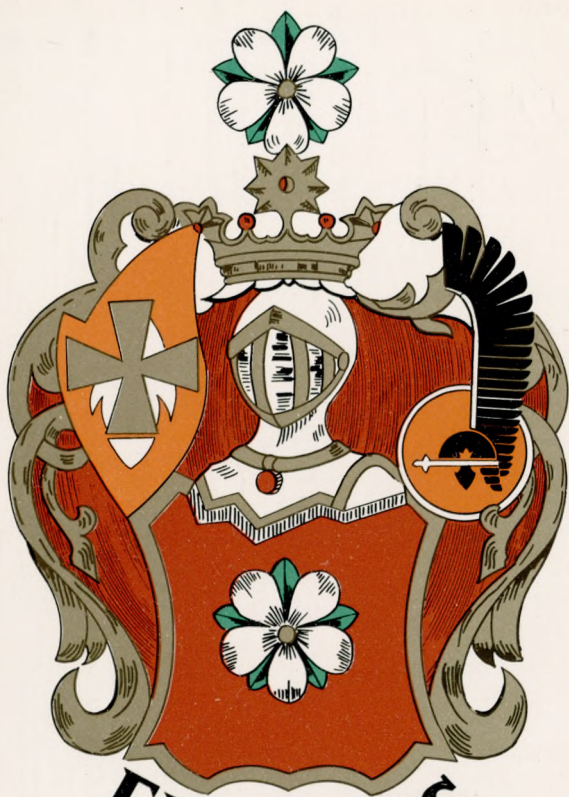




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**THE POLISH LAND**



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The  
Polish Land

*ZIEMIA POLSKA*

AN ANTHOLOGY  
IN PROSE AND VERSE

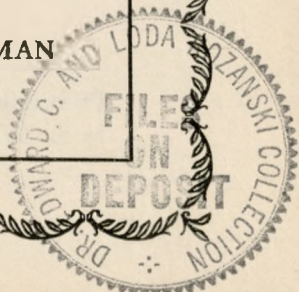
compiled by

**KLUB POLSKI**  
OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Edited by

MARION MOORE COLEMAN

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## Dedication

To all those who, nameless and unsung,  
defended The Polish Land through the terrible  
years of the Second World War, this book is  
affectionately dedicated.



## FOREWORD

The very name of Poland itself has for its root the word *field*, for Poland is, indeed, a country of meadows and fields. Of factories and cities, too, but, above all, of fields.

For centuries unnumbered the Pole has lived on these fields. He has derived his sustenance from them and to their defense dedicated himself and all his possessions. When driven from them by force too great for his matching, he has written in exile the tenderest of poems and music immortal in their memory.

Like the gracious, yet sturdy, willows that line every lane and highway of his homeland the Pole has been in his devotion to his land: meeting the thrust of the storm wind, the slash of the hostile axe, the fire of invasion with toughness and fortitude, swaying but never breaking, his strength to resist rooted deep in the life-giving soil of the Polish land itself.

Today we are in the midst of one of history's recurrent deluges. In Poland the fury of that deluge is beyond all measuring, beyond anything other nations have been obliged to endure. But through it all remains, and shines forth, the land: permanent and changeless in a world ravaged by change.

And so it is with peculiar affection that we send on its way, at this time, a volume dedicated to The Polish Land.

HALINA RODZINSKA

Stockbridge, Massachusetts  
November 10, 1943



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## INTRODUCTION

The one primarily responsible for the present anthology is the American poet and anthologist Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. It was our discovery, some years ago, that Longfellow had failed to include a proper selection from the Polish in his massive *Poets and Poetry of Europe* (1845) and in his later *Poems of Place* (1877) which first gave us the idea of doing such an anthology as *Ziemia Polska* ourselves, if only to make up for the gap, inexcusable and shocking, as it seemed to us, in Longfellow's two anthologies.

By a stroke of chance, our little volume appears from the press a hundred years almost to the very day after the date on which Longfellow noted in his diary that he had begun work on *Poets and Poetry of Europe*. That date was November 24th, 1843. *Ziemia Polska* becomes, thus, a kind of anniversary volume, serving to remind us of the great work done by Longfellow toward the popularization of foreign literatures and making up belatedly for his neglect of Polish.

Ten years before Longfellow began his first anthology of world poetry, the Polish poet Mickiewicz wrote these memorable words:

*For us today, the world's unbidden guests,  
From all the past, in all the future too,  
There is a single country left where still  
For Poles a little happiness remains:  
The land of childhood years! Holy and pure  
The land will always be, like early love,  
Untainted by remembrance of mistakes,  
Nor undermined by hope's delusiveness,  
Unaltered by the stream of happenings.*

Mickiewicz was an exile, living perforce far away from his homeland, when he wrote these words.

Today, as in Mickiewicz's time, the tide of Poland's destiny is again in ebb. Now, as then, the only country left to Poles where a little happiness remains is the Poland of their childhood years, living still but in memory.

And so it is fitting that Klub Polski (The Polish Club) of

Columbia University should choose this moment for the publication of a volume designed to evoke that Poland. It is Klub Polski's hope that a certain comfort may descend upon the hearts of the present exiles from this book, knowing that there are those in our free and fortunate land who care about that Poland of theirs and regret its fate.

In offering *Ziemia Polska* to the reader who is not of Polish origin we should like to point out that the Pole's attitude toward his country is deeply and intensely religious. "Holy is our love, dear motherland, for thee," Bishop Krasicki put it,

*Toward Thy care alone is bent the noble mind,  
Poison drunk for Thee upon the lips is sweet,  
Fetters for Thee worn lack power to bind,  
Wounds are noble scars, if won for Thee.  
In all our happiest dreams Thyselſ shalt find,  
And whoso unto Thee brings succor nigh,  
Regrets no earthly pain, nor e'en to die.*

Even the American sons and daughters of Polish fathers and mothers retain a certain reverence and mystical affection toward their parents' homeland and it was the desire to express this, quickened and intensified by the war, that kept the members of Klub Polski at the task of preparing this volume, when without this inspiration, they might have abandoned it in midstream.

A word should be said about certain physical features of the book. The date in parentheses following the author's name in each case indicates when the work first appeared in print, if this is known. The authors' dates will be found in the Index at the end of the book.

The translators are all, with the exception of Martha Walker Cook, either present or past members of Klub Polski of Columbia. The editor, who revised, rewrote, and in the case of the poems put into rhyme, all selections used and who is responsible for all translations and adaptations not specifically attributed to anyone else, is an advisor of Klub Polski.

The club members who have worked on *Ziemia Polska* are aware that they have here but scratched the surface of Poland's rich treasury of poems and prose pieces of place. Lack of time and the restrictions on paper imposed by the exigencies of war are responsible for the shortness of the volume. Some day the club will do a *Ziemia Polska* II, and even perhaps III!

Readers familiar with Polish literature will be disappointed



in *Ziemia Polska* when they fail to find here some of the very greatest pieces of descriptive prose and verse in the Polish language. They will miss, for example, Mickiewicz's magnificent descriptions of the Lithuanian forest (*Pan Tadeusz*), and Żeromski's fine prose-poems of the Holy Cross region (*Ashes*), and Malczewski's stirring descriptions of the Ukrainian steppe (*Marya*). These, it must be explained, are lacking simply because they have already been translated and are readily accessible to the English reader. With Polish literature so scantily represented in English, it seemed too bad for us to do over again work that had already been done. We have built our picture, therefore, as far as possible from works either untranslated hitherto or, if translated, done inadequately, even at the price of omitting a few masterpieces of descriptive writing.

MARION MOORE COLEMAN



# The Polish Land



## THOU LAND!

*Thou Lechish land! Thou land so dearly loved!  
How wondrously has God thy beauty robed!  
Like virgin who expectantly doth wait,  
Rose-wreathed and Sunday-fresh, at cottage gate!  
How fair the arch of heav'n above thy plain,  
The winds how healthy blow above thy grain!  
Thy air from sea to height how laden down  
With scent of flow'ring fields and forests' song!  
Thy fields in golden wavelets rise and fall,  
Like silver streamers wind thy rivers all.  
Thy hillocks deep with carpet green are piled,  
O Lechish land, prolific, undefiled!  
How fortunate the man thy womb has borne,  
Who on thy bosom greets the final morn!  
With thee is air to breathe, and space to live,  
And e'en a cause for which one's life to give!*

— Józef Kraszewski (19c.)  
Tr. by Charlotte W. Bielawska

## HOME THOUGHTS

When a Pole dreams of home, what pictures most often rise in his memory? In what symbols does he think of home? Here are the pictures and symbols that most often recur.

*Now evening casts her net of livid gray  
About the sky, and all the starry catch  
Begins to quiver. Yonder treetops  
Sink their tousled locks in mist  
As on a couch.*

*Thou land, thou distant land, my vanished home,  
Above thee bows the moon, thy dreams to silver.  
Thick about thee cluster firs; the sun-warmed earth  
Begins to murmur, chimney smoke maternal hands  
Above thee spread to guard thy sleep.*

*The gate below the garden creaks,  
As someone runs impatient up the path  
And lingers on a lilac-bowered terrace.  
Sleepy dogs bestir themselves within the yard  
And drowsy pigeons brush the roof with startled wings.*

*A silv'ry quiet reigns above the orchard,  
Frogs keep up their chatter in the marsh.  
The scent of hay perfumes the meadow  
And from out the glades arise familiar mists.  
Below the casement, near the garden fence,  
A bush of late-blown jasmine glistens white,  
A clatter sounds from yonder highway near the wood,  
And stars shine tenderly above the church . . .*

— Fragments from *A Song of Home*  
by Władysław Pelc, Tr. by Florence  
Depkowska

## OUR FATHERLAND

*On the long mountain ranges black firs tower high,  
 And murmur a dirge as the north wind sweeps by,  
 While down in the valley, below on the plain,  
 Billows an ocean of golden-speared grain:  
 An ocean, with islands of blossom-starred green,  
 Like vagabond sailing-ships dotting the scene.  
 Here and there little homes white and glittering stand —  
     That's Poland, our Poland,  
     Our fatherland!*

*Now the milky way cuts a white track in the blue,  
 And earth slumbers deep on her couch spread with dew.  
 But, far on the steppe, let a single horse neigh,  
 Or bird start in fright by the lake from its play,  
 Let a single long note rumble down from the hills,  
 And vigilance wakens, to stiffen the wills  
 As if at a sign from Jehovah's own hand.  
     That's Poland, our Poland,  
     Our fatherland!*

*Winter has hidden crag, forest and dale,  
 And draped every torrent with crystalline veil.  
 Over silver road-ribbons, through valleys snow white  
 Sleds hurry along, like grey hours in their flight.  
 A cocoon's silky whiteness the sun paints with red,  
 And a flock of young birds to the roof-thatch have fled,  
 While a pillar of smoke turns to cloudy white band —  
     That's Poland, our Poland,  
     Our fatherland!*

*Near the highway a homestead, whose white columns gleam,  
 A gate standing open, a turf-carpet green,  
 A crane at the well-sweep, a pigeon hard by,  
 And clouds of pink apple bloom staining the sky.  
 In the pine-grove a peacock's shrill warning of rain,  
 Storks perched on the roof-top that loudly complain,*

*A host at the doorstep with welcoming hand —  
That's Poland, our Poland,  
Our fatherland!*

*The country where naught can the race ever spoil,  
The country that for its faith, language and soil  
Stands ready its breast, heart and hand to lay bare  
To the sword of the foeman, to wrong everywhere;  
That, so long as life lasts, will not cease from the fight,  
So long as it breathes will strive on for the right:  
One man, with one sword, ever firmly will stand:  
That's Poland, our Poland,  
Our fatherland!*

— Aleksander Fredro (c. 1825)  
Tr. by Eugenia Kielbińska



The  
Seacoast  
and Pomorze

*A welcome there thy song awaits,  
The laurel's golden leaf —  
There fame and honor,  
And sweet ecstasy.*

— Adam Asnyk



## THE BALTIC

*From the sea we are, from the ocean!  
O Baltic! Time's blade behold,  
Raised o'er the fount of our glory,  
The waters Polish of old.*

*From the sea we are, from the ocean!  
From murmurous Baltic's space,  
With vigor and freshness unceasing,  
Renewing our Polish race.*

*From the sea we are, from the ocean!  
From Baltic's enchanting strand.  
Firm on the shore it caresses,  
Each a true guardian shall stand.*

*From the sea we are, from the ocean!  
On its banks let God shed his care!  
We vow to defend them forever,  
No foeman to threaten shall dare.*

*From the sea we are, from the ocean!  
Far on its giant waves blown,  
Already our prows cut its waters,  
And sail to some happy unknown.*

*From the sea we are, from the ocean!  
O Baltic! We are for thy might  
A bulwark! Let danger but menace,  
With sword lifted high, we shall fight!*

— Jan Kasprowicz (1924)

Tr. by A. P. Coleman

## QUEEN OF THE POLISH SEA

At Szwarzewo on the Bay of Puck, protected from the Baltic by the long slim arm of Hel Peninsula, is to be found the Madonna whose image adorns the prow of every Polish vessel that puts out to sea.

The Virgin Mary herself, according to Kashubian legend, selected Szwarzewo as her seat, and there, in her honor, the Kashubians built a splendid church, placing in it a small but exquisitely wrought figure, which they call The Virgin of Szwarzewo, Queen of the Polish Sea.

All about the church are the fine old beech trees of which the poets have so often sung.

*"Still as of old in Ovid the trees send  
forth their lay:*

*I strain to catch the special song  
of each,*

*Of Gorgan firs and Beskid, as thunderous  
they pray,*

*Of Białowiezian copse, Szwarzewan beech."*

— Kazimierz Wierzyński (1942)

## IN TIME OF PEACE . . .

## ON HEL

*Black-frocked insects swoop for hungry sips,  
Dusk bathes the farthest dune, the deepest sand.  
The air is stifling. From their sticky lips  
The pine trees loose faint perfume o'er the land.*

*Behold the Baltic nymphs who all  
Day long have sung 'midst burning heat,  
Send forth at eventide another call,  
Luring the vagrant winds to their retreat.*

*Love now, in long, pine-needled farthingale,  
Flies unto thee, Kashubian moon divine;  
Look hard at this romance, nor fail  
The zephyr's salt to add to resinous pine.*

— Kazimierz Wierzyński (19-)

Tr. by Albina Kruszevska

## ON THE DUNES AT HEL

*The pine trees descend in droves,  
to bathe in the surf. . .*

*A sailboat rocks like a gull, far  
in the distance. . .*

*While over the murmurous verdure,  
The undulant blue,  
The life-giving sun warbles blushing,  
And glows. . .*

*Still an ember remains, to perfume  
the shore with full summer,  
But the sky is already scented with night,  
Clothing with lustre thine eyes, the stars,  
And the lighthouse out on the deep.*

— Światopełk Karpiński (1936)

## . . . .AND IN WAR

It takes much more than the mere passage of time to make a place part of a nation's spiritual heritage. It takes also great deeds.

In the autumn of 1939, great deeds happened on Hel Peninsula.

The German invasion had reached flood-tide. Resistance in most parts of the Polish realm had collapsed. Only a single unit of the Polish army still held out.

It was on this unit, stationed at the tip of the Peninsula of Hel, that the full fury of German vengeance was hurled. The defenders did not give an inch, although German guns were trained on them from two directions at once.

Finally the last defense remaining was the strongly fortified line of Jastarnia. On the men of this line was directed, on the 24th of September, a mighty propaganda offensive. Leaflets were dropped by the thousands, bearing the invitation,

“Soldiers on Hel Peninsula! You are the very last

of those defending themselves in vain on the soil of Poland. Don't be food for our guns and bombs. Lay down your arms, come to us with white flags. Think of your families, your wives and your children. You will be treated as brave soldiers."

But not a single man laid down his arms.

It is through such deeds that a mere place becomes — heroic soil.

### THE CHURCH BELLS OF HEL

Once upon a time, on the peninsula of Hel, there was a poor little village whose church bells were so fine that their tolling was like a wonderful, living voice. There were seven bells in all, two magnificent large ones and five small, and tough old Bartholomew who rang them loved them all.

Twelve year old Joasia loved them too, more than anyone else could possibly love them, for Joasia was deaf, and the sound of the bells was the only sound that penetrated to her lonely, silent world. Evenings when old Bartholomew rang the Angelus, Joasia would hear the sound and know it was time to lead her goats home from their grazing. The bells were her dearest, her only friends.

Then a terrible thing happened: the bells were missing! Gone, completely gone, leaving no trace. The villagers shuddered, certain that someone in their midst had committed a secret crime.

Now Joasia was truly alone. . . Even the bells had deserted her.

Then, one day as she was going through the forest, Joasia heard a whisper.

"Joasia, Joasia!" it said. "Joasia, here we are!"

And lo! there the bells were, covered with twigs and moss lying beside the path.

"Take me first," said the largest bell, "Take me first!"

And Joasia did, while the other big bell and the five small ones followed behind. But Joasia said nothing at all that night to anyone about her bells.

