

This Page Will Cry . . . Which Page? Whose Tears?

Słowacki, Yeats, Materiality of the Text
and Theory of Representation

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ABSTRACT

*In this essay, the author reads a Polish Romantic poem written by Juliusz Słowacki. A close reading of the text leads toward a genetic analysis of its first draft, as well as a meditation on Słowacki's philosophy of textual representation (which appears to be deeply ambiguous). Inspired by George Bornstein's conception of textual materiality and by genetic criticism, the author also demonstrates the parallel between Słowacki's poem and the lyric *When You Are Old* by W. B. Yeats.*

TO WHICH "PAGE" DOES MY TITLE REFER? WHAT ETERNAL CRYING, weeping, what strange tears (shed by the paper!) am I thinking of? What do Juliusz Słowacki and William Butler Yeats, the key figures of Polish Romanticism and Anglo-Irish modernism, have in common? And, finally, what kind of "textual materiality", what "theory of representation", will be discussed in this essay? All these questions will be answered in the following paragraphs. At the center of the discussion, though, stands one short poem, consisting of two stanzas and eight lines.¹

Introduction: Poet and Poem

Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849) was a poet, playwright and prosaist. His works belong to the epoch of Romanticism, which in Polish literature took place between 1820 and 1860. In this time Poland did not exist as an independent state and was divided between three neighboring powers: the Russian

1. I wish to thank Ben Koschalka for his help with making stylistic adjustments to this article.

Empire, the Habsburg Monarchy and the Kingdom of Prussia (Poland had lost its independence in 1795, and would regain it only in 1918, after the First World War). The political situation affected Słowacki's biography: he spent the major parts of his adult life as an émigré, living in Paris (the main center of Polish emigration at the time), but he also travelled extensively through Europe and the Middle East.

As a poet, Słowacki was inspired by contemporary foreign authors like Byron, but also by the old masters of European literature, including Dante, Ariosto, Shakespeare and Calderón.² He is widely considered to be a virtuoso of rhyme and rhythm in the Polish language. Słowacki's poetry has a wide range of voice, which can sound solemn as in *Anhelli*, a prosaic work written in biblical style and describing the martyrology of Polish political prisoners in Siberia³, but also ironic like in the long digressive poem *Beniowski*, in which he deconstructs Romantic mythology, language and imagination.⁴

In the last period of his life and work, Słowacki became a “mystical poet”. He strongly believed that God had entrusted him with a mission of revealing the truth about the sources, course, and ultimate objectives of history. He was obsessed with creating his own mystical system—the definitive, religious interpretation of human and natural history (at this point we should add that Słowacki was quite well-oriented in the early, pre-Darwinian concepts of evolution). This “system”—contained in poems, prose works and dramas—was never finished, and remained a set of historical and cosmological intuitions, far from precision, coherence and, of course, Catholic orthodoxy.⁵

2. Słowacki, for example, made an authorial paraphrase of *El Principe Constante* by Pedro Calderón, which reinterprets the famous baroque masterpiece. The Shakespearian references in Słowacki's works are numerous; among them the most interesting seems to be a drama entitled *Balladyna*, which has a strong intertextual relationship to *Macbeth*. *Balladyna* is a text available in English translation; see *Poland's Angry Romantic Poet. Two Poems and a Play by Juliusz Słowacki* 2009, 31–155.
3. In this work the allusions to Dante can be seen. Słowacki's poem shows the journey through “the hell of Siberia”, which imitates the journey through the infernal sphere in the first part of the *Divine Comedy*.
4. *Beniowski* is partially available in English translation; see *Poland's Angry Romantic Poet . . .*, 171–304. The ironical and self-mocking aspects of Słowacki's works can be treated as an individual variant of the “romantic irony”; see *Romantic Irony* 1988, 225–240.
5. With this in mind, it is no surprise that in 1909 Cardinal Jan Puzyna, the bishop of Krakow, refused permission to move Słowacki's remains from Montmartre

Słowacki was a loner. He never married, and had no children. When he was dying in Paris at the age 40, he was a literary outsider. The Polish émigré community was divided in its attitude to his oeuvre, much of which remained unpublished at the time of Słowacki's death. In the following decades, however, there was an increased perception of the high value of Słowacki's works, and subsequent generations of Polish philologists, editors, and archivists made efforts to prepare a full critical edition of his works, including texts never published by the author. Nowadays all the poems, dramas, works in prose and letters written by Słowacki are gathered in a collection of more than 20 volumes. Next to Adam Mickiewicz, almost a generation older (1798–1855), Słowacki is undisputedly considered to be the greatest author of Polish Romanticism, and one of the key figures in Polish culture as a whole.⁶

As stated in the introduction, of all Juliusz Słowacki's important works I have chosen only one short poem. In the “core” of this text we will find some interesting points to deliberate.

