of folk literature, something that is attested by the introduction to *Podania i baśni ludu w Mazowszu*, published by the Warsaw Romantic Roman Zmorski. In it he wrote: “Feeling myself a living part of my people, I have permitted myself complete liberty in secondary and unimportant details” (Zmorski, *Podania* XIII), and he added that he could not overcome an addiction to bookish language. Zmorski himself confesses that he has made stylistic alterations of the works he has chosen. He felt himself obliged to explain the difficulties presented by the transfer of living speech – along with the articulation, mimicry, and gestures accompanying it – into written language. He also blamed the baggage of culture and education that he, a man of letters, simply could not rid himself of. We will speak later of how the changes he made were not at all “secondary” and “unimportant”. Roch Sulima was quite right to write the following:

“Folkloric works, however, entered literature in the basis of quotation, stylization, parody etc., and were, thus, treated according to the laws of another system of communication, and, therefore, ceased to be folkloric facts, and became “examples”, transformations of the original contents into some kind of secondary contents” (10).

Teofil Lenartowicz, the author of, *inter alia*, *Kaliny*, *Złoty kubek*, and *Duch sieroty*, is generally thought of as the most “naïve” Polish Romantic. It is in his work that the rhythm and structure of versification characteristic of folk lyric, its style, its language, and motifs and images typical for it, find their fullest implementation.

One must, however, remember that Lenartowicz also wrote dramas with a clearly Byronic hero in the leading role (*Pierwsze przedstawienie Hamleta*, 1847), and historical poems (collected in the volume *Ze starych zboic*). Many of his poems draw on Renaissance and Romantic traditions, but not from popular/folk ones. In such works as *Cienie syberyjskie* and *Wygańcy do narodu*, Lenartowicz draws near in tone to the full expression of the poetry of Kornel Ujejski, one quite different from his “naïve” style. He was also the author of a collection of poetry entitled *Album włoskie* (1869), which is a conscious departure from folk/popular models. The poems in this collection are dedicated to historical-philosophical reflections and to descriptions of Italian landscape. They were produced under the influence of the criticism of Julian Klaczka, who accused the poet (just as Norwid did) with being monothematic. So if we look at the entirety of Lenartowicz’s work, we must question the thesis concerning his exclusive “naïvety”, untaught and unmediated by culture.

The case is similar with the work of Roman Zmorski, who wrote in a programmatic poem:

"Głos twój zaś, niechaj będzie jak siermięga prosty,
A tak twardy i ostry, jak ostrza tych kos,
Co z równin naszych tępią wybijają osty..." (Zmorski, *Poezye* 116)

("But your voice, may it be as simple as homespun,
And as hard and sharp as the scythe blades
That from our plains drive the exuberant thistles")

It is worth drawing attention to the metaphors used in this excerpt. "Homespun" and "scythe blades" are mentioned, the most widespread attributes of "the people" at this time. (The fashion for them had developed in Polish culture after the battle of Racławice.) The very fact of this reference to national history points to the conventional, literary character of the appeal to the young poet. A further indication may be the convention of the poetic letter used here – a genre unknown in folk lyric. Above all, however, one can see that Zmorski's poetic program is clearly contrasted with Lenartowicz's commitment to the folk. Although the Zmorski's folklorism has an idyllic character (even if it is, as Janion wrote, a "wounded" idyll), the young revolutionary draws from it rebellious and martial elements. Lenartowicz's "orphan" is replaced by a threatening body of armed peasants with scythes. This contrast shows that individual Romantics did not so much speak with the voice of the people, as find in folklore what they wanted to find in it. Or, to put it differently, they filtered folklore through their own sensibility, imagination, and also frequently their political views. The very choice of these and not other characters, attributes, and scenes became an artistic and ideological declaration.

In this respect, Ryszard Berwiński's declaration is typical. It comes from the commentary to *Bogunka na Gople*, a novel "derived from a popular tale" from the district round Gopel.

"Kiedym ręką prawie dziecinną pierwszą moją powiastkę napisał, gniewałem się na nią, że mi nie wygląda jak *Oczy uroczone* albo *Serce zajęcze*. Tam się po niej i osób, i luda więcej kręciło, tam i mówiono więcej; tam i ja się raz po raz między gadających wmieszałem, bo mi się zdało że jestem częścią tego obrazu, że i ja do powieści należę! Dlatego też zawsze się coś więcej napisało, niżelim słyshał od opowiadacza, zawsze się znalazły zmiany i dodatki" (288).