The next day was Sunday. Suddenly, on the still morning air there rang out a glorious sound, a wonderful sound, too long unheard. It was the bells. Startled, yet bursting with joy, the villagers ran to

the church. They fell on their knees, begging God to protect them from evil. It was a triumphant day for Joasia. . . and ever since, to this very day, though the village itself has long since disappeared beneath the waters of the Baltic, the church bells still may be heard, on a fine summer Sunday, tolling the same old call, Joasia! Joasia!

— Adapted from Zuzanna Rabska

## THE AMBER COAST

It was amber, the hard golden substance, sprung, as the Greeks believed, from the tears of the weeping poplar, that first lured civilized men to the Baltic, and it was amber which kept them journeying there centuries before the region had even a settled population.

The first European to gaze on the amber coast from the sea was probably Pytheas, an explorer from Marseilles. Pytheas sailed past the Baltic shore in the time of Alexander the Great, more than three hundred years before the birth of Christ. In his notes Pytheas remarked, among other things, the luxuriance of the forests and the tidal character of the rivers, of which, of course, the Vistula was one. Pytheas mentioned also the overpowering brilliance of the sun, which remained so bright, he said, from its setting to its rising again, as to blot out the very stars. Whoever has known the enchanting "white nights" of the northern summer understands the meaning of Pytheas' words!

The merchants who journeyed Baltic-ward in search of amber went by an overland route leading up through such passes in the mountains as the great one at Moravian Ostrava or the famous Bardiov pass in Slovakia. North of the mountains they would follow the great rivers, especially the Vistula.

The amber merchant often made his hazardous trek northward in fulfillment of certain specific commissions. The Emperor Nero, for example, sent an expedition for amber to adorn the white throat of his favorite Poppea.

The traders themselves had no idea what amber was, or how it came into being: they simply took the word of the natives who gathered it in the river-shallows or along the coast after a storm. Some native tribes believed it to be the juice of the pine tree, forced out from under the bark by the summer sun and then hardened by the icy water of the river. Others believed the fair golden rocks were

fragments of the palace of Jura, Goddess of the Sea, which Perkunas, God of Thunder, in order to punish Jura for a secret love affair with a fisherman, struck by lightning and shattered.

When the people of Free Poland began to build the city of Gdynia, the portion of the amber coast selected for the project was hardly changed at all from what it had been in the time of the Roman amber merchants and even in the much earlier days of Pytheas. Only the boundless and luxuriant forests were lacking. These had largely been cut down to make way for the villages of fisherfolk which had grown up on the Baltic coast through the centuries. The low-lying, undulant gray coast was still, as in Roman times, lonely neglected, and melancholy.

## THE GREAT GATEWAY: GDYNIA

### *ITS MEANING TO THE POLE TODAY*

“The old sailor kept staring at the Baltic with a gaze of such longing that one could see he would have gathered it all right into his pale eyes if he could, would have drunk it in, filled his very soul with the flashes of light that played over the water.

As it was he steeped himself in its warm reflection and closed his eyes: now he could see even more than before, and wider and farther.

Now he sees not only the sea whose murmur actually reaches his ears but the sea which this may become. The vision mounts and multiplies. He sees this sea as it shall be when he himself is no longer there. . .

What magnificence there is in it, what power! His heart contracts with delight: the whole of Poland inclines toward the sea, has proceeded toward it as in a holy pilgrimage, has embraced it in its arms.

All the pain, all the arduous toil of the nation revolves toward the mighty waters of the sea; all Poland takes hold of its giant rocks, of its primeval granite, strikes to the ground whole forests of oak trunks.

What movement, what life there is here! A thousand vessels move about in the mighty port, smoke rises from the chimneys and curls in the air like giant clouds. A hundred tongues are heard in the harbor as men from all over the world throng its thousand arms to



meet in the city, great now and rich, its every hilltop well-peopled.

For this — this Gdynia — is Poland's gateway, her gateway to the world. A measureless gate it is, a very triumphal arch, imposing, motionless, splendid, its very foundations kissed by the sea that serves it rapturously, faithfully, world without end."

— Kornel Makuszyński (193-)

## THE SPIRIT OF POMORZE

In the year 1273, the fortress-town of Chełmno, a stronghold situated on nine little hills overlooking the Vistula, was attacked by a powerful coalition of pagans including Prussians, Lithuanians and also the aboriginal Jadzwingians. The people of Chełmno resisted the attack with spirit and determination and when the enemy settled down to wear them out by siege they met that too, with spirit and determination.

The siege dragged on, the people inside the walls of Chełmno, meanwhile, growing hungrier and hungrier as their supplies of food dwindled. The time came when there was nothing left to eat — literally nothing, save a single loaf of bread and one bony, half-starved ox. But the defenders of Chełmno did not yield or lose hope.

Instead, they resorted to a trick. To show the enemy that all was well inside the walls and that there was still plenty of food for further resistance, they ostentatiously turned the last ox loose *outside the walls*, and shot from their bows their last loaf of bread!

The ruse worked! Believing further siege to be more costly than it was worth, the enemy withdrew. The nerve, the courageous spirit of the people of Chełmno had saved the day.

## TORUŃ: QUEEN OF THE VISTULA PLAIN

*"You see above her hilltops pointed spires  
And gilded domes, brilliant as very fires,  
Soaring aloft to pierce the topmost sky,  
And set the clouds awry.*

— Sebastian Klonowicz (1595)

Toruń has been celebrated since time immemorial as a cross-roads of trade, and even more celebrated of old than Toruń itself was Toruń's "gateway", as it was called, The Isle of Bazaars.

Separated from the city by the wide, sluggish arm of the Old, or Lazy Vistula, the Isle of Bazaars is today used only as a wooded retreat where the good folk of Toruń go for picnics. On it is found one of the few remnants left of the once majestic, primeval Vistulan Forest. Here you find enormous willows and huge black poplars, here elders and hazel trees, wild pear and aspen, all bound together in a very jungle by the pale green tendrils of the wild hop vine.

The Isle got its name from the bazaars held on it in the olden time by Turkish and Persian and Armenian merchants. They would set up here, on their way to the great wholesale market in Toruń proper, retail stalls, for the convenience of the great country families, who flocked to buy at first hand the richly embroidered divans, the glistening fabrics and enticing perfumes of the east.

Often the Isle of Bazaars was the scene of great pageantry. Here, for example, took place the great peace conference which dictated terms to the Germans after they had been defeated by King Władysław Jagiełło at Grunwald in 1410. Here also, years later, in Copernicus' day, the citizens of Toruń staged a magnificent welcome for Jagiełło's son, King Casimir. It was on this occasion that the Isle was first linked to the Toruń mainland by a permanent bridge.

Today the Isle of Bazaars can but dream of those great, other days, when Toruń was known everywhere as a city of riches and peace, and, above all, contentment.

*"Toruń, richly built, with virtue blest,  
Where plenty doth a happy folk attest,  
Where flourish goodness, peace, contentment,  
Equity."*

— Klonowicz

*“O, the raftsmen’s poor wife  
Sits at home all her life,  
While the raftsmen himself,  
With his paddle to help,  
Floats merrily down*

*to*

*Toruń. . .”*

## THE RAFTSMEN

OF THE

VISTULA

— Song of the Vistula  
Raftsmen

Toruń was the raftsmen’s principal port of call on the long trip between Kraków and Danzig and it was in this town he received his initiation into the raftsmen’s fraternity.

In Toruń, the fledgling pilot — the Frycz (Freddy), as he was called — was escorted, on his first trip down the river, to the famous old tavern *At the Sign of the Turk*, there to be put through his paces before being admitted to the closely guarded circle.

The initiation ceremony consisted mostly of paying homage to Fat Maryna. Fat Maryna was a bawdy, female Bacchus who sat astride a wine-keg in a dark corner of the tavern. About her sprawling figure vines were draped and she held in her two fat hands a goblet and a bottle. The Frycz was supposed to bow low before the figure of Maryna and then to complete the ceremony by kissing one thumb in a certain specified place on the right side. This done he was sprinkled with wine and, amid congratulatory speeches, sworn into the raftsmen’s guild. Unless he went through this ceremony the Frycz could not hope to become an upright and respected river pilot.

Maryna has been kissed on the right side of one thumb by so many generations of Fryczes that she is considerably worn down in this particular spot.

— Adapted

## THE "PIERNIKI" OF TORUŃ

If you want Poland's finest, said an old proverb, get yourself brandy from Danzig, a girl from Kraków, shoes from Warsaw, and — *pierniki* from Toruń!

It seems that once, in a time of famine, a certain kind-hearted nun of the Norbertine Cloister in Toruń, baked some gingerbread according to a quite special recipe and distributed it to the poor. The good nun's gingerbread was so toothsome that word of it spread beyond the narrow circle of those for whom she had designed it and in time reached the ears of Toruń's rich burgher families. Soon all the housewives of the town were asking where the fragrant new cakes might be purchased, and permission was given to the nun to sell them for charity in front of the Church of St. Catherine on the day dedicated to the memory of that saint, which is November 25th, and for a certain number of days thereafter each year.

At first the *pierniki*, as the ginger cakes were called in Polish, were quite simple affairs, just plain round, or perhaps heart-shaped, cookies. But they were rich, golden-brown in color and utterly delectable, and it was not long before people were demanding that the cakes be baked in such a way as to make their appearance match their wonderful flavor.

Soon Toruń's finest artists were employing their talents in the designing of forms for the baking of *pierniki*. Gingerbread angels and soldiers, sailors and queens were made in every home, while in the shops of the great confectioners appeared cakes of the most elaborate and often fantastic patterns.

When Kings passed through Toruń, the highest honor that could be paid them was a gift of *pierniki*, especially designed for the occasion. Ambassadors were plied with *pierniki* in order to win their favor. In 1663, when a certain Jan Graf was sent to Stockholm to see about the payment of a debt which Sweden owed the city of Toruń under the terms of the Treaty of Oliva, the harrassed negotiator wrote back that he was sorry the magistrates had not given him a supply of Hungarian wine and *pierniki* with which to soften the flinty Swedes! Later, in 1696, when a commission arrived in Toruń to settle the Swedish debt, the officials of Toruń repaired their earlier mistake by supplying the delegation abundantly with the delicious ginger cakes!

Wielkopolska,  
Cradle of the Polish State

*Wide is the world, its countries fair,  
But none can with my own compare.*

— Klemens Janicki, the first Polish poet  
of peasant origin, 16 c.  
Tr. by Caroline Ratajczak Rogozińska



HOW THE POLISH STATE CAME TO  
BE CREATED*A Myth of the Ancient Tribe of Polani*

Centuries and centuries ago, in the 5th century before Christ, to be exact, a certain warrior known as Her, the Armenian, fell in battle as he was fighting the Parthians on the side of the Greeks.

Her was left on the battlefield for dead.

Now it happened that Her's body, "young, fair and clad in armor of gold," was dead, but his soul, which had escaped the body in the moment of death, was still living, still in possession of its senses and still able to muster sufficient will to enable it to go on living.

Her's soul came, in the course of time, to the River of Oblivion called by the Greeks the Lethe. But it had no desire to bathe in the obliterating waters. Instead, Her sat down beside the Lethe and dreamed of resurrection.

Ages passed. Ulysses came and went. The Ceasars too. Then suddenly a breeze arose in the meadows near the river. A voice seemed to whisper in the breeze. Whose voice it twas Her did not know, but he listened.

Finally it appeared that the voice was that of the goddess of Beauty, daughter of the Word, and that she had come from the North for the express purpose of addressing Her: for the purpose of giving Her his destiny!

Fair indeed was Beauty to gaze upon:

*"A setting sun she clasped above her brow,  
A silver moon reposed about her feet.  
She skimmed the tree-tops lightly, swooping now  
To touch a roof-thatch, cometlike and fleet.*

*A rainbow winged her round with swirling veil,  
And wreathes of sunny radiance bound her hair,  
As jasmine-pearls she flung with pale  
White hand, and poppy-corals lavished everywhere"*

Her followed Beauty as in a trance, until finally he found himself, awake again, beneath a straw-thatched roof in a far nor-

thern land. Over him towered the shadowy figure of a woman, grim and awesome and unfamiliar to him. The woman began to murmur in Her's ear "magic runes".

The woman, as Her presently learned, was none other than Rosa Weneda, Rosa, the Venedic Maid, the Cassandra of the tribe of Polani. A tragic figure, she, in mourning for the two dearly beloved brothers, Lelum and Polelum, whom the Lechs had slain in battle and burned to ashes on a great funeral pyre.

*"Slain is my fatherland, slain indeed,"* Rosa chanted, *"but..."*

And here Rosa gave Her the destiny she had held in wait for him.

"But you shall be the heir of my living spirit and that of our nation. The ashes of my dead brothers have already impregnated me. Soon I will bring forth a body for you to dwell in, that you may be their avenger and mine. Thy name, Thou Son of Ashes, shall be Popiel, a word that in our tongue has the meaning of ember."

— Adapted from *Król Duch*  
(The King Spirit), c. 1845 by  
Julius Słowacki



## GNIEZNO

*The Hill of Lech: Poland's Holy of Holies*

I tarried on the Hill of Lech, to dream, above the silent lake, upon our nation's past.

Here, ten centuries ago, there stood a shrine, called by the curious name of Lelum, and as I thought of it my mind went back to the very depths of pagan times.

I seemed to see on this spot pagan priests, approaching the lake in solemn procession and preparing to sprinkle the crowds of people who had gathered, with the lake's sacred waters. The people had bowed in rapt worship before the idol Lelum.

Then I saw coming from the opposite direction King Mieszko, leading a numerous retinue and bearing the standard of a Christian knight. My imagination pictured a people shaken with wonder and awe, and pagan priests lifting their lamentation to heaven as the Christian King ordered the idol cast in the lake, his own standard, with its shining cross, set up in its stead.

And I reflected that the memory of the pagan god Lelum still persists in Wielkopolska. At weddings, for example, as the bridal party, bearing the traditional baked goose, approaches the cottage of the newly wedded pair, it is the custom for all to cry out with one voice the old pagan formula, "Lelum, Polelum! Lelum, Polelum!"

I reflected also on how the coming of Christianity had left its traces in the curious rites of Dyngus and Śmigus. For it is not true that these arose on this very spot: as King Mieszko, unable to calm the grief of the women over the destruction of their idol, ordered them sprinkled lightly with water and gently tapped with supple branches until they rose and scattered to their homes. And so we have Dyngus, which is the sprinkling, and Śmigus, the switching, that go on today in our villages at Easter time among our young men and lasses.

— Adapted from Karol Miarka's  
account of a visit to Gniezno 1864

## A LAKE OF LEGEND AND SONG

## LAKE GOPŁO

The name of Lake Gopło comes from an ancient Slavic root meaning "a vast flood of water". It is an appropriate name, therefore, since Gopło is the largest of Poland's numberless lakes.

Lying in the broad valley of the River Notec, in the heart of fertile Kujawy, Gopło and its reedy banks are supposed to have been the scene of most of the great events of Poland's earliest history.

## THE NYMPH OF LAKE GOPŁO

SCENE: A forest path near Gopło

CHARACTERS: Two fanciful creatures, *Skierka*  
and *Chochlik*.

*Skierka*: But tell me where is she, Goplana, our Queen?

*Chochlik*: Asleep still, in Gopło.

*Skierka*: But how can the perfume of pine  
And the fragrance of spring not have roused her,  
Our Queen? Such a wonderful fragrance!  
How can she not have heard the swish  
Of the black-winged swallows, beating the lake  
Till its glassy surface was stained  
With a thousand orbs?

*Chochlik*: Soon enough the mad one will waken . . .

*Skierka*: (pointing to the lake)  
See yonder! There on a beam of sunlight  
Goplana herself gushes forth from the water!  
Like a quivering buckwheat leaf,  
Airily riding the breeze —  
Or a swan, when a snow-white sail is unfurled,  
As it rocks on the water, hesitates, glides away.  
But look! See yonder — balancing lightly  
She leaps from the water now like a mermaid,  
On a braid of forget-me-nots  
Swings by her small white hands,  
Striking, with dainty foot on the waves' expanse,  
Diamond sparks.

Ah, thou enchantress! Who could detect  
If thou'rt holding thyself by thy ring,  
Or resting upon the air,  
Or suspending thyself by the blossoms?

*Chochlik*: She's wearing some kind of garland . . .  
Is't fashioned of blossoms, or rushes?

*Skierka*: Of neither. What you see on the witch's brow  
Are enchanted swallows . . .

Tied by the feet.  
One time on an autumn morn,  
The creatures fell into the depths of a streamlet,  
And this cast them up as a garland,  
Black garland, ebony-black,  
For Goplana's bright golden tresses.

— from *Balladyna*,  
by Julius Słowacki (1834)

## THE MOUSE TOWER OF KRUSZWICA

Prince Popiel, who ruled over the Polani, had, it seems an excessively ambitious wife. Her name was Ryksa and she was a German. In Ryksa's hands poor Popiel was no more than a piece of putty.

Ryksa had many ambitions, but the greatest of these was to place a German kinsman of her own in Popiel's place at the head of the Polani.

To do this Ryksa had not only to get rid of Popiel but also of all his relatives. She set about doing this in the most subtle and crafty manner, by enlisting the help of Popiel himself, who had no love for his relatives.