Bo to jest wieszczą najjaśniejszą chwałą,
 Że w posąg mieni nawet pożegnanie.
Ta kartka wieki tu będzie płakała,
 I leż jej stanie.

Kiedy w daleką odjeżdżasz krainę,
 Ja kończę moje na ziemi wygnanie,
Ale samotny — ale łzami płynę,
I to pisanie . . . (SŁOWACKI 2005, 258)

Cemetery in Paris to Wawel Cathedral, the necropolis of Polish kings and national heroes. The bishop regarded Słowacki as a heretic (Słowacki's remains were finally buried in Wawel Cathedral almost twenty years later). Over time, the Church's attitude to Słowacki was changing—the theological inaccuracies in the poet's works, as well as his critical opinion of the nineteenth-century papacy and institutional Church, became historical details. For example, Pope John Paul II (born 1920) belonged to the generation whose imagination was strongly affected by Romantic poetry—Słowacki was his favourite Polish poet.

6. A general view of Słowacki's oeuvre (as well as of Polish Romanticism) is given by *The History of Polish Literature*. London 1969. This monograph was written by Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004), Polish poet, Nobel Prize Winner and professor of Slavic literatures at the University of California, Berkeley (see Miłosz 1983, 232–242).

Juliusz Słowacki wrote this poem at the end of his short, intensive life, not later than in 1846, not earlier than in 1844. For more than thirty years the text remained in Słowacki's papers — its first, posthumous publication took place in 1879. The English translation of the poem reads as follows:

For it is the poet's brightest glory,
That of mere parting he makes a monument.
This page will cry here for a century,
Its tears won't be spent.

When you depart towards distant frontiers,
I finish on this earth my banishment,
Yet I am lonely — yet I dissolve in tears —
This writing too I end. (SŁOWACKI 1999, 39)

As is often the case, here too the translation lacks many subtle features of the original. Of course, the original “melody” (rhymes, rhythm, pattern of accents) was changed and destabilized. But it is not only the tone of poem that is lost in translation; some meanings too were converted. In the first line, the translator uses the word “poet”, when the original in the same place does not use the word “poeta” (the strict equivalent of English “poet”) but “wieszcz”. This term — very typical of the Polish Romantic vocabulary and much more solemn than the common “poet” — does not have a simple equivalent in the vocabulary of English Romanticism. The Polish “wieszcz” denoted both “poet” and “prophet” in a religious or quasi-religious sense.

In the third line, the translator tries to preserve both the meaning and the rhyme — this is the reason for the singular form of noun at the end of this line (“This page will cry here for a century” — correspondence to “glory”). In fact, Słowacki used the plural form — he was writing about “centuries” of constant weeping.

In the first line of the second stanza, the translator mentions an excursion “towards distant frontiers”. In doing so, he ensures a rhyme with the word “tears” and maintains a similar figurative meaning, yet without being semantically faithful to the original: Słowacki wrote of “distant lands”.

In the third line of the second stanza, the translation unavoidably loses a special aspect of the original poetic language. In the original we can find a difficult expression there, quite strange from the grammatical point of view, and a little unclear (also for a native reader of Polish): “łzami płynę”. This phrase may be understood as it is by the translator: “I dissolve in

tears”. But this is not an obvious reading; there is also another possibility of interpretation: “I am sailing on the water of my tears”. What was Słowacki saying, what did he mean, when he said: “Izami płynę”? Whatever he intended, he left the poem, whose syntactical structure is not definitely closed and completely clear—and this ambiguity (rather intended by the author) was completely effaced by the translation.