("When, with nearly a child's hand, I wrote my first tale, I became angry at it that it did not resemble *Oczy uroczone* or *Serce zajęcze*. There more people and more folk were involved, there more was said; there I mixed myself up time after time with those who were speaking, for I thought

I was a part of the picture, that I belonged to the novel! That is why something more was always being written, more than was heard from the teller, there were always changes and additions”).

Berwiński acknowledges that despite his efforts he did not succeed in staying faithful to the folk utterance. Why not?

“To mnie zrazu niepokoiło, nie wiedziałem, jak sobie poczcć. Nuż dopiero kiedym się lepiej rozpatrzył, poznałem przyczynę i dojrzałem różnicę między moimi ramotkami a *Klechdami*. P. Wójcicki spisał to, co słyszał, tak jak słyszał, prawie słowo do słowa; ja według własnego widzi mi się opowiadałem, niby ów poeta-bajarz spośród ludu; pan Wójcicki jest historykiem, czyli raczej kronikarzem literatury gminnej, ja chciałem być jej częstką żyjącą (...) P. Wójcicki każde ziarno poezji, które w datku od kmieci odebrał, przyniósł wiernie do domu (...) Jam te ziarna wyżebrane rzucił na grunt własnej duszy” (289).

(“At first it disturbed me, I did not know what to do. Only now when I look more closely, do I know the cause, and I saw the difference between my scribblings and *Klechdy*. P. Wójcicki wrote down what he heard as he heard it, nearly word for word; I told the story the way I saw it, like a poet-storyteller from the people; Mr Wójcicki is a historian, so a chronicler of the literature of the common people, I wanted to be a living part of that. ... P. Wójcicki brought faithfully home every grain of poetry which he was given by the peasants. ... I cast what I had gathered on the ground of my own spirit”).

Here we see the essence of the first of the paradoxes of Romantic folklorism. Wójcicki behaved like a historian, thus an observer, for whom folklore was a subject of research. That is why he succeeded in maintaining it in a state close to the original. Berwiński, however, who wanted to “mix myself up ... with those who were speaking”, and to become “a poet-storyteller from the people”, departed from authentic folklore. This is what happened because the poet – seeing himself a part of the people, and for that very reason not wishing simply to “copy” tradition – insisted on his right to his own invention. So he set forth his own “soul” and individuality more than the particularity of the oral utterance. Therefore, paradoxically, it is his involvement and passion for penetrating the secrets of “Slavism” that distance him from the poetics and the esthetics of folklore².

Perhaps the best proof of the Romantics’ utopian dreams of creating a national “naïve” literature, identical with folklore, is an excerpt from the *Ustęp* from *Pan Tadeusz*.

“O, gdybym kiedy dożył tej pociechy,
Żeby te księgi zbłądziły pod strzechy,

² As Maria Janion wrote: “The Ziewonia group were joined in their belief that poetry is an outpouring of spontaneous sincerity, that an original Romantic poetry is possible, and that poetry constitutes an expression of supra-individual unconsciousness, the ur-speech of a collective soul. The poet as the original human being, the folk as the collective creator of poetry. ... The Ziewonia group treated Slavic folk poetry as ur-poetry” (103).

Żeby wieśniaczki, kręcąc kołowrotki,
Gdy odśpiewają ulubione zwrotki
O tej dziewczynie, co tak grać lubiła,
Że przy skrzypeczkach gąski pogubiła,
O tej sierocie, co piękna jak zorze
Zaganiać gąski szła w wieczornej porze –
Gdyby też wzięły na koniec do ręki
Te księgi, proste jako ich piosenki!” (Mickiewicz 386-387).

“Oh, could I only live to see this joy,
And these books come to the thatched cottages,
And the village women turning their reels,
When they sing their favorite songs
Of the girl who loved to play music,
On the fiddle, and lost the geese thereby,
Of the orphan fair as the northern lights,
Who chasing the geese went out at eventide –
If finally they took them in their hands,
Those books, simple as their songs”).

To describe as “simple” one of the most artistic works of Polish Romanticism makes it clear what an abyss separated the Romantics’ imaginings on the subject of folklore and the people from the real needs, competences, and aspirations of the contemporary peasantry. The twentieth-century folklorist Edward Redliński wrote, in his *Konopielka*, an ironic, but bitter, conclusion to these utopian expectations on Mickiewicz’s part. This is in the scene in which the “Uczycielka” (instructress) reads *Pan Tadeusz* to Kaziuk.

“Odwracam oczy na ścianę, na muchy patrze jak po glince łązo, ona czyta o jakichś panach, jak na koniach jado, ścigajo się, strzelajo niedźwiedzia, potem jeden między nimi staje, gra.

Odwracam głowę do ściany, bo nie chce tego fiubździo słuchać” (196).