The first victims were to be Popiel's uncles. These Ryksa invited to an enormous banquet, where she plied them with *miód*, the delicious honey wine so popular among the Polani.

Of course the *miód* was poisoned, and the uncles died. Ryksa and Popiel congratulated themselves on the success of their plans.

But then rumor began to run stealthily through the ranks of the Polani, rumor that whispered it had been Ryksa and Popiel themselves who plotted the foul deed.

In desperation they took refuge in the high wooden fortress that stood on the edge of Lake Gopło. There they believed themselves safe, for the tower was a mighty one, proof against every human weapon.

But the tower was not proof against the weapons of God. Soon sharp, biting noises began to be heard in the casing and before Ryksa and Popiel knew what was happening great ugly rats began to swarm out of the walls in a frightening stream. Half-starved, the rats fell upon Ryksa and Popiel and in less time than it takes to tell had devoured them.

And so, from that day to this, the tower on Lake Gopło,

near the village of Kruszwica, has been known everywhere as The Mouse Tower.

*"When Popiel committed that awful crime  
The throne of the Poles was left bare  
for a time;  
So the nation, desiring a worthy successor,  
Looked for one there in the plains of  
Kruszwica."*

— Old Rhyme

. . . And found him at last in the wheelright Piast.

Angelic visitors appeared to Piast, legend has it, as he was working at his craft. He left off what he was doing and followed their injunctions, taking his divinely appointed place as leader of the Polani.

It was a descendant of Piast who became the first King of Poland — King Mieszko —, and it was a Piast too who, alone of all Poland's kings, was called "Great".

The word Piast has come to be a symbol for the Polish peasant, who is, after all, the true King of Poland, since it is he who rules her dearest possession, her Earth.

*"It is true,"* declared the poet Wyspiański,

*. . . . . , our peasant really does  
Have something in him of Piast!  
Of the old Piast kings — yes, a good  
deal in fact!  
I've lived among them for years,  
With only a low green ridge of turf  
between them and myself,  
And I say: when the peasant sows, when  
he plows or grinds his grain,  
He does it with dignity such as you scarce  
can imagine.  
What he does he does with devotion,  
Dignity, prudence and understanding.  
He prays that way, too, in church,  
With such reverence as scarce would be dreamed.  
Yes, there is much in our peasant of Piast.  
A power, he is, our peasant, there you have it."*

— from *The Wedding* (1901)

## HOW POZNAŃ IS SAID TO HAVE GOT ITS NAME. . .

Long, long ago, in the chaotic eleventh century, the enemies of Poland were vanquished, and the King, who had lived for years in exile as a monk, was restored to his throne through the miraculous intervention of a white-garbed warrior, who in the nick of time rallied the discouraged Poles by displaying a tablet on which was engraved a miraculous watchword.

This watchword served to enable the Poles, who had become disorganized, to recognize each other and thus was the means of fusing them into a solid fighting mass which swiftly routed the foe.

Later the restored King, whose name was Casimir, gave the name POZNAŃ to his capital, out of gratitude to the tablet, which had made recognition possible: for the name Poznań is derived, of course, from the verb meaning "to recognize"!

*The dearest object in their city to native Poznanians is the Town Hall which rises majestic above the central Square. . .*

The old teacher has tears in his eyes when, as he guides a band of schoolchildren about, he comes to the Town Hall and tells them the story of the crested White Eagle on its spire. As for the children, they are enchanted when, as the great clock in the tower strikes twelve, two solemn and dignified he-goats appear in front of it and begin to ram each other with their horns!

True, the goats of the Town Hall clock are no such figures as the Trumpeter of St. Mary's in Kraków, nor does the legend of the Raven Prince which is linked with the Town Hall spire have any such symbolic meaning as the broken note of the Kraków *hejnał*. But still, I know born Poznanians who are proud, truly proud, of those two bucking goats!

— Tadeusz Kraszewski (1939)

The White Eagle on the Town Hall spire in Poznań is the traditional and historic symbol of the Polish State, as the Bald Eagle is of the American United States.

The Town Hall itself is said to mark the spot where the three legendary brothers, Lech, Czech and Ruś, who founded the Polish, Czech and Russian nations, respectively, parted long ago and from thence went their several ways, following their separate destinies.

## THE LEGEND OF THE RAVEN PRINCE

Once upon a time, it happened that a young Poznanian chanced to save the life of a raven, which fell wounded at his feet one day as he was viewing the city from his favorite vantage point, the spire of the Town Hall.

As the bird was about to fly away, after the lad had repaired its wing, it suddenly revealed itself to be no ordinary raven, but the very Prince of all Ravens.

Wishing to express his gratitude to his rescuer, the Raven Prince handed the lad a small silver trumpet, saying as he did so:

"Keep this, cherish it carefully, and if ever you are in trouble, blow on it one long, unbroken blast. You may be sure help will come swiftly."

Years passed. The lad grew to manhood. Then a day came when Poznań was in terrible trouble. Once again, as so often before, the Germans were at the city gates. Further resistance seemed hopeless.

Then the one who had long before rescued the Raven remembered. He took out the silver trumpet and, mounting to the balustrade of the Town Hall spire, blew a long, unbroken blast.

In the twinkling of an eye the sky was filled with a thick, murmurous cloud of ravens. The cloud descended to earth and there, falling upon the Germans, utterly vanquished them.

Thus, once more, Poznań was saved.





Silesia  
and  
Krakow

*Black depths —*

*green mountains,*

*and a royal city . . .*

## ONDRASZEK, THE BANDIT OF THE BESKIDS

Silesia, like Gaul, is divided into three parts: White, with its sandy fields and murmuring forests; Black, with its coal mines and factories; and Green, with its high mountain streams and its glorious Beskids. The hero of the district where Black Silesia meets Green is Ondraszek, the Robin Hood of the western Beskids. Both miners and mountaineers claim him, for, though his abode is said to be in the high peaks and valleys, the miners tell of his exploits too, of how he dried his magic money in a deep pit, mixing the charmed coins about with an enormous pot-ladle until great flashes of violet flame shot into the air above them, flashes that could be seen all over the countryside for miles around. And even today they call the flames that shoot from the coal pits at night the flames of Ondraszek.

Ondraszek, according to legend, was a child of the Devil. His father, the Voyt of Janowice, did everything in his power, but to no avail, to break the charm that, even before the lad's birth, marked his son for the wild life of a brigand. The Voyt even sent the boy to Opawa to study for the priesthood, but, alas, it was Ondraszek's very learning that became the cause, in the end, of his turning to outlawry. Was it not because he could read German that the foolish young Countess Prazma, who lived in the castle at Frydek, installed the handsome youth as her companion, to read her the love lyrics and pastoral idylls she so adored? Was it not the lad's presence in Frydek Castle that sent the Count, on his return from Vienna, into a blistering rage, so that in sheer defense of person and name Ondraszek had to slay with his sword in all directions?

And after that, unwilling to return home with the brand of Murderer upon him, Ondraszek fled to the hills. Here, in the green Beskids, Ondraszek learned for the first time the secret of his birth and the horror of his destiny. From the very witch herself, who had got him from the Devil and given him to the Voyt for a son, he learned that he was a changeling. Thenceforth, knowing there was no escape from destiny, Ondraszek made a success of the career he had been driven to: instead of remaining a simple highwayman, he became the Head Man of All Highwaymen, the very Brigand of Brigands. And so it was that the Voyt's son, Ondraszek Szebesta,

became the Robin Hood of the Beskids, falling upon each passing caravan, as it wound through the mountain pass between Bohemia and Silesia, and exacting from each in turn a percentage of booty for himself and a still larger percentage for the succor of the poor. He is the hero of a drama that is, even today, not yet finished: a drama whose central conflict is the struggle between peasant and master in the Silesian borderland.

— Adapted from Zofja Kossak

### SILESIA OF OLD

*Not a single roof in the village was made of shingles,  
But of moulded and matted sheaves of full-grown straw,  
Under whose low, overhanging thatch the houses were  
dark as night.*

*It's hard to imagine how graceful those tiny  
cottages were,*

*When you think that even the masters in those days  
didn't possess a saw!*

*Saw, plane and axe, all were unknown.*

*A beam, mind you, was split with a wedge! The timbers  
also were split,*

*Then fastened crudely onto the knotty beams*

*And there was your framework; the walls, far from being  
smoothed out with a layer*

*Of plaster, were left full of chinks and cracks, that  
were used*

*Instead of a cupboard for combs, perhaps, and for spoons  
and knives and for pipes;*

*The knots in the beams were used to hang clothes on, and  
the whole habitation*

*Was low and cluttered . . .*

— Norbert Bonczyk (1883)

## THE SILESIAN MINER

His watchword:

*"From the struggle we'll never resign:  
We've the strength of justice within.  
By the might of that strength divine,  
We'll fight to the end — and win."*

An ancient warning:

*"Wretched is our lot. With every blow  
The horrid fear of injury we know.  
So strike with caution, let no hammer free,  
For soon he'll have a lump, who forges carelessly."*

— From *Officina ferraria*, by Walenty  
Rozdzieński, Kraków, 1612

## SILESIA SINGS

*Hark to the way the hammer blows pound,  
And the turbines tattle in tune,  
Working by night, working by noon,  
Treading unbroken their rhythmical round.*

*Smoke from each giant grey chimney pours,  
The wide smelting ovens flare,  
The endlessly driving machinery roars,  
Past the ruddy glow of the foundry's glare,  
Slumber spreads widely its darkling streak.*

*Hark! as Silesia sings,  
As her coal and iron speak!*

*From the bowels of earth hear the stubborn blow  
Of the pick, driving on to its goal,  
With a knock and a crash on the ledges below  
Is loosened the obstinate coal.*

*Swing high, swing low,  
Swing low, swing high,  
To the mine-shafts go,  
In the darkness ply,*

*Boring to bring out the earth's black wonder,  
Ye earth-hidden folk, ye Silesian thunder.  
The lifts, the drills, with clamor and shock,*

*Hack and hew at the shattered rock,  
 Coal, coal, to bring from beneath,  
 Into the hungry machine to feed.  
 Now sings the machine,  
 I live, I breathe,  
 My heart's beat hear in the motor's heave,  
 Out of the fire was forged — my soul,  
 Movement and pow'r from the anvil roll.  
 The hiss, the whisper, the clatter of steel,  
 The clash, the clang, as each dentated wheel  
 Into its proper position jumps;  
 Pistons and turbines, pistons and pumps,  
 In the shuddering rhythm of the iron team,  
 Thunders the heart of the throbbing machine.*

— Julian Tuwim (c. 1930)

### THE HOPE OF POLAND TODAY

*So behold, there comes toward me, out of the ages' abyss,  
 A man — one of those who sow with the spirit, appointed —  
 A man — worker, mighty, gigantic and nameless,  
 Who by lifting his hand can alter the pattern of history,  
 Whose voice echoes down from one generation to the next,  
 In hammer and anvil, in sparks, thunder, drive, and in flight,  
 Whose words are as rocks that mutter and crash till in grandeur  
 They're silenced — before him the spirit crumbles and bows,  
 For lo! He, with brazen feet — Pace-setter divine,  
 Strides toward us . . .*

*Once the nation senses its duty,  
 Thou'lt be its awakener — Thou, O black earth!  
 Thou Silesia!  
 Thou'lt be its arouser, restorer,  
 As today thou'rt already its Baptist,  
 Whose voice, not in vain, has ca'led out in the wilderness,  
 No, not in vain, for that voice has fulfilled  
 Itself now in a mighty act of redemption.*

— Emil Zegadłowicz

## CIERLICKA . . .

In Poland the peasants have a belief that if a person is very evil the earth will refuse to accept his body when the time comes for it to be buried.

This happened, it is said, in the case of Elizabeth Lucretia, the last Princess of Cieszyn. The legend does not say precisely what great evil Elizabeth had done, but it was probably that she had been cruel to her peasants, which was crime enough. At any rate, when she died, the earth refused to accept her body. Time after time the pious peasants buried her, but each time the earth gave her body back.

Finally in despair the gravediggers loaded Elizabeth's body onto a cart drawn by four black oxen and turned it loose. The oxen hauled it as far as the village of Cierlicka and there, oxen and cart, all disappeared in the ground. Nothing more was ever seen or heard of the grim funeral equipage - perhaps it did not sink into the ground, perhaps it was not the earth but the air that finally consented to receive the evil Black Princess.

National heroes are in the process of being made all the time. At Cierlicka are buried two of Free Poland's most popular heroes — the two young fliers Żwirko and Wigura who by their record flight in 1932 made Poland's name one to conjure with in the field of aeronautics.

The two young heroes literally skyrocketed to fame, and then as quickly sank to their tragic graves. On the 10th of September, 1932, as the two were flying from Warsaw to Praha at the invitation of the Czechoslovak Aeroclub, a terrible storm suddenly struck central Europe. It was especially severe in Silesia. At very midday the sky grew black as night. Unable to see where they were, Żwirko and Wigura flew too low over the forested Olza region, near the Czech-Polish border. The wings of their famous airplane R.W.D. 6 tangled with the top of a fir tree on the summit of Cierlicka and in less time than it takes to tell the tragedy had been consummated. The nation which had taken the two dashing figures to its heart just two weeks before, when word came on the 28th of August that they had made a record in world flying, was plunged into sorrow as black as the clouds

which had been the cause of their deaths. A memorial chapel marks the fatal hilltop of Cierlicka.

*"Tell them, O trees, O orphan sisters, tell  
The aspiring pair who winged our name  
Aloft, they still shall fly, by spell  
Of poet's song still mount to towering fame."*

— Kazimierz Wierzyński (1932)

At twilight, as one contemplates the Polish landscape, he senses its almost palpable personality. Nature becomes for a moment very real. . . a lovely, lonely, brooding woman, evoked by the music of the evening churchbells. . .

*'Mid twilight mist and thickening fog,  
O'er plain and meadow, field and bog,  
Through marsh and woodland, glade and glen,  
By pathways long forgot of men,  
The great Earth Spirit lonely flies,  
Sowing the plain below with sighs  
Yearning and woe her footsteps mark,  
And lo! she rests, in graveyard dark,  
Beside a maiden's gravemound sits,  
As o'er the world her wan glance flits.  
That blanket it as moonlit frost,  
Then hard by a streamlet's edge is lost,  
Upon the misty, slumbrous groves  
A shadowy darkness from her blows,*

— Kazimierz Tetmajer (c. 1900)

Tr. by Emily Orzechowska

The Polish landscape on an April day in 1794, just after the great battle of Raclawice, in which the victorious Polish troops, many of them peasants with such improvised weapons as scythes and other farm implements, defeated the Russians. The Polish commander at Raclawice was General Thaddeus Kościuszko. . .

*Budded are beeches and maples,  
And budded the flexuous ash;  
The milky-white birch  
Has loosed  
Her long braids  
On the wind, which, rustling a leaf,  
Escapes to the darkling wood.  
Softly the fatherland sighs:  
Where are you, children of mine?*

*The full moon of spring  
Has coursed over the sky  
Like a comet,  
Turning each hut lustrous white.*

*Now a mist-cloud descends on the valleys,  
Deeper and deeper descends,  
And out of its whiteness,  
Wide-flung as on very wing,  
Emerges, far-spreading, the land:  
Our land, with its silvery plain,  
Rock-sprinkled and flinty,  
Abounding in grasses and knolls  
But mangled and shattered now,  
As if swept by a giant storm.*

*Yet still, in the golden hush,  
Unpierced by a living note,  
Orphaned, and drear, and lone,  
The sentinel birches stand.*



## WANDA, AND THE DRAMA OF TEUTON AND SLAV. . .

Before the popular Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw was blasted to rubble by German bombs in September 1939, there hung in one of its galleries a painting by Alexander Lesser called "The Death of Wanda".

Wanda, the Polish guide would explain, was a Polish princess who lived in the 8th century A. D., and whose death, self-inflicted by drowning, marked the end of the first act in the long tragedy of Teuton and Slav. Wanda threw herself into the Vistula, legend has it, because she could not bring herself to consummate a dynastic marriage with a German.

Wanda, we learn from an old poem, was the daughter of Krakus, the Chief of the Vistulan Slavs, himself famous for having rid the country of an annoying, man-eating dragon that lived in a cave under the Wawel (he had killed it by feeding it brimstone, done up in the skin of a sheep!). Wanda was "fair as a breeze in May" and her cheeks were "the hue of apple blossoms", her hair "like the golden stamens of the lily".

Now it seems that Ritogar, the hot-blooded prince of Rügen and the idol of all the well-born maidens in the land, fell in love with Wanda and sent an embassy to Kraków to sue for her hand. Ritogar had wealth and power to offer the Polish princess, as she was aware, but she had taken a vow of eternal virginity and this she would not break in order to marry a German.

Unaccustomed to having his designs frustrated, Ritogar flew into a frenzy when he heard Wanda's verdict. He called up his faithful soldiers and led them at once in a bitter foray against the Vistulan Poles. The unhappy Wanda, seeing the storm she had let loose by her coldness and being unwilling to be the cause of bloodshed, leapt to her death in the Vistula.

The figure of Wanda is symbolic, as a huge gravemound to her memory not far from Kraków attests. She is the earliest of Poland's national heroines.