In spite of all these confusions, problematic details and lost features, the general meaning of the text seems to be quite easy to capture, both in the original and in translation. There is no doubt that *For it is the poet's brightest glory* is a self-referential poem, which means here: this is a literary work that refers to the very nature of literature. We would be justified in saying that Słowacki's poem performs praise of poetry. The term “perform” is appropriate here, I think, as it emphasizes the rhetorical activity of the text. This poem tries to persuade us that poetry (great poetry, of course) can really triumph over time and death. There is no doubt that the passage about “a monument”, which is “made” by the poet from “mere parting”, alludes to the famous, classical sentence by Horace: “Exegi monumentum . . .”. Słowacki outbids (or tries to) the ancient metaphor, saying: not only a great poet will have a monument in poetry, but also the same time of parting between the great poet and the world and life will be caught and immortalized in the language. In other words: something which is “momentary” will turn into something which is “monumental”. Indeed, the promise given by the text really seems to be kept. After the 150 years which have passed since Słowacki's death, his poetry is intensively read and commented; the same poem, “For it is the poet's brightest glory”, was, is (and probably will be) repeated by so many different pages (or, in the digital era, by tablet and computer screens).

Here, at this point, the interpretation could be brought to a halt. But it will not be. What I will do in this essay is to show that after all above remarks, inside the text there remains some bothering potential of sense, some ambiguity which was not noticed and upon which it is worth reflecting. To achieve this new feeling of the text, we need to focus our attention on the third line of the first stanza, which did not find itself in the title of my article by chance.

Ta kartka wieki tu będzie płakała

This page will cry here for a century [centuries],

There are two general questions here that are of concern. The first is: what does “ta kartka”, “this page” mean? And the second: what does “będzie płakała”, “will cry” mean? These two questions correspond to the two major parts of my article.

Part One. “This page”: Text as an anamnesis of avant-text

We can ask about “this” — “which” in fact? — but one can say, of course, that the expression “this page” does not refer to any concrete, material object made of paper. A crying, inexhaustible “page” is just a “symbolic page” and should be interpreted as a conventional sign of a poet’s work — eternal and immortal, strictly in opposition to the short human life. This answer is formulated in the canonic interpretations. As the prominent scholar of Polish Romanticism Marian Maciejewski explains, Słowacki’s poem proclaims the glory of poetry, not of one page. And it is poetry, obviously, and not the one page, that is understood here as a spiritual power able to immortalize and save mortal reality (MACIEJEWSKI 1980, 90).

There is no doubts that this is true. Perhaps not all of it, though? The interesting case of a completely different lyric, written in another time and language, can help us to find a new key to the words of the Polish Romantic poet. The text which I would like to consider now is a poem by William Butler Yeats, consisting of three stanzas and twelve lines:

When you are old and grey and full of sleep
And nodding by the fire, take down this book
And slowly reading, dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep:

Dream how men loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty, with loves false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you
And loved the sorrow in your changing face.

Bending your brows beside the glowing bars
You then will say perhaps “Pride dwells with Love
He paced along the mountains high above
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars”. (YEATS 1974, 40–41)

It is not difficult to guess that the textual moment which attracts my attention occurs here just at the close of the second line. “Take down this book”—we read. “This”, so “which”, to be precise?

That question is examined in depth by George Bornstein in his inspiring essay “Yeats and Textual Reincarnation: ‘When You Are Old’ and ‘September 1913’” (BORNSTEIN 2001, 46–64). The scholar reveals here that the first “incarnation” of *When You Are Old* took the form of a hand-written inscription in a manuscript notebook, entitled *The Flame of the Spirit*.⁷ This was prepared in 1891 especially for its only reader, Maud Gonno, and presented to her as a token of love. It is not difficult to notice that in this prime “incarnation” the expression “this book” achieved a clear sense—the referent of indication could have been simply identified as the *Flame of the Spirit* manuscript. Bornstein’s analysis also demonstrates what happens when a text such as *When You Are Old* is included by the author and, after the author’s death, by generations of the editors in subsequently printed volumes. Generally, it leads to an ambiguous situation. On the one hand, readers of a printed book containing *When You Are Old* may feel that the expression “this book” refers directly to “this book” in their hands—in this case the first original referent disappears and is replaced (or covered) by new ones (BORNSTEIN 2001, 48). But there is also another possibility: a reader who knows the history of *When You Are Old* can interpret the expression “this book” as a trace of existence of the first manuscript or—perhaps even better—as a memory of the poem’s first material incarnation. In this case, “this book”, repeated in every printed or digital edition, still refers to an original, which is absent (BORNSTEIN 2001, 54). This absence has a double meaning here.