“I turn my eyes to the wall, I look at the flies as they go through the mud plaster, she reads about some gentry who go riding, race each other, shoot a bear, then one of them stops and plays.

I turn my head to the wall because I don’t want to listen to all that silly stuff”).

3. Neither for the folk, nor for all humanity

In the works of the Romantics discussed above, the motif frequently appears of their close contact from childhood with folklore. Although they came from gentry families, they

suggested that they derived a love of the culture of the folk from home, and they liked to recall the tales and chants told to them by the servants. Years later, Mickiewicz recalled the old servant called Błaziej, and he wrote in the introduction to Part II of *Dziady*:

“Cel tak pobożny święta, miejsca samotne, czas nocny, obrzędy fantastyczne przemawiały niegdyś silnie do mojej imaginacji; słuchałem bajek, powieści i pieśni o nieboszczykach powracających z prośbami lub przestrogami” (Vol 3, 13–14).

(“The pious purpose of the festival, lonely places, nighttime, fantastic rites once spoke powerfully to my imagination; I listened to tales, stories, and songs about the dead returning with requests or warnings”).

Roman Zmorski, too, recalled hearing in his childhood the last Mazovian lyricist, Mateusz Dziubiański, and Ryszard Berwiński remembered many nurses and nannies who introduced him to the mysterious world of folk beliefs. “My strangely youthful soul was seized by the tales and parables of nurses and nannies who looked after my younger brothers and sisters” (288). Seweryn Goszczyński confessed:

“Straciłem wiele, bardzo wiele na drodze obecnej cywilizacji, ale dotąd jeszcze przechował się we mnie ten instykt pierwotnej prostoty ludu, ta struna jego sumienia, to zapamiętanie owej niewinności, owego dzieciństwa uczuć wewnętrznych” (161).

(“I lost a lot, a great deal on the way to modern civilization, but until now my instinct of the original simplicity of the folk has remained, the string of its conscience, the recollection of that innocence, that childhood of inner feelings”).

Indeed, during Mickiewicz’s and Goszczyński’s youth, in the places where they grew up, folk culture was still alive. It was nurtured by the local “folk”, and not just by “old servants” and the sentimentally recalled “nannies”. It was maintained by local peasants during market days and holidays. So it can seem that folklore constituted a natural environment for the development of young Romantics (many of them, for example Zan and Czeczot knew folk dialect and wove it into their poems).

However, the Romantics overestimated their folk “education” or mystified it. It was supposed to serve as proof of a natural accretion with folklore, or – in the case of Lenartowicz – to serve the creation of his own legend as a writer “from the folk for the folk”. In his memoirs, Lenartowicz described his escapes from home into the fields and to the forest, where “till late into the evening I was entertained by goose girls and horse herders”. He added: “And this is the source of my local poetry”. “All my poetry began in the rotten tree to which my thoughts so often return – if it is right to call these peasant, untutored verses poetry” (V, VI).

In *Rówieśnicy Mickiewicza*, Witkowska rightly notes that, in their attempt to discover a national culture, the Philomaths and other young Romantics did not so much remain faithful to the ideals implanted in their childhoods, as rather discover them in themselves *ex post facto*. In reality, they took a path followed by many precursors, who imposed on the entire younger generation of the early nineteenth century a fashion for what is “antique”, spontaneous, and authentic. An enthusiasm for popular/folk culture erupted all over Europe, the patrons of which were Rousseau (with his ideal of “natural man”), Schiller (author of an essay on “naïve” and “sentimental” poetry), Thomas Percy (the English collector of relicts of the folk culture of Scotland and editor of *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 1765), James Macpherson (*Songs of Ossian*), Gottfried Bürger (author of the exceptionally popular ballad “Leonora” – read and paraphrased by the Philomaths), and particularly Johann Gottfried Herder – discoverer, collector, researcher, publisher, and popularizer of the folk songs of various nations, collected in his *Volkslieder* (1778–1779), a figure that found many imitators in Poland (including Kazimierz Brodziński and Lach Szyrma).

The Romantic experience of folk culture had, thus, above all an intellectual dimension. Young poets, “discovering” folk culture – consciously or not – were simply imitating a Europe-wide trend. A fascination with “antique” folk ways and “Slavic culture” was both a literary innovation and a cultural fashion. For Polish Romantics it offered entry into the esthetic revolution taking place over the whole of Europe. It offered the chance to enrich Polish culture not just with indigenous monuments, but also with the traditions of other nations. After all, folklore does not recognize the borders drawn by modern states. Of course, it is a local phenomenon, particular to a given region, but does not overlap with political and administrative divisions. What is more – as Vladimir Propp described in his *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, but as was recognized already in the time of Romanticism – at a deeper level, it reveals not only the cultural uniqueness of a given geographical region, but also a community of thought, understanding, perception, and experience of the world that belongs to all humanity. Therefore, although the epoch of an increased interest in folk/popular cultures does not by chance coincide with the birth of a modern understanding of national identity, an interest in folklore did not necessarily go hand-in-hand with nationalism. Such an interest could equally be an incentive to taking up intercultural dialog, as much as to rejecting such a dialog. Men of the cut of Percy and Herder contributed to the awakening of patriotic attitudes, but that did not prevent them collecting, publishing, and discussing the folklore achievements of other peoples.