## KRAKÓW, CITY OF MOONLIGHT AND ANCIENT WALLS. . .

Kraków in those days was all "left bank". There you had, in the ancient palaces of the aristocracy, a second Faubourg Saint-Germain. . . in the cassocks and veils and black hats of the clergy a second Faubourg Saint-Sulpice. . . There you had the imposing walls of the Academy, with their berets and togas and swarms of young men and women pouring out of the University. There you found also an artists' quarter. . . where in quiet workshops young hands, armed with charcoal, were busy copying. . . There too were narrow lanes, silent and still, and picturesque nooks, and old churches; all "left bank", all impressive and not be ashamed of in any capital. But with that it ended. That was all there was. Whereas on the right bank of the Seine there bustled the whole great modern, rich, swarming city of Paris, on the Vistula's right bank was only. . . Dębniki.

By day Kraków had a look that did not harmonize with her walls. . . but at night it was different. . . When the last stroke of ten had sounded from the tower of St. Mary's, a single policeman was all that remained on the lonely streets, and a single coquette, whose only recourse was to fall in love with the romantic beauty of a city of dead men. By and by she too was absorbed into the walls, a night watchman with halberd had appeared and one could begin to imagine himself far away, in the depths of the middle ages. . .

There the sun felt somehow not at home. . . But the moon, on the other hand, seemed to belong there, harmonizing miraculously, as it did, with the narrow streets and alleys, and seeming to have kinship even with the people themselves. So it was that Kraków was a city of the moon. Nowhere else but in Kraków do I recall being interested in the moon. But there, when it was full, the moon gave me no peace. It sent me hurtling from the house. Never have I heard anywhere else of men driven mad by the moon. In Kraków I heard often of such things. . . .

— Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński (1932)

Different things attract people in different cities. In Kraków, now, you have to fall in love with the walls. Native-born Krakovians

who spend their lives roaming the world, long to return in their old age to their native city, to gaze at the Wawel, at St. Mary's Church, at Florian Street, and at the city garden called Planty. It makes no difference that their old friends are gone — the walls remain.

— Tadeusz Kraszewski (1939)

In the Wawel, Poland's Pantheon, hangs the most famous bell in all the Polish realm the

### BELL OF KING SIGMUND

*Ring out, dear Sigmund Bell, with triple voice,  
And let your booming strike men with its noise:  
To rouse them, all their thoughts to glory turn,  
And keep them in our country's service firm.  
You know the foes beyond the city gate,  
You know how frail the thread that holds our fate,  
How tiniest sounds confuse our restless ears,  
How oft from weighty things our judgement veers.*

— Mikołaj Rej (16th c.)

Tr. by Caroline Ratajczak Rogozińska

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Of all the rites and ceremonies by which events of the past are still commemorated in Poland today, none are more intimately and affectionately a part of the nation's life than the two by which Kraków keeps alive the memory of the Tatar invasion of the 13th century.

First there is the broken note of the *hejnał*. . .

Many centuries ago, in the days when Poland was linked by close dynastic ties with Hungary and when Hungarian influence was strong at the Polish court, the morning song which trumpeted daily from the spire of St. Mary's Church to waken the Polish army was known by the Hungarian term *hejnał*.

Now the *hejnał*, besides being used for daily reveille, was employed also as a warning, an alert as it were, to army and people alike when an enemy was sighted in the distance.

Came the terrible year 1240 and the even more terrible year 1241 that followed, when the Tatar horde from the east inundated the land. As the Tatars were sighted approaching, the trumpeter of St.

Mary's, faithful to his task, mounted the spire and began to sound the warning. Urgently he blew the first notes of the *hejnał* . . . then, swift as lightning, came the whizz of a Tatar arrow, — a note was broken off in mid-air, as the trumpeter fell dead on the floor of the balustrade.

And so today, the *hejnał*, played every hour from the spire of St. Mary's, ends with that symbolic broken note, reminding the Poles of the Anonymous Trumpeter who remained at his post to the end.

Then too there is the boisterous rite of *Lajkonik*, or The Pony of *Zwierzyniec*, as it is called. This too commemorates the Tatar invasion of the 13th century, but in a manner far from tragically, for the episode it brings to mind was not a defeat for the Poles, but rather a victory won by the citizens of Kraków, and especially by the members of the raftsmen's guild, over the dread horsemen from the east.

The ceremony of *Lajkonik* takes place in Kraków on the eighth day after Corpus Christi, at the beginning of summer. It is a day of universal jollification and merrymaking.

On the appointed day, when crowds have gathered expectantly in the *Planty* and the squares, there appears from the direction of what used to be the suburb of *Zwierzyniec* a curious, nondescript creature sitting astride a wooden caricature of a horse. The rider is dressed in extravagant eastern garb, with bright red coat and turban and high yellow boots, and, as befits his position as chieftain of the Tatars, he brandishes a great staff in his right hand. Accompanying him is a vast amount of discordant music.

As the Tatars advance they are confronted by the members of the Raftsmen's Guild, who carry a banner inscribed with the White Eagle of Poland. With much ado, and much horseplay for the amusement of the delighted crowds, the two sides "fight it out", with the Raftmen coming out victorious, as indeed they did in actual encounter with the Tatars in 1281, when Leszek the Black was King!

The part of the Tatar chieftain is played traditionally by the eldest member of the brotherhood of *Zwierzyniec* raftsmen. Early in the 19th century a famous Polish Bishop, Paweł Woronicz, was so enchanted by the ceremony, a portion of which takes place before the Bishop's palace, that he ordered it immortalized by a famous artist,

in a mural on the Palace wall. Unhappily the wall was later destroyed by fire and the painting lost. But each year, eight days after Corpus Christi, Lajkonik takes place again, reminding the good citizens of Kraków of the toughness of their ancestors of long ago.

In Kraków, the Academy, once attended by Copernicus and the ancestor of the present University, was said to be the Pole's

*Grandmother, of a certainty,  
Unless his very mother, she.*

— Old Rhyme



The  
Heart of Poland:  
Warsaw  
and The Vistula Plain

*"Thou Vistula, who dost swift waters bring  
To northern sea,  
Who bear'st today the panoply of King  
Triumphant,  
Raise thy head aloft, and know  
Our King doth smite the wicked foe  
As soaring eagle strikes the sparrow low!*

— Jan Gawiński (c. 1659)

## THE VISTULA QUEEN HOLDS COURT

*One day, at the rosy moment of dawn,  
The Vistula Queen jangled a silver bell  
To summon together before her crystalline throne  
The water maidens and little gods who owed her allegiance.  
A mighty roar arose in the hills and valleys  
As, one by one, the vassals assembled.*

*First of them all came that darling of joyous youth,  
That empty-headed adventurer, jaunty in white czamark,  
A thousand silvery trout clanking about his girdle,  
Capering gaily along like a Kraków lad, fleet Prądnik.*

*Then fair young Nida, like a dainty flower-maiden,  
Skipping across the meadows and up to the Vistula's shore,  
As if to a basket in which she wanted to lay  
An offering of golden rue, and lilac, and fragrant thyme.*

*Next in order the brothers Dunajec, the mountaineers,  
Each with the eye of a huntsman, a hound's alertness,  
One with its curling wavelets flashing and white,  
The other mournfully draped in a cloak of black.*

*After the two comes the merry Wisłoka, blue-eyed lass,  
Holding aloft the edge of the Vistula's gown.*

*But see! Yonder advances a man resplendent,  
The very San, a menacing knight, who smashes  
To bits with his silver-tipped lance the towering forests  
And cuts through the towering masses of rock in his way.  
On his waves ride the echoes of old Carpathian dreams.*

*Next the Tanew, concealed in the shadow of pine-woods,  
Goes roaring into the murmurous waste like an oracle.*

*Farther along in the valley, winding in tortuous fold,  
Fragrant with wild blue iris that grows in her very lakes,  
In writhings of stone complains the Kamienna.*



*And then you seem to be hearing a princess, enchanted  
Amidst an amazed and stupefied mass, or a dancer,  
Scarcely touching the ground,  
As the swift Bystrzyca taps with her bright, sharp toes.*

*After her, stately, sapphire Pilica,  
Advances, a silent and faithful priestess.*

*Next comes the Narew, so proudly that when he advances  
To greet his mistress he throws the shadowy fold of his cloak  
On the Vistula's azure gown that flows from her shoulder.  
Is it some peasant, pursuing a princess proud?*

*O, yes, and there is the Vistula's brother, the Bug,  
A gay-hearted reaper. Daily he clothes himself in a garland  
Of vessels laden with grain, and daily aboard his craft  
Harvest feasts are in progress.*

*There the Bzura rises in garments encrusted with pearls,  
Her raven tresses pinned up with pearls, and wearing also  
A pearl-studded coronet.*

*But yonder murmurs and roars the fleet Drwęca,  
Drawing the blossoming brows of her banks  
Amid vineyards and roses and grain-spikes.*

*Next the Brda, a silvery serpent, sleeping  
Among the fields in a net of groves, quietly winds its coils.*

*The Ossa, now, warmed by a blazing sun, sets on fire  
Wavelets that glitter like very flames.*

*And finally, close to the yellow shores of the northern sea,  
Hard by the Vistula's very threshold,  
Two streams stand guard, the gloomy Moltawa and ever  
light-hearted Radunia,  
Like porters, stationed to watch the amber gates of the Baltic.*

*And still they keep flowing today,  
Still bearing the keys set with glittering dew. . .*

*These water deities, bright or foreboding,  
 Coursing still to the Vistula, others too in their train,  
 And others still, so many you scarce can keep count of them all,  
 So many you'd have to compile a volume  
 To paint, in their proper colors, the whole cavalcade  
 Of vassals that carry their loyal tokens down to the Vistula Queen.*

— Jadwiga Łuszczewska,  
 known as Deotyma (mid 19 c.)  
 Tr. by Helen Sikorska

## THE SONG OF THE VISTULA

Above all the whispers and voices of the countryside rises and reigns the imperial song of the Vistula. When she casts off her ice and speaks, the whole land listens to her sonorous roar. When she bursts with mighty, unfettered speed, the whole land quivers under her silver lashing. When she comes and goes the ways that are hers, the whole land feels that where she ends, there is *our* sea.

In her roar can be heard the primeval mutterings of the ancient Beskids, and the silvery tinkle of mountain streams carrying to her their pristine waters. The deep bronze sounds of the Sigmund bell and the harp-like rustling of the linden tree of Czarnolas repeat the psalms of ages and generations. To her rushes the Dunajec in the whirling foam of its dizzy swirl; unto her hurries the San from Ruthenian fastnesses; with her merge the holy waters of the Bug to form an indissoluble and eternal union. Her course is followed by the pines of our forests and by regal oaks; by the golden wheat and the gray flax of our fertile fields. Above her the song of the river pilots floats far and wide, carrying native notes to the accompaniment of the murmuring sea. By an azure link she binds to us old Silesia; she flows past the two royal castles of our capitals; she cuts across the land of Kujawy, fragrant with bread; proceeds to Toruń, whose blackened towers still hold visions of eternity, strikes with a silver shield at Chełmno, at Grudziądz, at Kwidzyń, rousing them from the sleep of ages, until, gaining our Pomeranian lands, she opens wide her arms and before she hurls herself into the chaos of the sea, envelops in a wide and powerful embrace, from Danzig to Königsberg, this land on which she has traced a great historic road.

— Marja Konopnicka,  
 Tr. by Halina Chybowska

## TO THE VISTULA. . .

*O river, that faithfully in its wave  
The stars of Warsaw reflected,  
That every dawn, every dusk,  
Repeated a lovely verse —  
(Flowing and tremblingly said it,  
Voice broken, oft, with emotion,  
As light is refracted in water,  
Only to flow the more sweetly  
And tunefully on, for its tears)  
O stream, that already by heart  
Knew the poems fashioned of sky,  
The strophes of light cloud-snatches,  
The sagas of tempest and dawn of the Trojan plain,  
The Holy Writ of the stars,  
. . . . at last it came your turn, grey songstress,  
To burn with your capital's fire,  
To lament when you heard  
The lamentation of Warsaw, the Job of cities!  
When over your head the sky broke apart,  
You continued to flow in the purple light,  
Your pace as of yore, unaltered,  
Proudly and freely flowed,  
While the homes of the city, like torches,  
Funeral torches, reflected in you,  
Marched with your current, a crimson procession. . .*

— Julian Tuwim (1941)  
Tr. by Helen Sikorska

## MAZOVIA FAIR

*'Mid spreading fields the Vistula flows blue,  
And low-bowed huts dream on, the valley through.  
Above the stream a knotted oak springs forth  
And chattering women tend the whitening cloth.*

*A stork majestic 'round the meadow strides,  
Amid the oats a cricket, chirping, hides.  
And from the somber pines in yonder wood  
Rare evergreen perfume distills abroad.*

*A-sudden, through the hush of dawn is heard  
The lap of river craft, like vagrant bird;  
With stately roll a wheat-barge comes in sight,  
Sounds rise: a rudder's creak and banter light.*

*O fair Mazovian land, O country dear,  
Where winds more pure and streams more crystal clear  
And pines more tall and rosier cherries far  
And men more strong and skies more azure are!*

*Where else such cots as here you find with us?  
Such restful streams and woods so murmurous,  
Such mullen stalks and bluebells as are here,  
Such songs of man and lark, in field and air?*

— From Teofil Lenartowicz (1848)  
Tr. by William S. Krason

## HOW WARSAW GOT ITS NAME

As Rome took its name from Romulus and Athens was named for Athena, so also did Warsaw get its name from a creature half human, half divine, in this case the son of a Vistulan mermaid and the spirit of a man who drowned in the river.

Deserted by his mother and left on the river bank to die, the child of this ill-assorted pair was rescued by a fisherman's wife from Rybaki, a village on the hill overlooking the Vistula where War-

saw now stands. When the child was seven his hair was cut, according to custom, and he was given the name Warcisław, or Warsz.

Warsz was looked upon in the village with some mistrust, because of his curious parentage, and he never quite felt at home there. He longed to perform some great deed, some spectacular service to the community, so that the community, out of gratitude, might take him truly to its heart.

Finally his chance came. It happened one time that a certain monster which had its home in the Vistula stole and carried off to his lair the prize oxen of the Prince of Czersk, whose seat was at Jazdov not far from Rybaki. For the return of the oxen the Prince offered a ward of a piece of land on a hill above the river.

Not a soul in the village dared go after the dread water monster. Not a soul except Warsz. Trapping the creature in his fishing net, Warsz forced the thief to return the oxen and to promise never to prey on the good people of Jazdov and Rybaki again. As a reward Warsz received the fine piece of land offered by the Prince of Czersk and also the good will of the villagers.

After that Warsz never fished in the river again but made his living by farming. He built himself a hut, making sure, however, that its back was to the Vistula, so that in the evening, as he sat smoking on his doorstep, taking his ease after a day at the plough, he would not be reminded of his Vistulan origin.

And so it was that from the name of the mermaid's son Warsz, the Polish capital Warszawa got its name.

— Adapted

*"Here on the Vistula's rim, where the winds  
of Mazovia murmur,  
Childhood was passed, and youth . . .*

*Beyond my window the rolling meadows  
And poplars that tell me this surely  
Is Poland."*

— Władysław Broniewski (193-)

## WARSAW IN EARLY SPRING . . .

*A moon from the Dream of Salome  
Shone silver outside my room,  
From the Park, the Łazienki, Aleja,  
The breeze wafted linden perfume.*

*In the virginal, dewy-fresh green  
Of new leaves born of blackened old  
Boughs, spring's magic and wonder were seen,  
Its enchantment foretold. . .*

## AT NIGHT . . .

*A café deserted, dark,  
A street empty and bare,  
Only 'mid rain-drenched leaves, the spark  
Of a street-light, and mist everywhere.*

*Only, afar to be heard,  
The muted creaking of gates tight  
Closing, nothing is stirred  
Besides: alone, we two, with the night.*

*Only this hour, this one before dawn breaks pale,  
When out of thy dreams thou hast hardly begun  
To awake, do I find 'neath its azure veil  
Thy face, O Warsaw, tender and young.*

— Antoni Słonimski (1938)

Tr. by Helen Sikorska

## THE BELLS OF WARSAW

*You cannot imagine now the way the bells used to ring,  
Ancient bells in the twilight stillness,  
When the crimson tongue of the sun  
Licked the ruddy tips of the wavelets,*

*When back of the plain, on the already darkened shore,  
The forest would muse, in the language common to pine trees,  
While a serious note would go coursing above it all  
In the black-throated caw of the crows behind the Cathedral. . .*

— From Władysław Broniewski (1938)

## THE LEGEND OF THE GOLDEN GOOSE

On Ordynacka Street, in the Powiśle section of Warsaw, are the remains of an ancient castle, the castle of the powerful princes of Ostrog. In a dungeon at the base of this castle there used to be a lake, and on the lake a wonderful Golden Goose, which was in reality not a goose at all but a beautiful princess, bound by a spell of enchantment.

The spell which bound the unhappy princess could be broken only one way: someone had to be found who for three days in succession would go to the lake, carry away each day the one hundred ducats which the Golden Goose would point out to him, and spend this money that very day, all of it, on revelry and self-indulgence, being careful not to apply a single farthing of it to any worthwhile purpose.