Firstly, the original (the *Flame of the Spirit* manuscript) can only be recalled, imagined by the user of the print or digital edition, but not touched or physically reached (even the facsimile edition provides just the

7. The religious metaphor of “incarnation” and “reincarnation” used by Bornstein to describe the different states, shapes and repetitions of still wondering text, is not only spectacular, but also has two more important advantages. Firstly—it is well justified on the grounds of Yeats’s criticism, because it suits the poet’s predilection to different esoteric traditions, also including, among other motives, belief in serial reincarnation. Secondly—it is an operative metaphor. Repeated (re-scribed and re-printed) text can be compared to a “spiritual subject”, involved in a chain of reincarnation and, paradoxically, keeping and at the same time changing its identity.

image, not the original itself). Secondly, the material object prepared by Yeats in 1891 and given to Maud Gonne nowadays appears to be inaccessible. *The Flame of the Spirit*—the book indicated by the words “this book” contained in every single materialization of the poem, in every printed or digital edition—was sold in 1987 to a private, anonymous collector; the present whereabouts of the volume is unknown.

And this is the turning point. Just from this interpretation of Yeats’s poem, we can go back to Słowacki’s poem. What does the expression “this page” in the first stanza refer to? The answer can be given as a paraphrase of Bornstein’s remarks: “this page” indicates the concrete material sheet of paper, once covered with Juliusz Słowacki’s hand inscription. In other words: “this page” refers to the page on which Słowacki inscribed the poem, containing the expression “this page”. So what is there to say and to be thought about this page which Słowacki covered with the inscription “this page”?

First of all, this page is also lost—or even “more lost” than Yeats’s manuscript. The holograph surely existed in 1879, when it was used as a source for the first printed edition. But now, in 2016, it probably does not exist. We cannot find it in any literary archive or private collection, and it was probably destroyed during the twentieth century. We do not even have a facsimile reproduction. If we agree that the expression “this book” from Yeats’s poem refers to an absent original, we will need a stronger statement in the case of Słowacki’s poem. We should admit—for the sake of balance—that “this page” points to a “very absent” original, towards an empty place, and acts as a sign that refers to a radically disappeared source.

At the same time, though, we can say that this preliminary “incarnation” of Słowacki’s poem, this original manuscript, is not completely lost without a trace. The first editor of *For it is the poet’s brightest glory* in 1879 had obviously seen and consulted the manuscript. The published text was a representation of handwritten text (of course, only in the range of linguistic code). This editor also left us a description of the document. According to this witness, Słowacki inscribed his poetic trifle on a sheet of paper, which was also used by the poet as a rough draft of private letter dated 12 January 1846 and addressed to another Polish Romantic poet, Zygmunt Krasiński.⁸ What’s more, the text of the draft version of the letter was

8. Zygmunt Krasiński was born in 1812 and died in 1859. His position in the history of Polish literature is marked mainly by his work *Nie-Boska komedia* (*The Un-Divine Comedy*)—the title refers of course to the Dante’s masterpiece. This is a political and historiosophical drama because it provides a vision of future

printed and published in 1883 in a special volume presenting Słowacki's epistolary writings.

The situation, then, is ambiguous. On the one hand, we do not have, because of the loss of "this page", a sensual, physical approach to the document, which was in fact a double draft—of the letter and of the lyric. On the other hand, we know (thanks to the editor's mediation) the purport and wording of two texts, letter and lyric, created in double draft. Knowing this, we may deliberate about that special space of draft, space of writing, space of "this page", a space which no longer exists in a material sense, but existed formerly and still can be, at least partially, reconstructed.

Let us then imagine this object, seen in the late nineteenth century by the editor: the sheet of paper covered with the text of the letter to Zygmunt Krasiński and the sketch of the poem *For it is the poet's brightest glory*. This is a paper space of co-presence and neighborhood for two actions, from which the first leads to the creation of an epistolary utterance, and the second to the creation of a lyrical one. No doubt, these are two separate actions. They conclude in isolated results: the letter finally sent to Krasiński does not contain the poem, and the poem is not part of the letter. Two texts were born on the same sheet of paper—this is a material fact, but one that does not allow us to efface the distinction and border between them. It would be a mistake to join the clearly definite "you" of the projected letter—Zygmunt Krasiński—and the indefinite "you" of the projected poem.