Equally frequently, however, local folklore was treated as an argument confirming the exceptionality and discreteness of one’s own culture. Therefore, what differentiates

and divides was sought out, and not what unites. Even so, Berwiński wrote in his commentaries to *Bogunka na Gople*:

“Wyroby i plody ojczystej myśli, wzgardzone od uczonych naśladowców Horacego, Wirgiliusza, Anakreonta itd., uciekły pod zachronę ubogiej strzechy wieśniaczej, gdzie na jałowej i skromnej strawie mało się wzmogły nad poziom, ale pozostały **zdrowe!** (...)”

Rozróżnić winniśmy dwie literatury całkiem od siebie niezależne, tj. literaturę **łacińsko-polską** i literaturę **czysto polską**, czyli jak inni chcą: **słowiańsko-polską**. Pierwsza złożona w księgach i foliantach, które mało kto dzisiaj czyta; druga ruchoma, ustna, ulotna, jeszcze nie stężyła w żadnych formach ani prawidłach poetyki. Pierwsza dziewięć wieków żyła na cudzym chlebie i panoszyła się na cudzych śmieciach; druga przed niedawnym dopiero czasem wyszła z gęślą rodzimą spod słomianej strzechy i w całym oddziękła narodzie (...)

Te ballady nieraz myśl moją wyprowadzały z zamglonego świata *Eneidy*, a nieraz mnie porwały spośród bitew i szczęku oręża *Iliady*, a przenosiły na ojczyste, okwiecone łąny albo sadzały przy spokojnym kominie, gdzie nowe światy ani Grekom, ani Rzymianom nie znane odkrywałem. Nauczyciele moi przyganiiali mi nieraz, a mnie dusza rosta po swojemu” (287–288).

(“The products and fruits of native thought despised by the educated imitators of Horace, Vergil, Anacreon etc. fled under the cover of poor village thatch, where eating barren and modest fare, they scarcely came up to the correct level, but they stayed *healthy!* ...”

We should distinguish two literatures that are quite independent of each other, i.e. *Latin-Polish* literature, and purely *Polish* literature, or as others have it *Slavic-Polish*. The former is contained in tomes and folios that few today read; the latter is in movement, oral, transient, still not fixed in any forms or rules of poetics. The former lived for nine centuries on the bread of others and flourished on others’ smiles; the latter only recently emerged with its native fiddle from under a thatched roof and in struck a note in the whole nation. ...

These ballads often led my thoughts out of the misty world of *The Aeneid*; and they often tore me away from the battles and clash of arms in *The Iliad*; they carried me to native, flower-covered fiefs or placed me by a peaceful fire-place where I discovered new worlds unknown to Greeks and Romans alike. My teachers often chased me off, but my spirit grew in its own way”).

Here Berwiński contrasts the foreign culture, inculcated in school and supported by educational institutions, with a native culture, felt with the “heart”, and instinctively assimilated. Hereby, he places “the fruits of native thought” higher than the foundation stones of European literature, *The Aeneid* and *The Iliad*, linking native simplicity, Polishness, and the indigenous with the categories “purity” and “health”. “Purity”, indeed, becomes here the main criterion of value, and it determines the value of a given work, even if, as Berwiński stresses, folk art is artistically poorer than world classics, because

it has grown up on “modest fare”. A similar view that the quality of art is less important than that it is “ours”, was held by many other Polish Romantics – especially those who set as their goal the “naïve” imitation of folklore. After all, Czeczot accused Mickiewicz of nothing more than that the young, ambitious, educated poet “sets himself” above “the dreams” of the old lyricists. Teofil Lenartowicz, however, confessed that it is not right to call his “verses” poetry, for they are deliberately “peasantry” and not “educated”. In a letter to Ewaryst Estkowski he stressed, nevertheless, that he values more highly “tales taken faithfully from the people’s lips” than Mickiewicz’s *Grażyna* (Rzepka 80). Norwid’s voice was in a minority when he suggested that the artist’s aim should be “the raising of the people’s inspiration to a power permeating and gathering all Humanity – the raising of the popular to the Human, not by internal adaptation and formal concessions, but through the external development of maturity (464).