In the days of the great Prince Constantine, a man was found who agreed to the terms. He was a soldier of the first infantry. Making his way secretly to the lake, this man found the Golden Goose and was shown where the money was hidden. He took the money eagerly and had no trouble in getting rid of it that very day on riotous living.

The next day the man returned and again had no difficulty in getting rid of his spoils on pleasure.

The third day he returned for the third installment. This time however, as he was making his way to the scene of his frivolities, he happened to run in to an old friend, who was in the last stages of starvation. Moved to compassion, he hastened to share his new riches with his friend. But just as he did this there came a deafening clap of thunder. Like a flash the earth opened and the Golden Goose, lake and all, sank into the bowels of the earth, to be seen no longer by mortal eye.

And so, deep below the surface of the earth, still imprisoned, is the Golden Goose — to this very day.

— Adapted from the legend as told by  
Ewa Zarembina (1938)

## THE PAINTED MANSIONS ON THE RYNEK

*“Edifices fair of stone  
 All the Rynek’s streets adorn.  
 Glittering with very gold,  
 (No such things in Czersk or Rawa!)  
 Warsaw’s jewels, famed of old.  
 Strange designs upon them etched,  
 Brilliant pictures o’er them sketched.”*

— Adam Jarzębski, a burgher from Czersk, who described Warsaw in a famous poem *The Highroad*, 1643

And opposite the brilliantly painted mansions of the Rynek, or Square, of Warsaw’s famous Old Town, is the celebrated winery — Fukier’s.

Centuries ago, it is said, in the heyday of the great Hanseatic League, one of the seven sons of Jacob Fugger, founder of the vast commercial empire of the Fuggers, migrated to Warsaw. As befitted his position, Fugger settled in one of the fashionable stone mansions on the Rynek.

In the cellar of his mansion Fugger, now known in Polish as Fukier, set up a wine business. So superior were the Fukier wines, especially the Polish *miód* or honey wine, and so pleasant was the atmosphere of Fukier’s, that soon the place had become the favorite rendezvous of the rich and the great not only of Warsaw but of all Poland.

Eventually Fukier’s descendants left Warsaw, to establish homes in other parts of Mazovia. But the winery remained in its original location on the Old Town Rynek. A lugger ship with the legend “Bearing Wine for Fukier’s” marks its entrance. Inside, Fukier’s is a scene from Rembrandt come to life. What events have been plotted, what decisions made, over its glorious vintages, only History itself knows. What events remain to be plotted there and what decisions taken, only the Future shall reveal.



## KILIŃSKI: SYMBOL OF THE SPIRIT OF WARSAW

As Kraków, with its tombs of kings, is the Royal City of Poland, so Warsaw is The People's City, and no figure more truly symbolizes the popular nature of Warsaw's tradition than John Kiliński.

That is why, when in 1942 the Germans carried off the statue of Kiliński to be "executed", the people of Warsaw felt that the very heart of their city had been torn out and trampled on.

That is why, also, courage returned to the unhappy folk of Warsaw when, after a few days, there appeared on the walls of the National Museum, in the courtyard where the statue had been set up for "execution", the words, scrawled in an awkward and uneven hand, but large so that all might read,

I AM HERE, O PEOPLE OF WARSAW

JAN KILIŃSKI

Who was Kiliński? He was a shoemaker. A master shoemaker, in the days when shoes were all made by hand and shoemaking was an exacting craft. He lived on the third floor of the stone dwelling at No. 5 Szeroki Dunaj, in the old section of Warsaw. Besides being a leader in his guild, Kiliński was an officer in the 20th regiment of the Polish army. He was also an immensely popular man personally, with a decided gift of leadership.

On the 24th of March, 1794, Kościuszko declared Poland in a state of insurrection. The declaration was issued in Kraków. Warsaw patriots promptly began to meet at Kiliński's apartment in order to make plans for working with Kościuszko.

Learning that the Russians planned to strike on Holy Saturday, Kiliński and his followers fixed on Holy Thursday, two days earlier, for joining battle. On that day, April 17th, at 4:30 in the morning, the alarm was sounded. The populace, led by Kiliński, took a large part in the fighting and it was due to them that many a wavering appeaser among the aristocrats was brought into line and won over to the national cause.

Kiliński was the heart and soul of the popular uprising, and in commemoration of his spirit as well as of his deeds, a monument

was erected to him in the Old Town. This was one of the half dozen or so statues in Warsaw which the people really loved. Kiliński meant something to them. So long as he stood there in stone, with his blazing eyes and his right arm raised as if to beckon the people forward, the folk of Warsaw felt themselves and their rights somehow secure. Kiliński was their savior and while he remained among them they were safe. This feeling the poet Słowacki put into verse in the lines:

*There stands in Warsaw, in the city's midst,  
A stately column: migrant cranes rest  
Often on its brow, and vagrant clouds are seen  
Upon its tip. Majestic and serene  
It soars, St. John's three noble spires behind,  
And all about a veil of mist entwined.  
Beyond, a dusky labyrinth of lanes  
And then the Rynek. A marvel now its panes,  
Stone-framed, behold: Kiliński's eyes  
Flash green, swift darts arise  
From out of them, as the street-lamp's flare  
Reveals a spectral Savior standing there.*

(Tr. by Janet Narolska)

The stately column to which the poet refers in the above is the imposing monument of King Sigmund. Legend has it that so long as the sword shall remain in King Sigmund's hand, Warsaw and Poland are secure. When word came in the early years of the Second World War that the Germans were bent on destroying all important Polish statues, the poet Wierzyński wrote, with the Sigmund Column in mind:

*If you fall, if they shatter you too,  
On whose summit Słowacki beheld the migrating cranes. . .*

*. . . There still shall remain the eyes,  
Green still in the street-lamp's flicker,  
Of Jan Kiliński. . .*

## SOWIŃSKI AT WOLA

In the western part of the city of Warsaw, on a slight elevation, lies the suburb of Wola. Here, on the 6th of September, 1831, the Russians, by fierce assault, took the famous Wola Redoubt, the last remaining outpost of which was defended by General Sowiński. The church in which the doughty old General made his final stand has since been looked upon as heroic, even hallowed, ground.

*In a little old church on Wola height  
Stood General Sowiński,  
An old man with a wooden leg,  
Beating off the enemy's attack with his sword.  
All around him lay prostrate the leaders  
Of battalions, soldiers,  
And shattered cannons and rifles:  
All was lost!*

*But the general refused to surrender.  
Old though he was, he stood firm,  
Supporting himself against the altar,  
Leaning on God's own tablecloth,  
Resting his elbow on the place  
Where the missals are commonly rested,  
On the left side of the altar,  
When the priest reads the gospel.*

*Adjutants came rushing in, one after another,  
Adjutants of Paszkiewicz,  
Begging him: "General,  
Surrender, do not perish in vain."  
One after another they fell on their knees  
Before him, beseeching him, as if he were  
Their father: "Surrender your sword, General,  
The Marshal himself will come for it."*

*"I will not surrender, gentlemen,"  
Answered the old man calmly.  
"Neither to you, nor to the Marshal  
Will I give up this sword.*

*Not even if the Tsar himself came for it  
 Would I surrender this sword,  
 But will defend myself with it,  
 So long as a beat remains in my heart.  
 Even though not another Pole is left in the world,  
 I must still die . . . on the ramparts,  
 For my country's sake, and for the souls of the  
 Ancestors, defending myself until death with  
 My sword, against the foes of my country.*

*That the city may remember,  
 And that Polish youth,  
 Lying now in their cradles,  
 Listening to the crash of bombs,  
 That these children, when they are grown,  
 May remember that this day,  
 There died on the very ramparts,  
 An old general with a wooden leg.*

*There was a time when, as I walked  
 About the streets, young folk would smile  
 At my wooden leg and sometimes shy away from it.  
 Let them look at me now and see  
 If that leg does not serve me well,  
 If 'twill not lead me to God, directly,  
 And quickly.*

*My adjutants, the young squirts,  
 Had sound legs to go about on  
 And these served them well  
 In time of need.  
 But I, with my game leg,  
 Can only lean on the altar,  
 Unable, as they, to go forth to meet  
 Death, but must wait for it stoically here.*

*Do not bow your heads before me,  
 I am no saint, but a simple Pole,  
 Telling you how you must write my Life;  
 No martyr, but one who defends himself  
 To the end, and kills whom he may,*

*Giving freely of his blood,  
But his sword — never!"*

*Thus spake General Sowiński,  
An old man with a wooden leg,  
Who fought with his sword  
Like a veteran.*

— Julius Słowacki (after 1831),  
Tr. by Laura Strobel

### MEMORIES OF MEADOWS BACK HOME

*A sharp stalk of ryegrass, steeped in the hues of the rainbow,  
A lush thistle bloom, languishing deep in the grain —*

*A single wild rose, hard by a hedge, in a dusty conglomeration  
Of nettles and raspberries, spider-web draped.*

*A sprig of chicory, spattered with golden blossoms,  
As if a bluejay's egg, or a crow's, had been broken above it.*

*Wild clove pink, the star of a little wound,  
A tiny bell, blue as a neon light —*

*Charms, alas, so dearly paid for today,  
So deceptively modest and fragile, so loved to despair.*

— Marja Pawlikowska (1942)  
Tr. by Sigmund Słuska

## WARSAW

*When I reflect on what "Ojczyzna"\* means to me,  
I think of the Alejas, Zjazd, Powiśle. . .*

*For you the word may mean some hamlet, or some stream,  
For me 'tis Mokotowska, Bracka, Krucza. . .*

*Neither woodland grove nor grainfield,  
Only Krzywe Koło, Wspólna, Hoża. . .*

*And when longing grips my heart,  
'Tis Chmielna I remember, Złota fills my dream. . .*

*If I must die, let it be, dear God,  
For all the burned out homes of Hoża. . .*

*If I die, O let them murder me  
For Nowy Świat, struck level with the ground,*

*For Świętokrzyska, turned to useless rubble,  
And for Dobra, Twarda, and Drewniana.*

*Let me die: but first vouchsafe me once, to see  
A summer moon, sailing again above Mariensztat. . .*

— OF, an anonymous, "underground"  
poet of Warsaw, 1940,  
Tr. by Sigmund Słuska

\* Fatherland

## POLISH LANDSCAPE: 1933

*How hard our land's peculiar charm to tell:  
Its amber fields, its rosy hawthorn, and the breeze  
That sings its way through starlit pines: the spell  
Of crosses by the wayside, rowan shrubs, primeval trees.*

*How hard. . . for always when I start to paint  
Its sky or sketch its scene my poem goes askew,  
The rhythm becomes confused, the tone a plaint,  
And what I write some strange, distorted view.*

*The dewy lilies and the lovers' grove change  
Into battlefields in Europe's heart,  
Toward yonder artist's hill great armies range  
And out of fruitful meadows — trenches start.*

*That little dwór beyond the Warsaw line —  
Remember in my early lyrics how it shone? —  
Explodes in flames and, crumbling, leaves no sign  
Save dust to show it was a home.*

*That silver stream of which we said, "How  
Like the silver pen that Goethe's hand  
Gave to Mickiewicz once in Weimar!", now  
Becomes a line of last defense, of final stand.*

*And so my dream-born view is hid by cold  
Reality: a grim design replacing my serene,  
A blood-stained sun swift blotting out the gold,  
A poisoned breath corrupting every scene.*

*The fight and die, if death alone be life immortal's toll. )  
Still stands, however, 'twixt my fading view  
And that dread canvas which the fates unroll  
For us this magic: courage — to renew*

— Stanisław Baliński (1933)  
Tr. by Albina Kruszevska

## THE CRANBERRY TREE

*A cranberry tree with leaf broad and green  
Once grew in a grove by a sky-blue stream.*

*In May, when the soft spring rains had begun,  
She bathed in their waters beneath the sun.*

*Rosy coral she wore, when it came July,  
Thick woven in garlands to charm the eye,*

*And she decked herself out like a country lass,  
Gazing long in the streamlet as in a glass.*

*Each day, as the wind combed her hair anew,  
She would sprinkle her eyelids with drops of dew.*

*Now close to the spring where the cranberry grew,  
A lad named Jaś on a willow-pipe blew:*

*Playing mournful tunes till the hour was late,  
In the grove by the stream every night he'd wait.*

*He would sing to himself in a voice forlorn,  
And his words to the tree by the dew were borne.*

*The cranberry's leaves were a glossy green,  
And she waited, like country maid, near the stream.*

*But autumn came, and the winds blew strong,  
And they buried the lad she'd awaited so long.*

*'Neath a small black cross they laid Jaś away,  
Whom the cranberry loved, though she could not say.*

*So she cast off her leaves and her red coral flung,  
Deep in the stream where her lover had sung.*

— Teofil Lenartowicz (1845)  
Tr. by George Szymański



## WARSAW — CITY OF THE SIREN. . .

*In May, yon native town of mine, in realm enchanted,  
Takes your very breath away with clouds of yellow currant bloom. . .*

— Jan Brzechwa (1935)

*There lilacs run riot in springtime, their shade  
Over garden and square a mantle of beauty.  
There nightingales spill from young boughs a cascade  
Of sweet song from the poplar trees of Łazienki.*

— Antoni Bogusławski (1941)\*

*Mournfully over all is suspended the night,  
A lonely maiden who weaves, with a sigh,  
Kisses of counterfeit gold; or bright,  
Gold-headed stars pins on the mist-hung sky.  
As onto a shroud. . .*

— Gustaw Daniłowski (c. 1902)\*\*

## . . . AND THE SWORD . . .

*Thou sorrowing widow of the Polish folk!*

— Julius Słowacki (1838)

*Amid the relics of glory marking the Polish plain,  
The heart of Poland is Warsaw, her every alley and lane.*

— Stanisław Baliński (1941)

*And so we say farewell, thou land beloved and best!  
Relentless might doth drive us from thy breast.  
We kiss with trembling lips each hallowed grave  
Of fallen kin — the blessed and the brave.  
Be with us yet, whatever fate betide,  
And let thy whispered prayer be still our guide.*

— Adam Jerzy Czartoryski (1831)\*\*\*

\* Tr. by Helen Sikorska

\*\* Tr. by Sigmund Stuszk

\*\*\* Tr. by Caroline Ratajczak Rogozińska

## POPPIES WILL GROW AGAIN

*These battlefields, these fields of strife,  
These fields of future legend,  
Poppies, bursting forth in bloom, will cover  
rankly. . .*

*Thou Nature, thou, before ourselves,  
Wert first, with pitying heart, to honor,  
With the fire of radiant blooms,  
The Unknown Soldier's memory.*

— Marja Pawlikowska (1942)  
Tr. by Irene Pyszkowska

## A COUNTRYSIDE SERENE

*There still are lanes among us unaware of doom,  
And paths not torn by bomb-thrust  
Still meander where wild roses bloom.*

*Just as of yore, in days of quiet bliss,  
Run riot still at dawn,  
'Mid shimmering dews, bright morning-glory disks.*

*And birches, steeped in melancholy yet,  
(How little warlike, and how old, the mood!)  
Their leafy shade from hostile clay beget.*

*In tresses plaited thick with grain and sun  
The highway opens out.  
A chestnut tree, like welcoming servants, waits  
With candles lighted — futile flames, but festive —  
To announce My Lady Fair's return, the coming home  
of Joy.*

— Marja Pawlikowska (1942)  
Tr. by Helen Sikorska

The  
Tatras

*Over thy meadows and fields  
Thy valleys deserted,  
Flow in the hot white  
Stillness of noon, old songs.*

— M. Orkan



## HOW THE MOUNTAINS CALLED THE TATRAS CAME TO BE. . .

Centuries ago, in the reign of King Bolesław the Modest, there fell upon Poland like a plague the dread Tatar Horde from the east.

The King, frightened half to death as the Horde swept on, killing and destroying every living thing in its path, fled to Hungary. The Queen, however, Queen Kinga, who was dearly beloved by the simple people of Poland because of her kindness to them, stood her ground.

On the border where the Hungarian realm touches the Polish Queen Kinga waited, while the people, in terror waited with her.

The beat of the Tatar horses could be heard not far off.

"Save us, O Queen!" cried the people, "save us, lest the whole nation perish."

The Queen looked around. Seeing the Horde approaching and not knowing anything else to do, she quickly threw down in the highway before her a thick pilgrim's staff which she carried.

Instantly an enormous forest of pines and beeches and firs sprang up on the spot. The Tatars were blocked. For days they were held back, trying to find their way through the wooded maze.

But finally they found their way out and again the beat of their horses' hoofs could be heard approaching. Again the people cried to the Queen to save them.

This time a light breeze was blowing and just as the people spoke it plucked from the neck of the Queen a silvery white scarf that she happened to be wearing, depositing it in the road along which the Tatars were advancing. At once a swift, foaming river appeared, leaving the Tatars surprised and confounded on its far, opposite bank.

But this did not stop the terrible Horde. Soon they had flung a bridge across the river and once again were hard on the heels of the Queen and her frightened subjects.

"Save us, O Queen!" they cried again.