But still possible in this case are studies focused on the semantic relation between two separate texts. We can consider a series of micro-similarities between two compared texts caught *in statu nascendi*. Equally or even more important are the differences situated inside the similarities. This is the path which I shall follow. I will analyze two common meanings, which

revolution, totally destroying the old social order, as well as a metaphysical and religious play (the final scene, which shows the bloody triumph of revolution, contains an image that can be interpreted as the Parousia, the second coming of Jesus Christ to Earth). Krasiński, who personally descended from an aristocratic family, tried to understand the ideas of both fighting sides—the revolutionists on the one hand and the supporters of the old social order on the other. However, there is no doubt that *The Un-Divine Comedy* is caused by his anxiety of the great and radical social movements and expresses sympathy to the conservative forces (to learn more about Krasiński's drama see WICKSTROM 1972, 269–282). The disagreement in the case of revolution was the reason for a serious ideological dispute between Krasiński and Słowacki, who thought that even a bloody and cruel revolt, which radically changes the old shape of the world, may be essential as a stage in the historical process.

circulate “on this page” and cross the border between the zone of the letter and the poem. The first of them is the motif of the glory of the poet; the second is that of human tears and human weeping.

In the lyric, the affirmation of poetical power is expressed mainly by the first two lines:

Bo to jest wieszczka najjaśniejsza chwała,
 Że w posąg mieni nawet pożegnanie

For it is the poet's brightest glory,
 That of mere parting he makes a monument. (SŁOWACKI 1999, 39)

The idea is quite clear: the power of the poet relies on his ability to immortalize every aspect of reality, even that which is particularly fluid and unsolid. The poetry keeps alive something which is sentenced to death.

In the letter, however, the praise of poetical power is expressed in completely different terms:

spozrzegłem się na dwóch rozstajnych drogach: ducha i ciała. Z jednej strony mówiły duchy: “Poemat z nas jest — nam potrzebny, jest formą, z której będą się rozchodzić dzbanki różne, a my je będziemy Duchem świętym nalewały”. (SŁOWACKI 1952, 353)

I saw myself at two crossroads: the way of the spirit and the way of the flesh. On the one side the ghosts said: “A poem comes from us — poem is needed for us, is a form from which different jugs will flow. We will pour the Holy Spirit into these jugs”. (my translation)

The great poet is a poet-prophet, anointed by God, called for the sacred mission of revealing a very deep truth. Great poetry is filled with the sacred message descending directly from the Holy Spirit.

To summarize: the draft of the lyric, and thus the published lyric, defines poetic power in “earthly terms” wherein the poet immortalizes mortal reality in his words, while the draft letter (and thus the sent letter) defines the poetic power in “metaphysical terms” as the poet reveals in his prophetic words the real dimension of the temporal world, which can be noticed *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Let us look at the motif of human tears and weeping, which also circulates between the poem and letter, two separate texts arising on the same paper sheet. In the lyric, this motif appears at the close of the text:

Ja kończę moje na ziemi wygnanie,
Ale samotny — ale łzami płynę,
I to pisanie . . .

I finish on this earth my banishment,
Yet I am lonely — yet I dissolve in tears —
This writing too I end. (SŁOWACKI 1999, 39)

Why is Słowacki crying? I do not know, and no one can, because the text is quite discreet in this case. We may say of course: he (Słowacki) is crying, because he is sad, and he is sad, because he is ending his life. But how can we exclude another interpretation? Let's think: he is crying because he is happy; he is happy because he is ending his life. This is not a very strange idea, as "life" was described just one line above as "banishment on the earth". So what do these tears express: happiness or sadness? I cannot find any indication in the text that emphasizes one and efface another possibility (or vice versa).⁹ Whatever the case, we can reach the general conclusion: the tears clearly appear here in relation to the end of life. The subject talking in the poem is nearing death and shedding tears (whatever they mean, they are caused by the fact of death). Reaching the end of the earthly path and weeping — these two actions are strictly connected.