Norwid offered Chopin as a model to indigenous enthusiasts of folk/popular culture. His mazurkas had won recognition all over Europe, and he had thus become the best known propagator of Polish folklore in the continent. The composer was able harmoniously to combine folk traditions with artistic values and high art. In Berwiński’s judgment, it would certainly be necessary to class such an approach as an attack on the “purity” and “health” of native folklore.

How can we explain the popularity of such a peculiar conviction that – to simplify – what is worse but ours is better than what is better but foreign? To a certain extent, this can be explained by the fact that for the Romantics folklore constituted a genuine treasure house of feeling contrasting with the cool reason of the enlightened and the wisdom of the philosophers squatting atop their barren knowledge. Folklore was, thus, an inexhaustible source of ready subjects, figures, and motifs. Folk demonology became a component part of the Romantic imagination, and the figure of the folk poet/lyrist became the Romantic ideal of a poet.

Further – here the interest in “past times” and a respect for them, along with a conviction concerning the folk’s unity with nature were decisive – any attempt to improve on the past, to restyle it, was considered by the Romantics to be an assault on perfection. Political considerations were of key importance in this matter. As a result of the Partitions, and of attendant Russification and Germanization, saving the monuments of national culture became a burning necessity. In extreme cases, free adaptation, pastiche, and parody were seen as an act of treason against the nation. Thus, folklore achieved the status that Romanticism gave to national history – the status of a sacred phenomenon, belonging to the sphere of *sacrum* and not to that of *profanum*. The beatification of history and folklore, indeed, went together. This is well illustrated by the well-known passage from *Konrad Wallenrod*.

“O wieści gminna! ty arko przymierza
Między dawnymi i młodszymi laty:
W tobie lud składa broń swego rycerza,
Swych myśli przędzę i swych uczuć kwiaty.
(...)

O pieśni gminna, ty stoisz na straży
Narodowego pamiątek kościoła,
Z archanielskimi skrzydłami i głosem –
Ty czasem dzierżysz i miecz archanioła” (Mickiewicz, vol. 2, 101).

“O local tale! you ark of the covenant
betwixt the older and the younger years:
In you the people lay their knight’s sword,
Weave their thoughts and their feelings’ blooms.
(...)

O local song, you stand on guard
By the chapel of the nation’s memories,
With archangel’s wings and voice –
And betimes you too wield the archangel’s sword”).

A violation of this local-national-chapel *sacrum* could bring social ostracism, just such ostracism as Słowacki encountered after publishing *Balladyna*, *Lilia Weneda*, and *Beniowski*.

Here is another paradox. In the Romantic period, folklore was rarely the bearer of universal content and values, because it was subordinated to a national mythology in which it had the role of a mainstay of Polishness. However, it was equally rare for folklore to be allowed to retain its separate, regional character. This was, first, because Romantics granted folklore the status of literature (and literature the status of folklore), dismissing the argument that the field of folk art ends where that of high art begins. As a result, even the most “naïve” works of Lenartowicz or Pol inevitably constituted more of less successful *simulacra* of folk art. Second, folklore lost its uniqueness when it was subjected to the pressure of Romantic individualism and Romantic imagination. Berwiński and Zmorski, Lenartowicz and Goszczyński felt themselves part of the folk and made it their aim to speak in the name of the folk. However, they articulated above all their own esthetic needs and their own feelings. Third, traditional folklore is generally apolitical, but it was made into a key component of contemporary democratic ideology.

4. Folklore and politics

The political situation in which an interest in folklore was born, on one hand, meant that many literary monuments were preserved; on the other hand, however, it meant that their reception was distorted, they were subjected to ideological reworking, and frequently, indeed, forgeries were produced³. A desire to discover the oldest monuments of language and culture, kept, it appeared, among the “folk”, was accompanied by a strong desire to prove the age and cultural superiority of one’s own nation (or one’s own “race”) over adjacent peoples. In this sense, the efforts of enthusiasts, publishers, and ethnographers often ceased to be scholarly work, and became a national sport. In this sport, the winner was the one who could “prove” that people speaking his/her native language possessed a right from time immemorial to a given parcel of ground, and that his/her nation was on a high level of development when the neighbors were still stuck up to their ears in the darkness of barbarism.