Then the Queen, in desperation, took the only thing she had left, which was her crown, and flung it, with all the force she could muster, behind her. Miraculously, on the spot where it fell there

sprang up, towering it seemed to the very heavens, a range of gigantic mountains, like a wall, blocking the Tatars' advance.

And that is how it is that the threefold boundary between the Polish realm and the Hungarian came to be — the boundary that consists of the forest, the silvery River Dunajec, and finally the granite peaks of the Tatras. That is why, also, the mountains were called Tatra, from the enemy whose murderous progress they were created to block.

— Adapted

### CLOUDBURST

*On Tatra heights, on Tatra heights  
On every livid crest,  
The swirling wind has kingly rights,  
And gives the clouds no rest.*

*A mist-cloak over all he draws,  
And squeezes from them dew,  
As torrents from his watery jaws,  
Each deep ravine flow through.*

*Now hides each slope and pine-wood bleak  
A curtain black of rain,  
In rushing tears each granite peak  
Dissolves to meet the plain.*

*There's naught to see, for all around,  
Horizon, crag and dale  
Are cloaked in darkness, drowned  
In mist, behind a rain-streaked veil.*

*No change occurs the hours to fill,  
Though days and nights pass by,  
The roaring flood keeps mounting still  
To meet the leaden sky.*

*The storm new strength in raining spends,  
The angry waters spread,  
On Tatra heights, in Tatra glens,  
Are gloom and haunting dread.*

— Adam Asnyk (1879)

Tr. by Emily Orzechowska

## THE PINE TREE

*On golden sands you grow,*

*O pine!*

*Yet only rusty mosses thrive*

*Your heights below,*

*O pine!*

*You stand as in some graveyard dream,*

*Deserted one!*

*And though a golden light surround you,*

*Mournful still, and dark, you seem,*

*Deserted one!*

*A height beyond the azure vault you seek,*

*Proud one!*

*And yet no mass of blossoms*

*Glitters at your feet,*

*Proud one!*

*To earth no shade do you bequeath,*

*O pine!*

*And only rusty mosses thrive,*

*Your dusky arms beneath,*

*O pine!*

— Bronisława Ostrowska (c. 1905)

Tr. by Helen Sikorska

## EYE OF THE SEA

The beautiful lake of Morskie Oko — Eye of the Sea — in the High Tatras is believed by the peasants of the region to be a tidal lake. They think its waters are connected directly, though they can not explain by what route, with the waters of the distant Ocean, so that the storm which ploughs up waves on the ocean raises corresponding waves on Morskie Oko, even though no storm is raging at the moment in the mountains, and though the sun may be shining there.

The people have a belief too that the waters of Morskie Oko possess a magic power, and that they can confer on one who bathes in them the gift of divine vision.

Once upon a time there was a youth who decided to test the magic properties of the lake. He was determined to do this even though an old man of the village cautioned him that in order to receive the magic power which the lake could confer he must first be cleansed of all his sins and must also scrupulously avoid looking into the face of the sun, once he had come out of the water.

The boy was disdainful of the old man's council and boldly stripped off his clothes, plunging unclesed of his sins into the depths of the lake. After swimming about for a while he emerged and, lying on the bank, gazed boldly straight into the face of the sun. That sun was the last thing the unhappy lad ever saw: for the heavenly powers he had deigned to defy — struck him blind.

— Adapted

## TWO LONGINGS

*I have here almost everything:  
A place to live in, comfortable and clean,  
A feather-bed, a pillow, and the knowledge  
Sure of welcome.  
Yet, in spite of all, I yearn for comfort  
Such as only sleep can give on common straw,  
Or even, lacking straw, upon the very ground  
Beneath a Polish thatch.*

*No beggar's role is mine: I earn  
My daily bread, as much as I have need  
Of: white and finely flavored. Yet I feel  
Continually (and strangely) some mysterious  
Sense of lacking bread: more nourishing  
Would be the very blackest of black breads,  
The black of Polish earth, wrested  
By arduous labor of my own right hand  
From my own soil.*

— Tadeusz Pawlikowski  
Tr. by Wanda Jakubowska



*In the eleventh century, when Bolesław Śmiały was King of Poland, a great expedition was made against the Russian capital of Kiev. The task of taking the "golden city on the Dnieper" proved a much greater one than the King had anticipated and the siege dragged out for years.*

*At home, meanwhile, the wives of King Bolesław's knights were eaten up with loneliness and some, in despair of ever seeing their lords again, turned to new lovers.*

*Many stories have come down to us of these lovelorn wives. Some of the stories are amusing, some tragic. Perhaps the most charming of all is the story connected with beautiful Smreczyń Pond in the High Tatras.*

## THE LEGEND OF SMRECZYŃSKI STAW

In one of the fairest and loneliest corners of the Tatras, near the foot of Mt. Bystra and not far from the entrancing valley of Kościelisko, stood, in the days of King Bolesław, the castle of Gromowid.

Half hidden from sight by steep gray crags and thick groves of fir, the castle clung like a mountain goat to the rough mountain side. Its top soared upward to the heights where only the mountain goat himself may climb, or arrows whistle, or winds and clouds ever march, the thunderbolt frolic and flash. At the foot of the castle peak slumbered thickets of pine. A valley of the freshest green formed an aisle through the mountains, and the glistening Black Dunajec sparkled along.

Not a sound was heard in the valley or on the peaks save the cries of the shepherds, the occasional whistle of a huntsman, or the low murmur of the herds. No sound save the marmot's whistle, the roar of a bear, or the chatter of night birds.

Now it happened that in the valley at the foot of Gromowid's castle there dwelt a most ravishing maiden named Oda. Loveliest of all the mountain maids in this part of the Tatras, Oda was a pagan. But when Gromowid made her his wife, as he did after proper wooing, Oda became a Christian. As the story has it, "The day of her wedding was the day also of her conversion."

Gromowid and his bride were blissfully happy in their lofty castle, but their happiness was short-lived, for Gromowid was one of the Polish knights who answered the call of King Bolesław to accompany him against Kiev.

At first Oda buried her grief in work, for there was much to attend to in the castle and its domain. But soon the burden of loneliness became unbearable. According to the legend, Oda's grief was not that of the ordinary woman, passively accustomed to endure, but the grief of a soul half savage, of a being aggressive and strong who experiences every emotion, be it pleasant or painful, to the most intense degree, who drains every cup to the dregs.

As the years of Gromowid's absence multiplied, Oda's grief increased until it became insupportable, and it was at this point that a comforter appeared in the person of a sorcerer. The sorcerer lived in a cave and was given to pagan practices. Gradually he lured Oda into his power.

The time came at last when Kiev was taken and Gromowid was free to return home. All the way back he could think of nothing but the fair face of his lovely bride and her warm embrace.

Now it happened that the moment of Gromowid's arrival in his home was the very moment of Oda's final desperate yielding to the pagan sorcerer.

"Say that you accept my love, dear Oda," he was pleading, just outside his cave. "Take this garland from my hand as a token that you accept myself, and my gods. . ."

But the words of the sorcerer were broken off by an arrow that found its way directly to his throat!

"Accursed be thy pagan soul!" Gromowid cried — for it was he who had shot the arrow — and lunged toward the sorcerer.

Oda, meanwhile, disappeared in the green depths of the forest.

"You and your God have triumphed!" whispered the sorcerer, when it became clear that Gromowid had the better of him. "My gods are the feebler, but faithful to them I shall die. Look after your wife. She is innocent. I only am guilty. Oda was weak, but not guilty. I swear it before the gods."

At these words Gromowid lost some of the madness that had overcome him at sight of his wife in the sorcerer's power. He set out through the forest in search of poor Oda.

All night Gromowid searched, and finally, just at dawn, his eye caught the first trace of hope, in a streak of white near an almost impenetrable thicket.

The unhappy knight crept stealthily toward the place. It was Oda indeed. With a cry of joy Gromowid fell on his knees before her,

begging her to love him again as of old.

But Oda only shuddered. Convulsions of terror and remorse shook her frame, and though Gromowid tried to kiss her lips with the old warmth and passion she only wept and turned away.

"It is the punishment of God," she whispered, smiling pitifully.

Gromowid never recovered from the shock of Oda's death. He buried her right there in the forest and over the spot built a chapel. Here he lived himself until his own death, which was not long delayed. The castle, meanwhile, in which Gromowid and Oda had been so happy, crumbled to ruin, alone and untended.

After Gromowid's death the chapel gradually sank into the earth, according to the folk of the neighborhood, and in its place appeared the lake known today as Smreczyński Staw. Strange stories are told about this lake.

On certain evenings of each year, for example, there is said to rise from Smreczyński Staw, a floating whitish cloud. This cloud makes its way slowly to the high crags of nearby Smytnia and after clinging there for a moment loosens itself, to wander, as if in search of an abode, through the dark and lonely valley. Eventually it returns whence it came, to be lost in Smreczyń Pond.

The mist-cloud, folk say, is the soul of Oda, wandering to this day, homeless and lost, not knowing yet whether it has expiated its sin in full or not.

What is left of Gromowid's castle serves today as a warehouse, while the sorcerer's cave before which the final act of the tragedy took place has vanished, leaving no trace but a great stone owl that, motionless through the ages, stares down at the lovely valley which was the scene of impious deeds, performed by him as a human being.

— Adapted from *Oda*,  
by Seweryn Goszczyński (1842)

## HAYCOCKS

*Haycocks besprinkle the meadows,  
The summits afar glimmer red.  
The sun breaks suddenly forth,  
A torrent of jewels to spread.*

*Down under the rocky cliff  
The timeless Dunajec flows,  
Past the eye of the sentinel firs  
The murmurous river goes.*

*Just at noon, as the scorching sun  
Flings widest its golden rays,  
Hard by the river's edge  
A figure of Longing strays.*

*Having shed the imprisoning hut,  
She brushes her weary eyes,  
And breathing the fragrant air,  
Ponders the glowing skies.*

*Then wrenches herself away,  
To be lost in the distant blue,  
Or with eyes wide open to dream  
And the whispering wavelets pursue.*

*But the folds of her wind-blown gown,  
Yearning seizes with shuddering hand,  
Sighing: how bitter to part  
With the very soul of the land.*

— Jan Kasprowicz (1911)  
Tr. by Sigmund Słuska

## JANOSIK, THE ROBIN HOOD OF THE TATRAS

Janosik, according to the story as told by the poet Tetmajer, was the son of poor, landless peasants who lived in a village of the High Tatras. His father was a serf, and he earned the meagre living he was able to provide by the hardest and most degrading kind of labor.

When Janosik was old enough to go to school, his father, seeing the boy was clever, got permission to send him away to Kezmarok to study for the priesthood. The magnate for whom the father worked did not like to let the boy go, and soon regretted his leniency in yielding to the father's importunings.

"Order the boy home," he commanded. But the father refused and willingly paid the penalty of his stubbornness: lashings on his bare back by the master's cruel steward.

When Janosik was twelve years old, word came to him that his mother was ill. Hurriedly leaving school, he set out for home, to reach his mother's side only as she was dying.

Soon after the death of his mother, Janosik's father also died, of beatings received from the steward because he refused to leave the bedside of his dying wife.

Now Janosik was an orphan and he had to decide what to do with his life. After much thought he decided not to return to the school at Kezmarok but to flee to the mounains. There, in the high crags of the Tatras, he gathered about him a band of twelve bold spirits like himself and together with them ranged the forests, hunting and fishing and falling upon the rich caravans of the merchant-magnates as they crossed the mountains.

"Here, O masters, you pay for the miseries of the poor!" Janosik would cry as his band swooped down from the rocks on the well-filled wagons. What they took from the rich they would carry to their hideaway in the hills and there divide for distribution among the poor peasants of the valley.

Tall tales are told of Janosik's exploits: how he measured vast lengths of cloth by stretching them between the great towering beech trees; how he would let himself into the most closely guarded castle by flinging a rope with a stone tied to one end through a window and then climbing up on the rope; how he cut himself a sabre of

maple and then hid it between two rocks under the mountain, telling it to wait there until he returned from the valley ready to wreak vengeance for the miseries of the poor.

Finally Janosik was caught, and eventually hanged on a Magyar gallows, in the year 1713.

But the peasants whom he had befriended were never willing to believe their hero was dead. They believed he was only asleep. Jan Kasprovicz tells how the folk feel about him, in a fragment of his dramatic poem *Napierski's Revolt*:

“Hanusia

*They say he will rise*

*From his grave when no more to be borne are  
The woes of the poor. . .*

Salka

*Some say that,*

*And others declare he never descended, Janosik,  
Below to the depths, but only pretended to give  
Himself up when the hussars of Orava  
Seized him, that only an image was hanged,  
While he, living still, is but sleeping, aloft  
On a far, snowy peak — and smiling so broad  
At his foes that the mountain tops  
Fly at the smile into torrents, that columns  
Of water mount up from the ponds  
To the sky and then fall with a crash  
To their beds; that forests of pine are torn up  
By their roots, while the sheep on the hillsides  
Crowd thickly together from fright till they look  
Like a single gray cluster of wool.  
When the sheep try to hide in the shelters  
The smile has laid low the shelters themselves  
Like a pile of dry branches or milky down.  
I've heard that thick clouds, black as pitch,  
Poured over the sky, and the smile rubbed  
These together, striking sparks as from giant flint.  
Thunder roared and the lightning began to strike  
On the giant crags, tearing the rocks to tatters.*

*I've heard — in these Tatras of yours are two  
 Terrible peaks known as Satan and Bastion,  
 Peaks with the teeth of the pitchforks of Hell,  
 But the roar of Janosik, even the power of these  
 Dared to defy. . ."* (1899)

## WISŁA\*

*Fierce Winter rejoiced as he gazed at the sight  
 Of Sarmatian Wisła's deplorable plight,  
 As, caught in the grip of his cruel vise,  
 The grain-bearing waters fast stiffened to ice.  
 "Behold," Winter cried, "see your fleet-flowing stream  
 How foolish it looks, how ludicrous seem  
 Its despairing attempts to get loose!  
 Men trample your forehead and bruise  
 Your back, Kalmucks ride over your plain.  
 And what do you do? Neither growl nor complain,  
 For Winter has mastered you now!"  
 Ancient Wisła replied, from her Tatra seat,  
 Addressing the foeman from her retreat;  
 "'Tis true," she said, "you have won today  
 And made me a joke none can well gainsay.  
 But brief is the rule that has fettered me,  
 For, under the ice, still daring and free,  
 The current flows on, defying your might  
 And warning you well, as it speeds its flight.  
 Let the sun but shine out,  
 Quick the ice it will flout,  
 E'en the snow drifted high  
 In the hills as the sky  
 All your might and your main  
 Won't avail to restrain,  
 Though Boreas rage, though he ravish each wave,  
 The swift-flowing course of returning Spring,  
 That freedom once more to old Wisła will bring."*

— Franciszek Morawski (1841)  
 Tr. by Sigmund Słuszką

\* The Polish name for the River Vistula

Poles who remained on the soil of their homeland during the Second World War found little of beauty in their lives beyond that provided by Nature herself in the changing aspects of the Polish landscape. Here is the way a 'teen-age girl of the Underground movement was affected by the landscape's beauty in winter. . .

### NOW SMILES AT ME

*Now smiles at me the boundless plain,  
Draped white in snowy net,  
As pain and tears depart, to let  
White ecstasy remain.*

*Each icicle gives back a smile,  
Each diamond flake a flash.  
The bushes even as you pass,  
Smile back from garden aisle.*

*The azure vault of heaven too,  
The house-roof deep in snow,  
And every ancient, plundering crow,  
Sends forth a smile at you.*

*Smiles, too, across each fencepost run,  
The bench joins in the glee,  
The frozen pond mocks fearfully:  
Beware, you fickle one!*

*From every clod has laughter leapt,  
From very earth, all lustrous white,  
And hearts with ecstasy alight,  
Forget they lately wept.*

— Anon, 1943

Tr. by William S. Krason



## Sandomierz

*"Enchanting realm! thou land of all  
in Poland  
Widest known to fame!"*

— Wespazjan Kochowski (1674)



## POLAND'S RICH ENDOWMENT

*When man can get his daily bread  
Within his native land, instead  
Of going forth the seas to roam,  
He stays at home.*

*Since Poland on a living garden rests,  
In God's own lap, the breasts  
Of Poles yearn not for oceans now,  
But for the plow.*

*Here Ceres doth renew her old domain,  
Abandoning fair Sicily's far plain,  
Here, towerlike, unnumbered stacks of rye  
Delight the eye.*

*Here bursting barns in neatly garnered fields  
And model husbandry behold, and quiet yields,  
Youth happy to possess earth's highest good:  
Abundant food.*

*Horned cattle, well-fed oxen, stock  
Of every kind, fat heifers and a flock  
Of shaggy sheep, the eye swift notes,  
And sluggard goats.*

*From these derive the farmer's every tool,  
The garb of those who serve and those who rule;  
Fresh meat, and butter, milk and cheese  
Derive from these.*

*Here geese go screaming noisily about,  
Trying to put the greedy ducks to rout,  
While fattened cockerels on each roost attest  
A dwelling blest.*

*But also, to the rich and varied board  
The leaky dovecote adds its tasty hoard,  
While strips of bacon none can ever match  
Hang 'neath the thatch.*

*The bounty of a richly wooded land  
To Poles our Lord assigned with lavish hand,  
Assuring those who care upon it pour,  
Wealth evermore.*

*The sporting doe leaps lightly o'er the ground,  
The trees are filled with birdling's merry sound,  
While bees unto the hive with zealous care  
Their plunder bear.*

*With fish is filled each crystal stream and lake,  
Each tiniest pond, each rivulet and brake,  
For everything with energy is rife,  
To bring forth life.*

— Sebastian Klonowicz (c. 1595)  
Tr. by Anne Marek

## A POET'S LAND: SANDOMIERZ

in the lyrics of the poet Wespazjan Kochowski

*For me the pleasant woodlands of the Holy Cross,  
The summits crowned with everlasting green!*

— Lyric I

*From every hilltop a ravishing vista is seen!  
Yonder behold the sinuous tide of the stream  
Dobruchna, winding in and out of the Sarny realm!*

— Lyric I

His birthplace, the farmstead of Gaj. . .