In the letter we can observe an exact inversion of this association:

Możesz słyssał, żem mocno był chory; teraz jestem zdrów do czasu, a żyję,
póki chcę — to mi Bóg zostawia; w ręku mi dał nić żywota mego; nie

9. It is worth recalling here the remarks of Roland Barthes, made in another context, but useful as a kind of comment on the interpretational confusion caused by Słowacki's poem: "Perhaps 'weeping' is too crude; perhaps we must not refer all tears to one and the same signification; perhaps within the same lover there are several subjects who engage in neighboring but different modes of 'weeping'. (. . .) If I have so many ways of crying, it may be because, when I cry, I always address myself to someone, and because the recipient of my tears is not always the same" (BARTHES 2001, 181). To paraphrase this passage, we may say: perhaps we do not need to refer these tears, which are mentioned in the second stanza of Słowacki's poem ("I dissolve in tears"), to one and same signification, regardless of whether it is grief because of death or relief because of the end of earthly life. Perhaps in these tears different "modes of weeping" are contained, which must be recognized and identified by the "recipients of tears". In other words — by us, the readers of the poem *For it is the poet's brightest glory*.

bez łez, jak widzisz, puszczam ją, aby szła jeszcze . . . Mocno byłem strudzony . . . (SŁOWACKI 1952, 354)

Maybe you heard that I had been seriously ill; now I am healthy for the time being, and I live as long as I want to live—God leaves it to me; God placed the thread of my life in my hand; I let it unveil, as you can see, not without tears . . . I was worn out. (my translation)

Mentioned here are the tears caused by the continuation of life. Słowacki has the special privilege of pushing away the moment of his own death, and uses this extra law, governed not by the fare but rather by the sense of duty, both exhausting and sacred. The prophetic mission is still in progress, and cannot be stopped, Słowacki must live (although he does not want to). That is a moral obligation—and that is the reason for his tears. In other words, in the lyrical inscription, weeping constitutes a reaction to finishing life on earth, but in the epistolary inscription, weeping is a reaction to the act of non-finishing earthly life.

We can see now that “this page” was, in fact, a space of very specific dialogue or, even, intensive dispute between two developing texts. In which order were they inscribed? What was previously written: the poem or the letter? Textual scholars are divided in their opinions.¹⁰ Whatever the case, we may say, that Słowacki created a hybrid composition. If we analyze this double draft “from the letter to the poem”, we can say: the very serious, solemn discourse of prophetic self-creation is converted into a “lower”, more “modest” style of thinking and expressing. If we want to follow the opposite direction, the poet’s and poetry’s admiration, placed on the margin of the document, in its central zones is hyperbolized and turned into a poet’s and poetry’s apotheosis.

To once again paraphrase George Bornstein, the expression “this page”, repeated in every print publication of Słowacki’s poem, indicates the first manuscript, which is, simultaneously, lost for archivists, who cannot find and keep the document in its proper place and regained by the philologi-

10. Marian Maciejewski believes that Słowacki first had covered the sheet with a rough copy of the letter and then added a poem in a free space (Maciejewski 1980, 90). Another scholar Marek Piechota claims, that it was exactly the opposite. He also argues, that poem and letter were not written at the same time. According to his opinion, there is two years gap between the first (lyrical) and second (epistolary) inscription (PIECHOTA 2012, 155).

cal imagination, which vivifies the remaining mentions and witnesses. The “original” pointed to by the expression “this page” is maybe not only absent, but also present in a phantom way. That lost/regained and absent/present sheet appears as a stage for a dynamic play of meanings. Finally, the arising letter and the arising poem, both situated on the same sheet of paper, seem to be two different ways of thinking about death and life, the end and infinity, the poet and poetry.

In 1948 Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, the authors of the famous handbook *Theory of Literature*, criticised studies which explore the process of textual creation. The main argument of both scholars was that this kind of studies diverts our attention from the proper target of textual criticism: the literary work itself. We should rather focus on a close reading of the finished text. (WELLEK and WARREN 1963, 91).¹¹ But here we saw that the same published text “remembers” the avant-texte, and points—by the indicative words “this page”—towards “this first page”. In other words: the same careful close reading of a finished work directs us toward analysis of the draft manuscript, where the work is still in progress.

Drafts, manuscripts, dynamic of the creative process—this is the traditional domain of genetic criticism. However, genetic criticism studies focus on physically existing manuscripts. As Pierre-Marc de Biasi, the prominent representative of French genetic criticism, concludes:

It is very true that genetic criticism can only work on extant documents, and that this period corresponds to a “golden age” of Western literary manuscripts. It would be difficult to reproach genetic critics for not working on documents that have not been preserved (BIASI 1996, 55).