The ennoblement of folklore, which by the efforts of Mickiewicz and other Romantics achieved the status of “the guardian of the national chapel of memory”, was accompanied also by a change in the way peasants were seen. The “folk” did not just become the repository of tradition, but also the personification of truth, sincerity, nobility, spontaneity, wisdom, and all other qualities valued by Romantics. There were also those who believed that folk retained a memory of an ancient, democratic social organization of the Slavs. Young Warsaw Romantics, with Roman Zmorski at their head, were inspired in this matter by the conception of Zorian Dołęga Chodakowski who wrote: “Nowhere is there a trace to be seen that before our epoch of refinement (i.e. the rise of Christianity – TM) there were subjects in the North” (4). So the folk was not only a potential force that had shown its usefulness in the battle of Raclawice and that it was necessary to reawaken once more for action, but also a personification of the ideals of the contemporary left (democrats). It is not a matter of chance that Slavophilia and a fascination with folklore almost always was connected at this time with political engagement, and that the enthusiastic consumers of folk legends and tales, such as Zmorski, were at the same time conspirators and agitators.

The thesis of Chodakowski’s *O Słowiańszczyźnie przed chrześcijaństwem* (1818) can be summed up in the assertion that Christianity deprived the Slavs of their identity. Because of Christianity, the Slavic peoples, who till that time had lived in harmony and constituted

³ The most famous Romantic forgery, apart from *Songs of Ossian*, was the *Krółodworski rękopis*, which it was claimed was from the thirteenth century, but in fact was written by Vaclav Hanka. A victim of this deception was Lucjan Siemieński, who “could not of course discover the forgery, since he found in it exactly what he had dreamed of finding, and what Hanka – seized by the same Romantic mania – had put in it. He only had some problems with the translation, a result, naturally, of a conviction of the vast distance separating the refined language of today from the original”. (Janion 104).

a cultural unity, merged with the other nations of Europe (it is not by chance that Chodakowski writes of the "Slavic world" before Christianity, and not of Poland).

"Ogniwa nowej wiary wcielały niepodobnych nas do reszty narodów Europy.

Od wczesnego polania nas wodą zaczęły się zmywać wszystkie cechy nas znamionujące, osłabiał w wielu naszych stronach duch niepodległy, i kształtując się na wzór obcy, staliśmy się na koniec sobie samym cudzymi".

("The links of the new faith fell on us, we who were unlike the rest of the nations of Europe.

From the beginning, baptism started to wash away all our unique features, weakened in many ways our independent spirit, and molding ourselves on a foreign pattern, we became finally strange to ourselves").

Christianity shattered the original community of the Slavs, divided it into Catholic and Orthodox, and thus made brother nations alien to each other.

"Uczęszczał Słowak z nabożeństwa lub potrzeby do Rzymu lub Carogrodu, a przejąwszy się nienawiścią wzajemną stolic Chrześcijaństwa, zapalał pochodnie wiekuistych wojen na przestrzeni swojej o to, że nie jednej głowie uświęconej daninę płaciła".

("The Slovak took part in the services or met the demands of Rome or Constantinople, and taking on the mutual hatred of Christendom's capitals, lit the torches of the age-old wars in his own lands, so that tribute was paid to more than one sacred head").

This is the source in Chodakowski's text of the postulate of a return to Slavic ur-culture and finding in it what unites us – the Slavs. Chodakowski was convinced that this unity can be found exclusively in the tradition maintained among the folk.

"Kiedy mniej będziemy oczekiwać od wieszczych pisarzy zagranicznych, mniej na nich polegać, a przedsięwzięmiem wśród siebie, na własnej przestrzeni w gnieździe ojców naszych, szukać o wszystkim wiadomości, znajdziemy może więcej, niżli dotąd gdziekolwiek pisano".

(When we start to expect less from prophetic foreign writers, rely on them less, and undertake to do more among ourselves, in our own place in the seat of our fathers, seeking there for news of all things, we will perhaps find more than has been written anywhere till now").

This is not only about pan-Slavic unity, but also about the concept, popularized by Joachim Lelewel, of an alleged ur-Slavic local system of governance. This conception was supposed to be proof that the original, ancestral social organization of the Slavs constituted, in essence, a realization of democratic ideas. These ideas, in the view of its proponents, were still, despite the passage of time, alive within the folk, and that is why the one place where you could start a revolution was not the gentry manor house, but the peasant croft, the sanctuary of a "genetic democracy". That is why Berwiński could write:

"Nadszedł czas, gdzie rozdwojone siły moralne narodu złączyć się mają, gdzie nic myśli rodzimej snuć trzeba z rodzimego włókna" (289).

("The time has come when the divided moral strength of the nation must unite, when it is necessary to spin the thread of native thought into native cloth").

He added an explanation as to why he shifted the folk tale of Bogunka to the times of Mieszko II and the pagan revolt.