*There on the hill, in a small wooden dwór,  
I romped as a child,  
Free as the frolicsome birds, or the air itself.*

*If you wished to cool off, or stroll,  
Or talk with someone,  
There was always the grove, in the heart  
Of the nearby pines,  
Where the tree-shadowed slopes and precipitous streams  
Made the water icy  
That filled the ponds of the valley below  
Till they overflowed.  
Or, if you wished, you could visit the place  
Renowned for its wondrous wood,  
Not far from Gaj, on the Hill of the Holy Cross,  
And renew old vows,  
Or converse, or engage in jest,  
Or ask good advice,  
Or join with the folk of the place  
In some common sport.  
Yonder the chimneys of one's own kin,  
And villages bound  
By ties of blood, while just a little apart  
One's own Italian garden.*

— Lyric III

THE ARIAN TOWER  
AT WOJCIECHÓW

A CHRISTIAN UTOPIA

IN THE HEART OF

SANDOMIERZ. . .

*"The tower looked from a distance like a gigantic windmill that had lost its wings."*

—Żeromski

Utopias, Brook Farms, New Harmonys and other forms of model community have never flourished in Poland on anywhere near the scale they have in other countries of the west. In fact it is hard to find traces of such communities, search though you may throughout the whole Polish realm. But one such venture there was, and that is immortally linked with the so-called "Arian Tower" at Wojciechów.

"A strange phenomenon indeed to behold in the land of Samuel Zborowski and the Devil of Łańcut," says Żeromski. Yes, it was a strange phenomenon in that land commonly thought of as wild because of those famous outlaws, for the very essence of Wojciechów's "model community" was self-discipline and self-denial.

At Wojciechów, in the 16th century, people of all classes who embraced the Arian — we should call it today Unitarian — faith, gathered together and undertook to live in a state of "pure communism", modelling their personal and collective existence on that of the early Christians. Nobles and peasants, burghers and lords met together as brothers. All sat down together at the modest evening meal about the same stone or wooden tables. All tried to be Christian brothers together, to practice the precepts of Christ, that it is wrong for one man to take precedence over another wrong to bear arms, to

swear oaths and the like.

The novel community was short-lived, for it was severely persecuted by orthodox Christians, and today all that remains of it is this curious tower.

### THE SILVER-RIBBONED SAN

*Yonder I can see two Russian churches, golden  
Tinged and clad in drapery of cranberries,  
Their rosy cupolas a lustrous light exuding,  
As they glow like very moons at full above  
the plain.*

*Farther off the silver-ribboned San a garland  
weaves,*

*A gravemound rises, like the hill of Wanda  
Hard by Kraków town, . . . beyond, a desert waste,  
The dwelling place of naught that lives save  
only eagles.*

— Julius Słowacki

## SALVE REGINA, ORA PRO NOBIS. . .

On dark, starless nights, especially in the depths of winter, there is said to stream forth from the high windows of St. James Church in Sandomierz a brilliant, unearthly light, and the sound of many voices singing a chorus of triumph is heard.

To the pious folk of Sandomierz the phenomenon has but one meaning: it is a reenactment of what happened in the Church of St. James more than six centuries ago when. . .

On a day in Lent, in the month of February, 1259, the Tatars and their Ruthenian accomplices burned to death the citizens of Sandomierz who, fleeing from their inflammable, straw-thatched cottages, took refuge in St. Mary's Church. Then they murdered those who had crowded into the city stockade, massacring these with the sword or pushing them alive into the icy river to die. Finally the horde proceeded on its bloody way to the Church of St. James.

The Dominican friars, who occupied the cloister adjoining the church, had arisen at dawn that day as usual and had gone about the daily routine of work and praise and prayer. At length came the moment when the martyrology was to be recited. The reader opened the book as usual, only to find written on the white page in words of blood,

*"Today in Sandomierz, Sadok will be ploughed up, and all forty-nine of you Dominican friars will be murdered in cold blood by the Tatars."*

The friars abandoned the reading of the martyrology and prepared themselves for death. With the first rays of sunlight the Tatars were heard approaching. Swiftly they fell upon the cloister. Soon not a single Dominican was left alive. But from the dead throats of the monks could still be heard the echo of the words they were singing as they breathed their last, "Salve regina, ora pro nobis."

As for the rest of the prophecy, that too came true, for a bull, fleeing from the fury of the Tatars, made for the great mound of Sandomir. He was stricken down, but as he gasped his last breath, he scratched in the earth the same words the Dominicans had sung, "Salve regina. . ." And from that day to this, the mound of Sandomir has been called, — Salve regina!

— Adapted from Zofja Kossak



*Beyond Rozwadów, Łancut and Leżajsk go  
Flying clouds like graceful swans:  
Across the blue their heavenly flotilla  
Rides, like happiness that nevermore shall be.*

— Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (1937)

Tr. by Albina Kruszevska

In no part of Poland does one feel more strongly than in Sandomierz an all-pervasive "sense of tears". Here great deeds seem once to have taken place — but to take place no longer.

"A peaceful and slumbrous domain", the poet Baliński calls the Sandomerian upland, rich "beyond all measure in torrents of golden grain". But peace and a tranquil existence were not always the mark of Sandomierz, for once it was the humming axis of the Polish state. It was the home, too, of the country's most famous rebels, particularly of the celebrated "Devil of Łancut", Stanisław Stadnicki.

"Like some great lion couchant, jealously mounting guard over his domain, Łancut spreads its massive length over the richly timbered plain." Here lived Stadnicki, and it was from here he engaged in the long feud with Łukasz Opaliński that won him his title of Devil. The feud started as a simple argument over a hunting dog and ended in a full scale civil war, with "The Devil" bringing in hired troops from Hungary and Wallachia and leading them in armed foray against Opaliński's estate of Leżajsk.

Now Stadnicki and his lawless escapades are but a memory, as are also the other figures connected with Łancut: Casimir the Great who founded it, Elizabeth Pilecka who left it to become the bride of King Władysław Jagiełło and the Queen of Poland; the warrior Stefan Czarniecki who, as a result vows taken here in the presence of the King, turned the tide of Polish history in the grim days of the Deluge, driving the Swedes root and branch out of the country they had so nearly succeeded in conquering.

Vigorous personalities were bred in Sandomierz: not only great rebels like Stadnicki but fine poets, like Kochanowski of Czarnolas, and wise politicians like Castellan Nicholas Ligęza, renowned for his liberal treatment of the peasants on his domain and

for his outspoken defense, at the Warsaw Diet, of the rights of Poland's towns and cities.

But today the Sandomerian landscape seems to cry,

*"You too they shall forget, as now  
The town Sandomierz is forgotten."*

— Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz

### THE HEIGHTS OF LUBLIN

*That land of golden pines and pears trees white,  
Of buttermilk and loaves of fragrant bread,  
Where lilacs sip the dew at dawning's light,  
My heart, long since, back to herself has led.*

*Let once the ice floe start in Tanew stream,  
Or hazel-blooms bedeck the deer's retreat,  
Then songs of piping shepherds fill my dream  
And wintry branches snap beneath my feet.*

*In Lublin churchyard, dense with ancient trees,  
How sweet beside my buried sires to rest!  
The while a jasmine sprig beguiles the breeze  
With talk of heroes and the land they blessed.*

— Józef Łobodowski (193-)

Tr. by George Szymański

*Let other men dig wealth from distant worlds,  
Let others load their vessels down with pearls,  
For us, let yield our meadows green,  
Fair harvests and serene.*

— Sebastian Klonowicz (1595)

## THE CHARM OF THE POLISH VILLAGE

*O village, blest with quietness,  
What tongue thy glories shall confess?  
The comforts and rewards that fall  
From hand of thine what voice recall?*

*Here uprightly mankind may lead  
The round of life, unsmirched by greed,  
Here piously each strain endure,  
And forward look to profit sure.*

*Some folk at court advancement seek,  
Some navigate the ocean's deep,  
Where tempests hard assail a man  
And death is distant but a span.*

*The first you'll hear with noisy sound  
Trading advice so much a pound;  
The second see with bloody stain  
Engulf their cruel, ill-won gain.*

*While here the ploughman cuts the loam,  
Therefrom himself and all his own,  
The year's employ, the cattle's breed,  
The wherewithal derives to feed.*

*For him do fruitful orchards thrive,  
And bees yield up each golden hive;  
For him the sheep give precious wool,  
And every lamb-cote teeming full.*

*From meadow, field and plain he gleans,  
And to his barn their fruitage streams;  
Now swift let's store the seed apart,  
Then rest before the smoking hearth.*

*There songs in numbers shall be made,  
And hidden tales in riddles laid;  
There dances shall be trod with grace,  
And rounds that call for lively chase.*

*The master, taking now his net,  
Departs at dusk his traps to set.  
He tests each snare in woodland glade,  
Then prompt returns, his toil repaid.*

*The river holds his evening meal,  
Which now he seeks with rod and reel,  
As myriad birds skim swiftly by,  
In chattering flight across the sky.*

*Now sports the herd by streamlet edge;  
The shepherd in some shady sedge  
Doth pipe, meanwhile, his simple lay,  
For Fauns to dance the livelong day.*

*The bustling dame does not forget  
The evening's rich repast to set.  
Her own good things so fill the board  
She needs no merchant's costly hoard.*

*Herself doth count the lowing kine,  
As home they file in lengthening line;  
Then swift to milk them makes her way,  
To help her husband as she may.*

*The grandsons, callow striplings still,  
To older judgements yield their will,  
And, used to being seen, not heard,  
Keep faults and virtues both immured.*

*Day lingers yet, but fain 'twould be  
Bright dawn again beyond the sea,  
Ere yet my tongue could fully praise  
The village and its gentle ways.*

— Jan Kochanowski (c. 1580)  
Tr. by C. J. Laskowski

## THE CHARM OF THE POLISH FOREST. . .

'Tis blessed to fall asleep  
 In the depths of some Polish wood,  
 On a couch of heather  
 To sleep, while through the forest  
 Resounds — a voice,  
 Lightly skimming the dew,  
 Then at dawn so enchanting a dream  
 To have as to make one yearn  
 To slumber forever there,  
 Dreaming, and never wake.

— Teofil Lenartowicz (1859)

Tr. by Adriana Gutowska

## THE REPUBLIC OF BABIŃ

Long ago, in the golden 16th century, there was a judge of Lublin County named Stanisław Pszonka who, being of a whimsical turn of mind, founded a republic on his own estate of Babiń which was a caricature of all proper republics.

Here, according to the poet Krasicki,

*" . . . you saw one Pszonka's wit create  
 A scheme for something novel in a state:  
 You won an office not by showing sense,  
 But folly, or pretending to be dense.  
 If other states had tried to use the scheme,  
 What scrambling after office there'd have been!"*

Everybody of importance in Poland who had a sense of humor and intelligence was connected in some official capacity with Pszonka's Babiń Republic. Even the great chancellor of the realm, Jan Zamoyski, was at one time its Totum Factotum. Each member had his special Babiń name and each office also had some special satirical nomenclature.

Babiń was a place where a man was free to jeer and gibe at his will, where tongues and spirits ran free and where it was permissible to "take down one's hair".

Once Pszonka was asked by King Sigmund August, "Tell me, sir, who is King in this republic of yours?"

To which Pszonka replied without hesitation, "Heaven forbid, beloved master, that we should choose in thy lifetime any other King than thyself!"



## The Eastern Provinces

Each nation has its own tone. The tone to which the soul of Poland is attuned, the "music of Poland's blood", is the sound of the wind's unbridled debauch as it tears across the open steppe, its caressing murmur as it kisses the blossoming rye. It is the sound of the streamlet's rhythm, the lapping of the waters of Poland's myriad lakes; above all the sound of the autumn rain as it beats incessantly and without pity, with the measured regularity of a pendulum, on the cottage panes.

— Adapted from Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Chopin and the Nation* (1910)

## PROVINCIAL ODE

*Galician province! Land, of all forgotten realms,  
The least remembered! Let me breathe  
Again the air, sweet as an infant's breath, that helms  
Thee 'round, whose scents the very heavens wreath!*

*I spent my childhood in a town barren and stern,  
Where, knowing everyone, I yet was free  
To live as now today I can but yearn  
To do: alone, within four walls, with thee.*

*We lived beside the railroad, where gigantic trains,  
Destined for wider spheres, shrieked on their melancholy way,  
Where, nights, I dreamed of signals, jewelling the plains,  
And mused on where the tracks were bound, by day.*

*A ruin towered near, a castle of the race  
Of Herburt. Now I scarce recall its true  
Design, rememb'ring only 'twas a place  
For picnicking, a village and a family rendezvous.*

*I knew each strolling peddler then,  
Each parrot, and the barrel-organ's wailing melody —  
Knew everything youth loves, but ne'er again  
Recaptures save in memory.*

*From this, O Poetry, how was it thou didst come to birth?  
By what, O Muse Mysterious, secret juggler's art  
Didst thou my vision wrench from narrow earth,  
And send hot flame-winds coursing through my heart?*

*Or, wherefore mine the face brushed by thy glowing hair,  
And mine the hand, Unseen One, thou dost e'er renew,  
O thou, my only love, thou wife most fair,  
Rocked in thy golden hammock in the blue?*

*Is not the magic circling 'round my head*



*The wonder still of youth's first trysting with the moon,  
The ecstasy of far Galician meadows, fcd  
On Sub-Carpathian springtime's marvellous perfume?*

*And did some owl's eyes bore out those madcap schemes  
Or see the gipsy escapades afar,  
On nights that blossomed ripe with dreams,  
When closer, ever closer, sank each star?*

*And so, perhaps, 'twas you indeed, O province of my youth,  
Deep in forgetfulness entombed, who hurled  
The magic. Locked in reflection, judge severe of truth,  
Perhaps 'twas you, thou heart of all my world!*

— Kazimierz Wierzyński (c. 1925)  
Tr. by Albina Kruszevska

## VILLAGE PEACE

*Blest be the village fair, the carts and horses,  
Rakes and barns, the flails and sharpened scythes,  
And all the tools whose glory 'tis to cut and cart away  
The stubble and the grain of Indian summer from the fields.*

*The windmill that appears to lift its toiling arms to pray,  
O come, thou wind! Come, grain! Thy husks shall fall away!*

*The peasant's hands, the girls with bright Ruthenian scarves,  
The songs, the mists arising from the grass, the croak of frogs.*

*The tedious threshing that foretells a well-stocked winter,  
And the oxen, yokes and plows, the harrow and the tilling  
Of the fields, the autumn with its weather, Sunday fair.*

*The smoky huts, stuffed full of blessed herbs,  
That tender dusk when wagons bring the grain  
To waiting barns —and God his peace into men's hearts.*

— Leopold Staff (1905)  
Tr. by Michalina T. Szymańska

## THE WHITE LADY OF MŁYNÓW

Each year, on a certain day in April, at Młynów, in Volhynia, the castle gates are said to open with a shrill, creaking sound, and a headless woman is said to pass through them.

Who is this ghostly figure, and why, each April, does she return in this manner to Młynów?

The woman is Rosalie Lubomirska, born Chodkiewicz, and she returns to Młynów because it is the seat of her ancestors.

But headless?

Alas, headless. For Rosalie was one of the hundreds, nay thousands, of men and women of high degree who died by the guillotine in the streets of Paris during the bloody Reign of Terror.

The dark thread of tragedy appeared very early in the tapestry of Rosalie's life. For she was born on the 16th of September, 1768, one of the most terrible days in all history for Poles of the eastern Border. That was the day, it will be remembered, on which the Ukrainian peasants revolted against their Polish landlords and massacred them in cold blood. The estate Czarnobyła on which Rosalie was born lay directly in the path of the massacring peasants, and it was only the miraculous loyalty of the Chodkiewicz's personal servants that spared the entire family from being wiped out root and branch.

But Rosalie's life was sunny and carefree for the most part and she was one of the three reigning belles of her time in Warsaw. There, at the gala performance of Niemcewicz's drama *Casimir the Great* on the first anniversary of the great Constitution of 1791, she received an ovation when she appeared in a long flowing robe of amaranth and white scarcely less enthusiastic than that which greeted the King himself.