No doubt, it would be difficult to work on unpreserved documents, but perhaps not completely impossible, as I tried to show above. My remarks on the process of writing of two and different texts on one and the same sheet are a sample of an “odd genetic criticism”, which examines the materiality of an immaterial object. Or in other words, it examines the trace of the trace of the creation process.

11. Wellek and Warren’s objections are easy to understand in their historical context because they were formulated when New Criticism was in its heyday. The rallying cry of the day was to safeguard the identity of literary scholarship in order to prevent its disintegration and merging with other fields of humanities.

Part Two. “Will cry”: text and textual representation

Who will be crying?

For it is the poet’s brightest glory,
That of mere parting he makes a monument.
This page will cry here for a century,
Its tears won’t be spent.

From the grammatical point of view, there is no ambiguity here: what is referred to is the page’s weeping. The ambiguity appears as we carefully read the second stanza:

When you depart towards distant frontiers,
I finish on this earth my banishment,
Yet I am lonely—yet I dissolve in tears—
This writing too I end.

In the first stanza we find a reference to the future and inexhaustible, textual weeping (“This page will cry here for a centuries, / Its tears won’t be spent”), while in the second stanza there appears an image of humans weeping, which comes to a close (“I finish on this earth my banishment, / Yet I am lonely—yet I dissolve in tears—/ This writing too I end”). These two acts of weeping correspond strongly—but what is the sense of this? How should we understand this parallel? Are the tears of the sheet substantial to the tears of the poet, of men? Or is it the opposite; are these tears completely different phenomena? In other words: is the text present on behalf of the absent author, or rather despite of him?

Marian Maciejewski, the historian of Polish literature cited above, assures: “Until our epoch, an *era of suspiciousness*, started to interpret Horace’s motif in an ironic way, Romantics were still using it to proclaim the laudation of a poet” (MACIEJEWSKI, 1980: 90). But is it certain that the Romantic use of Horace’s motif of “raising a monument” was so unequivocal and lacking in irony? Besides, what exactly did Horace say?

I have raised a monument more enduring than bronze
More lofty than the kingly site of pyramids,
Which neither gnawing rains nor the impotent north wind
Can erase, nor the years in endless
Number, nor fugitive fragments of time.

I shall not wholly die; in great part I
Shall escape Forgetfulness, on and on still
To grow, fresh in new-given praise. So long as priests
With silent Virgin still ascend the Capitoline,
I shall be spoken, where Aufidus noisily dashes on
And where, poor in water, Daunus once as liege
A peasant people ruled. (HORACE 1963)

As Ralph G. Williams suggests, the Horatian vision of the saved subject is not as obvious as it might at first appear.

What Horace foresees, I would argue, is that he will live, not as an empirical being, surely, and not as a stable written text, either. The movement from the supposed voice of the empirical speaker (“I have raised a monument”) to the poetic *I* (“I shall grow . . . I shall be spoken”) is seamless. “He” will live as performed on the labile and infinitely fluid medium of air, in sound constantly changing, constantly different in timbre and accent as they come from the mouths of generation after generation of speakers. And in fact “he” lives even as sung and spoken of (. . .) by a Canadian to a group of scholars gathered in a conference room at the University of Michigan. (WILLIAMS 1996, 62–63).

Let us paraphrase this comment, so that it fits the case of the Polish Romantic poem: what Słowacki foresees is an eternal weeping, which refers to human passing, to the ephemerality of human existence. This weeping, however, will not belong to Słowacki; it will not be Słowacki’s weeping, but that of the page left by Słowacki and of all pages in the world, which only carry the short poem. The page(s) will be shedding the written, rhetorical, linguistic tears—not the tears of the man who disappeared. “The brightest glory of the poet” lies not in the capacity of extending its own weeping (its own life) via a page, but rather in the capacity of substituting the reality of page for own weeping (own life). This poem cries and lives as long as is read, interpreted and reinterpreted—for example here and now on the pages of an American scholarly journal called *Textual Cultures*.

Did Słowacki wish to express in his poem such a philosophy of representation, or is it rather me who tries to complicate the text’s meaning, according to the spirit of an “era of suspiciousness”? I am not sure how to answer this question, but one fact seems to be clear. Whatever Słowacki wished to say, he left the poem that wanders through many sheets of paper in many volumes or anthologies and, in the digital era, through many computer or

tablet screens. Each page has the power to draw us into the very heart of confusion. Paraphrasing the words of the lyric, one might say: “this” page, “this first”, unpreserved, which carried the slight trace of a creating hand as well as “this every”, covered with the printed poem about “the poet’s brightest glory” and “this symbolic”, which denotes the same poetry itself, will capture our attention and *rack* our *mind*, giving both the promise of presence and the feeling of absence.