"Tak zwane bunty po śmierci Mieczysława II niczym innym nie są, jak z jednej strony ostateczną reakcją pogaństwa naprzeciwko chrystianizmowi, a z drugiej – słowiańskiej wolności naprzeciw feudalizmowi germańskiemu. Lud, który wyrzynał panów swoich za to, że się starym bogom przenięwierzyli i gminnowładztwo słowiańskie przeinaczyli, pamiętał przeszłość swoją i chciał jej powrotu" (291).

("The so-called revolts after Mieczysław II's death are nothing but, on one hand, the last reaction of paganism against Christianity, and, on the other, the last reaction of Slavic freedom against German feudalism. The common people, who slaughtered all its lords because they had abandoned the old gods and had altered Slavic local-governance, remembered their past and wanted its return").

The original "indigenous" tale that Berwiński drew on for his story material, as, of course, all works of traditional folklore, takes place in an undefined time and space, in an eternal now. Berwiński, following other Romantics, places his tale at a historical, deliberately chosen moment. A legend about a female "spirit of the elements", provided with magic power over the powers of nature (related to other creatures of the folk imagination, Leśna Panna and Wila, for example) becomes a fable about an unequal and hopeless struggle of freedom-loving Slavs with a social order imposed from without. The historical analogy is quite obvious. It does not just have a patriotic dimension, as is the case in the similarly composed fable about Wanda, but also – as it was said at the time – a "radical" or left-wing dimension. It proclaimed the right of the common people/folk to self-determination.

Chodakowski and Berwiński showed the way. Zmorski set the matter out clearly. He drew radical, political conclusions from their writings. "Only in the soul of the folk is there salvation", he wrote (*Wspomnienia* 282). Here he echoed both Słowacki in *Ballady* and Mickiewicz when he prophesized the coming of the Savior, whose name is "Lud ludów" (The people of the people) in *Dziady* (Part III). The echo of Krasiński is weaker, for Krasiński had, in *Psalmy przyszłości*, more conservatively argued: "With the Polish gentry – the Polish folk".

Zmorski was faithful to this maxim (and political program), not only as a poet, but also as a collector of folk legends. His *Podania i baśni ludu w Mazowszu* (1852) was a collection with a carefully thought out composition. Even a superficial glance at the texts in it shows that the author was guided by an ideological criterion, for works of a clear political coloring predominate in it.

An example is *Sobotnia góra*, which opens the collection. It is the history of three sons who, after the death of their mother, set off in turn for the mountain in the title to find the magic water that will bring their mother back to life. The two elder brothers set off first, but they do not come back. It is only the third brother, the one who can resist various temptations, who is successful in showing his nobility and courage, and manages to reach his goal and reawake his mother. The hidden message of this “folk” tale becomes clear when we discover who the brothers are. The first of them is “an organist in the parish church, very wise and educated”. The second “served in the army ... and in his wanderings through various countries saw and heard much”. The third, however, “was an old-fashioned peasant, plowing the earth in the sweat of his brow, as his fathers before him, and truly believing in all that they believed – paying no heed to the wisdom of his organist brother, nor to the new things told by the soldier” (Zmorski, *Podania* 1–2).

It is not difficult to see a political subtext in the story material of *Sobotnia góra*. It is based on the contrast between the cosmopolitanism and learnedness of the two elder brothers, on one hand, and the moral stature and simplicity of the youngest. The attribute of the youngest brother is symbolic – a scythe, which, after the battle of Raclawicze, became widely used in Polish literature. If we add to this the motif of the dying mother-fatherland, which Mickiewicz’s *Księgi* had made popular, then we have a clear political allegory illustrating Zmorski’s thesis mentioned above, and making it clear that “Only in the soul of the folk is there salvation”.

Reality, however, did not follow the program and assumptions of the Romantics. Indeed, many of them, including Goszczyński, Lenartowicz, and Zmorski, frequently had a chance to come into contact with the common people, participating in agitations organized by the democratic conspiracy. Their aim was to get to know the culture of the countryside and village, seeking inspiration to create the foundations of a new national poetry, but also to spread democratic ideals among the peasantry. The effects of such actions were, however, usually miserable. Goszczyński realized this in his memorandum to the Centralizacja Towarzystwa Demokratycznego (The Central Committee of the Society of Democrats). In it he described the mountain folk as “most secretive, most calculating, and most duplicit”. He also noted with disappointment that

the common people's hatred was to a greater degree directed at the landowners than at the Austrian administration. And finally, he concluded, there was no hope in the immediate future of "inculcating in the peasants the utter importance of a future uprising" or of "turning them into a folk worth of the Republic" (6–7).

This is the third paradox that the Romantic lovers of the folk preferred not to see: since the folk, they thought, retains in it a memory of a former Slavic local governance, it constitutes healthy tissue of the nation and represents – as someone had recently put it – "genetic patriotism", so why was it necessary to "turn" them and "inculcate" in them certain ideas? On one hand, the folk was supposed to be a treasure house of the highest sentiments (as in *Sobotnia góra*) and of love of the motherland.

"Gdy naród na pole wystąpił z orężem,
Panowie na sejmie radzili;
Gdy lud polski krzyczał: "Umrzem lub zwyciężem!"
Panowie o czynszach prawili.
Gdy wiara porwała siekiery i kosy,
W siermięgach z województw ruszyła,
Panowie uczone podnosili głowy
Gadali wymownych słów siła" (Ehrenberg 223–224).

("When the nation under arms entered the field,
The gentlemen met in parliament;
When the Polish people shouted: "Victory or death!"
The gentlemen talked of rents.
When faith grabbed ax and scythe,
And in homespun came in from the provinces,
The gentlemen raised their heads
And talked of the power of eloquence")

On the other hand, however, it turned out that the common folk were stubborn material that needed a quick course in patriotic education. Of course, the Romantics never finally got rid of the delusion that the "folk" formed good earth for spreading ideas of independence and democracy. They had to keep faith with this delusion, because through it they could dream of a new order of art and a new order of the world. But it was only a fantastic dream based on a utopian theory, and not on a sober assessment of the situation based on facts.

The democratic program was killed off once and for all by the events of the sacking of Galicia, when the peasants, stirred up by the Austrians, brutally murdered several

thousand gentry, officials, and priests (estimates of the dead are from 1500 to 3000 people). In this cruel manner, Jakub Szela carried out the threat expressed fifteen years earlier by one of the Romantic bards of the common people, quoted above by Gustaw Ehrenberg, who wrote in a further part of *Szlachty w roku 1831*:

„Zadrżycie, szlachcice! już naród się poznał
I wyszedł spod waszej opieki;
Wam naród wywdzięczy krzywdy, których doznał,
Lud już was przeklął na wieki.
O! kiedy wybije godzina powstania,
Magnatom lud ucztę zgotuje;
On miecze i stryczki zaprosi do grania,
A szlachta niech sobie tańcuje” (224).

(“Look up, gentlemen! the people know themselves,
And have quit your care.
The nation owes you the harms it has known,
Now the people have cursed you forever.
Oh! when the hour of the rising strikes,
The people will cook a meal for the magnates;
They’ll bring swords and nooses along,
And the gentry can dance away”).

However Ehrenberg certainly did not mean “dances” like those of 1846. When the music stopped, the perpetrators lined up for money rewards offered them by the Austrian government. They were paid by the head.

5. Epilog. The lost handbook.

One eulogist of folklore has not been discussed yet – Wincenty Pol. Yet one particular episode from his biography constitutes a symbolic conclusion to the history of Romantic utopias, the aim of which was to unite high culture with folk culture. Pol, a man of democratic views, who took part in the November Uprising, a lancer in the army led by General Chłapowski, won considerable popularity at this time as the author of *Pieśni Janusza* (1835) and *Pieśni o ziemi naszej* (1843). Even Mickiewicz himself, who met Pol in Dresden and called him a soldier-poet, was enthusiastic about the first of these texts. He told him:

„Daję ci patent na pisanie piosenek (...) Puszczaj bezimiennie w świat swoje piosenki i nie drukuj, a jeżeli wrócę do ciebie, wtenczas dopiero poznasz, że się przyjęły” (*Adama Mickiewicza wspomnienia* 163).

(“I’ll give you a recipe for writing songs... . Send your songs out into the world anonymously and don’t print them, and if they come back to you, only then will you know that they’ve caught on”).

Janusz’s Songs were to be marked – as Pol himself wrote – with “simplicity, tenderness, and sincerity”, and achieve the ideal of “songs from the folk”. Their characters were “unknown and poor” soldiers, mostly of peasant stock. The vocabulary of *Pieśni*, stylized to imitate the dialect and language of a simple soldier, the songs’ imagery, techniques of repetition and parallelism – all this meant that they were classed in the “naïve” tendency of Polish Romanticism.

In later years, Pol’s political views steadily changed toward more conservative ones. However still in 1841, the idea of teaching “the common people” a patriotic spirit was something he believed in. This is attested to by the lost *Szajne-Katarzynka* (1841), a collection of short poems, stylized to seem folkloric. They were to constitute a “handbook” for teaching the history and geography of Poland, designed for the uneducated and illiterate in countryside and village.

This text was lost in 1846, at the time of the sack of Galicia, in which Pol and all his family were tortured by the peasants taking part in the disturbances.

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Andrzej Nowakowski, *Antinomies 7*