If we are able to believe that textual representation in fact acts as a saving embodiment of a weak subject into language, we can also believe that the tears shed by fading man are transmitted into the potentially unlimited future by the mediation of the words (and pages with the words). We may imagine that the sheet is shedding (now, when we are reading the poem) and will be shedding (when our successor will be reading the poem) Juliusz Słowacki’s tears.

If we insist that literary representation in fact acts as a replacement of the weak subject by its linguistic simulacrum (is this idea not inherent in Roland Barthes’s imagination of the author’s death,¹² Paul de Man’s concept of autobiography as De-Facement,¹³ Edward Said’s theory of the oppressive cultural image¹⁴ or Maurice Blanchot’s remarks on the word,

12. Let us recall what Roland Barthes said about the textual creation process, which leads the author not towards textual immortality (text as a “place” where the author is present and alive), but towards textual death (text as a “place” where the author is absent and not alive): “No doubt it has always been that way. As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins”. (Barthes 1977, 142).
13. See Paul de Man’s remark on the nature of linguistic representation: “To the extent that language is figure (or metaphor, or prosopopeia) it is indeed not the thing itself but the representation, the picture of the thing, and, as such, it is silent, mute as pictures are mute. Language, as a trope, is always privative. (P. de Man 1984, 80)
14. What Edward Said says about the textual representation of the so-called “Orient” may also be treated as an individual variant of the general idea of “crisis of representation”: “It hardly needs to be demonstrated again that language itself is a highly organized and encoded system, which employs many devices to express, indicate, exchange messages and information, represent, and so forth. In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation. The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient therefore relies very little, and cannot instrumentally depend, on the Orient as such. On the contrary, the

which denotes the thing and, at the same time, annihilates it ¹⁵), we will definitely say that there is no transmission between “my weeping” and the “sheet’s weeping”, between “human” and “textual”. It is a naive mistake to confuse tears which belong to completely different realities, divided by an intransitive border.

A very short conclusion: what is the brightest glory of the poet indeed?

This poem written by Juliusz Słowacki in 1846 is an example of a self-referential text: it is a poem about a poem, a piece of literature about literature. I stated this fact in the introduction to my essay and now I can repeat this opinion, but following more profound consideration. Yes, it is a self-referent poem; however, this self-referentiality is not limited to a quite conventional discourse about poetry which immortalizes the mortal reality. Self-referentiality here also means the “memory” of the material draft, of the first holograph, which is “hidden” inside the public text. Self-referentiality also means the consideration of the possibilities and limits of linguistic representation, which works in an unobvious way, both rescuing and effacing the identity of the human subject.

Finally, we can once again read the whole poem, this time in a reversed sequence. Firstly in the English translation:

For it is the poet’s brightest glory,
That of mere parting he makes a monument.
This page will cry here for a century,
Its tears won’t be spent.
When you depart towards distant frontiers,
I finish on this earth my banishment,
Yet I am lonely—yet I dissolve in tears—
This writing too I end.

written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced made supererogatory any such real thing as “the Orient”. (Said 1980, 29)

15. Maurice Blanchot’s theory of representation is clearly explained and commented upon by Richard Stamelman in his book *Lost Beyond Telling*, devoted to the different rhetorical strategies used to express an experience of “death”, “loss” and “absence” by modern French literature from Baudelaire to Barthes (Stamelman also occasionally refers to non-French authors like Elizabeth Bishop) (Stamelman 1990, 30–46).

and secondly in the Polish original:

Bo to jest wieszczka najjaśniejsza chwała,
 Że w posąg mieni nawet pożegnanie.
 Ta kartka wieki tu będzie płakała,
 I leż jej stanie.

Kiedy w daleką odjeżdżasz krainę,
 Ja kończę moje na ziemi wygnanie,
 Ale samotny — ale łzami płyne,
 I to pisanie . . .

The conclusion may thus be that it is “the brightest glory of the poet” (“wieszczka najjaśniejsza chwała”) that he leaves us a short poem, which seems to be completely clear and easy to interpret, but which at the same time evades the simplification and proves its capability to provoke interesting questions.

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