When she was hardly more than a child Rosalie was married to Alexander Lubomirski, the powerful and wealthy Castellan of Kiev. But she did not love him. In fact she was in love with Paris. Paris had capitulated to her charm and vivacity the very first time she visited it, as a bride in 1788, and repeated its homage on her every visit thereafter.

It was her love of Paris which was to prove Rosalie's undoing. For on the 10th of October, in the fatal year 1793, she deliberately

went to that city, though everyone of her rank and station in life who could possibly leave it was running as fast as he could away!

Who it was in Paris who reported Rosalie to the bloody Revolutionary Tribunal we do not know. It may have been Madame Du Barry herself, on the basis of a letter in which Rosalie expressed compassion for poor Marie Antoinette. Or it may even have been Robespierre, out of revenge for Rosalie's refusal of a dance. At any rate there was someone who played Rosalie false and informed the Tribunal of her presence, for on an April day in 1794 she was one of the unhappy victims carted through the Paris streets in tumbrils to be fed into the gaping maw of My Lady Guillotine.

And that is why, on an April day each year, the gates of Młyńów are heard to creak, and a headless White Lady is seen to pass through. . .

## SPEAKING OF LWÓW

*Speak not, O foreigner, wise words about Lwów,  
The heart knows not the economic argument,  
And who can talk of love or hate by rote  
Or measure it precisely by some strict account?*

*You say: "Now look at this politically. . ." -  
But I — I see a mound, above a city  
Buried deep in lilacs dewy fresh,  
I hear a nightingale drowning the hazel daylight,  
Hear its song fly swift above the town, to gild each tow'r.*

*The day is ended — and the dusk is resonant with bells.  
The day is done — and mist has fallen on the curving roofs.  
The day is ended — echo somewhere strikes against a stone,  
And Night draws near — the hour for going home.*

*Home! How easy through the dusky streets  
To find that special street, that silent gate  
With arms stretched forth to welcome and embrace,  
That gate now gloom enfolded, like a benediction lost.*

*From this one could go forth into the blue  
On fragrant summer mornings, breathing deep  
The sun intoxicated air, then turn and gaze  
An instant at the spires of three cathedrals.*

*There, in mystic shadow, sat the very Savior,  
Harkening, as three distinct and separate tongues  
Were lifted in a single soaring hymn, praising the great  
Life current that runs deep as Dniester's silver flood.*

*The city plays. Smoke rises from the nestling mass  
Of homes by suburbs cradled, wreathed about with green.  
A health-inducing shade falls on it from the flowery hills  
And overhead the sky foams with abundant clouds.*

*Down from the cherry trees the zephyrs waft a prayer,  
Turn the resounding hive into an organ and the trees  
To bells. Over fertile fields an arch of singing flows,  
Above my home the holy manna blooms of silence.*

*So it used to be, is not today, but shall be once again,  
When on her day, Our Lady of the Fields, the Mother  
Of Lwów, once more the peace of summer shall with green  
Bedrape the plain and those three tongues unite again  
in praising God.*

*'Tis night. The sea thunders with noise of storm,  
A single plane, silhouetted like a torch,  
Sputters and dies away, its burning brand quick quenched.*

*But how shall darkness quench the flame of true desire?  
Or force e'er cool the heat of longing?  
Let them cut apart my breast and break my heart,  
They'll find within a picture of those tow'rs, musing  
in the sun. . .*

*Aye, let them cut us all apart, they'll find the same. . .  
'Tis love. The only force of all that proves  
victorious.*

*For of Lwów, O foreigner, one does not speak with words.*

— Mieczysław Lisiewicz (1943)

Tr. by George Szymański

## THE RASPBERRY

Of all the blessings Nature has provided for the delight of man in Poland, none is more truly characteristic of the Polish land than the raspberry. The poet has sung of it since time immemorial, as have also the untutored bards of the folk. Markets teem with the raspberry all summer long in Poland, and one cools himself always with a long, fragrant drink of raspberry juice, euphoniously known as *malinowy sok*.

*The palm must now to Raspberries be giv'n,  
Which Venus once in wrath at Juno bred,  
To have a lasting witness unto all.  
'Tis not enough that raspberry perfume  
Should far surpass the scents of Araby  
Or Sabaeen incense or the other fragrances  
That Flora holds within her scented breast,  
But magic potency besides the raspberry has,  
Wherewith at once to cool and likewise burn  
Whene'er some secret fire attacks the veins.  
Not one alone from death it has restored,  
Giving its healthful juice freewillingly.  
Their pleasant flavor diverse beverages  
From raspberries derive, the heart  
Likewise its greatest sustenance. . .*

— Daniel Naborowski (c. 1625)

Country maidens are wont to feed their lovers with the delectable berry, just as lovers often test the efficiency of their future mates by seeing how rapidly they are able to pick a pitcher of raspberries. . .

*Now the moon has retired and the dogs are asleep  
And there's something astir in the grove.  
It must be Filon, our tryst there to keep,  
By the maple awaiting his love.*

*To curl then my tresses I will not delay,  
But fasten them well in a plait,*

*That Filon, left pining the long night away,  
May not have to tarry too late.*

*A basket I'll take, some raspberries red,  
Some lithe rosy hazel twigs too,  
The berries we'll share when our vows we have said,  
The twigs for a garland will do.*

— Franciszek Karpiński (1782)

## THE LITHUANIAN NIGHTINGALE

*Still, as in childhood days, a nightingale is swaying  
On some bough in far-off Niemenland,  
A canopy of hazel twigs above him, or a lilac cluster,  
Sprigs, mayhap, of jasmine, just as then.*

*Not a breath is stirring, yet the leaves begin to rock:  
It is the birds, gath'ring for flight or settling down to rest.  
Drops of moisture fall from the trees. The song  
Breaks off — the nightingale has cut his note in twain.*

*Cease not thy singing, nightingale, but sing, sing on  
For me, and I your song will publish, as you sang  
It then, inscribing, fresh and pure, each pearl  
Of all your plaintive, questioning song.*

*Thy hymn of unremembered graves I will repeat,  
And sunken crosses; sing of meadow roses, and a field,  
Stream-bordered, hard by the forest rim; a footbridge,  
And a tow-haired lad, running amidst the flax.*

*The flax itself I'll sing that, crushed, is spun  
And woven into garments, fit for shroud or wedding gown;  
Of cradles, gently rocked, and painted walls,  
Of wormwood bitters and the healing yarrow leaf.*

*Sing ever more and more, O bird, sing out the full confessional  
Of all who choke their longing back in sobs, for all  
Who left the wilderness — themselves the wilderness's own —  
Whose ways are foreign to the cringe of sycophant.*

*Sing for the ones who grit their teeth in curses,  
Yet who pray — for all my people, and for me, O nightingale  
Of Litwa: for us all, for ravaged boundaries, for us all,  
Thou heart of us, O nightingale beloved!*

— Kazimiera Iłakowicz (1936)  
Tr. by Julia Pruszyńska

## WILNO: CITY OF THE HEART

*How Wilno came to be built*

Long years ago, in the early days of the 13th century, Litwa was a vast virgin forest. Here the Grand Prince of the Lithuanians, the great Gedymin, loved to hunt, sallying forth to the chase from his stout fortress-castle on an island in Troki Lake.

Once Gedymin pursued a wild boar far afield, even so far, it is said, as to the very hill today known as Castle Hill, in the heart of Wilno. At the base of this hill Gedymin finally slew the beast, and there, blowing a great blast on his hunting horn, announced his victory.

That night as the Grand Prince Gedymin lay dreaming on his rough pallet of skins, there appeared to him a gigantic wolf, clad in armor of iron.

The wolf began to howl, loud and agonizingly, and as mightily as if a hundred wolves were howling from that single throat.

The next morning Gedymin began to wonder if his dream had meant anything. He decided to seek an interpretation. But none of the wise men of his rude court were able to unravel the meaning of the fearsome Iron Wolf.

At length the Prince bethought him of Lizdejko, the High Priest of the Lithuanians himself. He summoned Lizdejko to his presence.

On hearing the details of the dream Lizdejko went into a long silence. Finally he spoke. The dream, he declared, would bring great fame and great power to Gedymin if only he would heed the command of the gods which it revealed. For the wolf was a mighty city which Gedymin was to establish, and the voice of the wolf, powerful as the voice of a hundred wolves, was symbolic of the power and influence the city would enjoy.

"Go forth," Lizdejko enjoined the Prince, "and found the City of the Iron Wolf, and it shall be a source of glory to you forever!"

So Gedymin went forth from his castle in Troki Lake, to dwell in a new castle which he founded on the hill near whose base he had slain the fateful wild boar. And he called the city which grew up around his castle Wilno, the city of the Iron Wolf.



## WILNO CLOUD-VEILED

*A strange and alien sky I gaze upon. . .  
 Yet dream of birches crowned with verdant mist,  
 Flooding the pallid sand with murmurous shade,  
 As by unerring road my heart returns  
 To thee whom I shall name,  
 Thou Wilno dear.*

*The airy flight is swift, on zephyr's wing,  
 To where the blue and gold the heart doth know  
 Reveals Wilejka's gold and Wilia's peace,  
 The hush, the far-off thunder, twilight mists,  
 The end of every yearning:  
 Very home.*

*Yon massive leaden cloud atop the sky,  
 Silent amid the dewy leaves of dusk,  
 Is Castle Hill; below it shines the red  
 Of huddled roofs; the chestnut trees  
 Long finger-shadows fling about All Saints',  
 Whence rises, like the note of homingbird,  
 The tinkle, feather-light, of vesper bells.*

*Dusk stains the city sapphire 'neath the clouds,  
 But one small ray of Grace vouchsafing still,  
 Where Ostra Brama's lamp, immortally,  
 Like errant star doth pierce the solid gloom.  
 A strange, and alien town I tread, and weep. . . .  
 In death, O God, for Heaven my Wilno grant!*

The above poem was written in Algiers, in 1942, by Zofja Bohdanowicz, an exile from Wilno. The Wilia and the Wilejka are two rivers of the Wilno region.

## BAZYLISZEK, THE DRAGON OF WILNO

Long, long ago, in the days before the people of Wilno were Christian, there dwelt in a cave on what is now Baszta Street, a monster known as Bazyliszek.

Like the Gorgon Medusa, Bazyliszek could not be looked at by the human eye. To look at Bazyliszek was to die.

A terrible curse to Wilno was Bazyliszek, but at length the curse was exorcised. At length a Perseus came forth, offering to slay this awful creature. Protecting himself by a shield which was so highly polished that it served as a mirror and so reflected the image of his dragon-foe, the youth accomplished the welcome deliverance.

Eventually the people of Wilno became Christian. But they did not forget the legend of Bazyliszek. Rather did they ensure its immortality by harmonizing it with the good Christian legend of St. George and the Dragon.

And so today, on the 23rd of April, the day sacred to St. George, a brilliant pageant is staged on Wilno's Baszta Street, once the haunt of Bazyliszek. On this day the dragon himself, a fearsome sight, rushes out of a cave, to be met by a band of Christian knights, together with a motley company of maidens, priests, young boys, and the like, all armed with spears made of palm branches. All carry the traditional heart-shaped gingerbread cakes that they have bought previously at the fair held on St. Casimir's Day. The culmination of the day's excitement is the slaying of the dragon by the knight who has been chosen to carry the mirrorlike shield at the head of the procession. At the end he is joined in symbolic wedlock with a maiden who represents the city itself, rescued long ago by the prowess of some unforgotten, but forever nameless, knight.

## CREDO

*There are forests, still, green forests,  
 And hundred-year oaks,  
 There are people, still,  
 With souls  
 That are stouter than oak.  
 There is power, still, in the black mother earth.  
 Let us plow it with sharpened steel.  
 There is life, still,  
 Slumb'ring deep in the seed,  
 That will ripen in golden-spiked grain.  
 There are hands, still,  
 Hands hard as iron,  
 And shoulders of steel.  
 There are hearts, still,  
 Tender as young spring grain in the meadow,  
 With the tireless strength of the earth.  
 In the depth of those silent hearts,  
 In the black mother earth,  
 Is swelling the slumbering seed,  
 Making ready to rise,  
 Bringing grain-heads to birth,  
 Fulfilling the promise of Faith.  
 Conversations I hear on the deep nights of summer:  
 Then whisper the grain-spikes,  
 And answers come back  
 In the muted rustling of oak leaves.  
 On the bank of the river oaks tower still,  
 Their power its waters reflecting.  
 To their shade sunburned foreheads  
 And spirits careworn  
 Come seeking their coolness.  
 Words I distrust,  
 But the murmur of ancient,  
 Green oaks I believe;  
 Zeal I distrust,  
 But the silence of slumbering,  
 Grain-bearing seeds I believe.*

— Eliza Orzeszkowa,

Tr. by Blanche Zborowska

## THE COUNT AND THE CUCUMBERS

The Count had not ridden very far when something fragile and white a-flutter in the nearby vegetable garden caused him to check his horse. He studied the garden intently.

It made a charming picture, with its rows of pleasant fruit trees and its brilliant vegetable beds. Here a bald-headed cabbage seemed to be meditating the way an old man does on grave matters like Life and Death and Destiny. Yonder a slender yellow bean, its pods entwined with the green tresses of the carrots, was to be seen, and shafts of golden-tasseled corn. Over there shone the fat belly of a watermelon that had wandered into the foreign land, as it were, of the beets.

The beds were all criss-crossed by files of stiff, straight flax, the sentinels whose duty it was to keep out snakes and insects and caterpillars. Above the white stems of the poppies floated a mass of rainbow-hued blossoms, like a swarm of butterflies. A huge sunflower towered above the other flowers, its face glowing as it followed, with steady, deliberate pace, the westward course of the sun.

Beside the garden fence was a cucumber patch, and in its very center, amid the vines that covered it over like a wrinkled carpet, stood a shining white figure. The Count looked hard, puzzled at first to make out what it was.

Finally he knew: it was a girl in a long white gown.

For a long time the Count could not take his eyes from her lissome white figure. He was fascinated by the way she seemed not so much to walk as to float above the cucumber greenery, as a water sprite might float above some shimmering woodland lake. Her head was shaded by a wide straw hat, from under the brim of which peeped a cascade of bright, loose hair and two little bows of pink ribbon.

The girl carried a basket in one hand and every once in a while she would dart into the midst of the vines, only to come up gracefully a moment later with a cucumber to place inside it. She was like a child at the seashore darting into the shallow water after minnows!

The Count was enchanted. Motioning to his groom to halt in the background, he edged his horse slowly to the garden fence and

stealthily dismounted. For a long time he stood leaning on the garden fence in silence, watching the fair apparition.

Suddenly a sharp sound interrupted the Count's reverie and he felt a brusque tap on his shoulder. He looked around. It was the Monk Robak, and he had tapped the Count with one of the thick, elliptical knots of his girdle.

"So you're looking for cucumbers, are you?" Robak inquired. "Take these then." And he tapped the Count's hand with his well-knotted girdle. "There you have your cucumbers!"

The Count looked: sure enough, the knots in the heavy cord were like little cucumbers. He understood the Monk's meaning.

"Beware of vegetable gardens!" Robak warned. "You'll find nothing at all, mind you!" And with a warning gesture he adjusted his cowl and rode off.

The Count lingered a moment longer, cursing the luck that had brought the Monk there just at that moment, yet laughing too for allowing himself be caught off guard by a simple country maid. He gazed once more at the cucumber patch, but there was no one there. The girl in the white frock had vanished. The apparition was gone, leaving as the only trace of its ever having been there, a willow basket empty and overturned, on top of the quivering carpet of cucumber vines!

— Adapted from Book II of *Pan Tadeusz* (1834) by Adam Mickiewicz

## DO YOU REMEMBER. . .

*The birch tree drooping white above the marshy road?  
 The rows of stunted pine trees,  
 Bent so low by winter's snow  
 That even spring could never lift them up?  
 Pools of blackish water near each cottage?  
 Do you remember?*

*The courtyard paved with cobbles,  
 The old church walls, the graveyard  
 Where the dead of all the village lay asleep?  
 The beggars' plaintive cry back there  
 Beneath the wall on holy days? The merry stalls,  
 And O! those riotous shawls!  
 And then the maidens, each with kerchief  
 Prettier than the rest, each one saucy, robust, fair,  
 As everything around was fair. . .  
 And each of them — thinking a little bit of you?  
 Do you remember?*

— Kazimiera Hłakowicz (1919)

## OF NOWOGRÓDEK LAND. . .

*Harken then: the Nowogródek land is drear  
 And lonely: meadows yield no bounteous fruitage here  
 Nor sparkle here Huculian or Podhalan handicrafts;  
 No stately harbors, mines, nor golden draughts  
 Of oil are here; but only dreams: a silent shade  
 Of land, poor in the goods of industry and trade.*

*But, still — it has a secret — no heresy  
 Is this, a secret which like magic herbs springs  
 Nightly into life, to murmur and allure — 'tis  
 poetry,  
 That sighs in soft White Russian, and in Polish  
 sings.*

*Mickiewicz first found out the land for us, then went away,  
But could not live without it, so one day  
Returned, to stay forever in the land he loves.  
And now at night he treads her forest groves,  
Her moonlit lanes of pine, to tarry wearily  
At dawn, like pilgrim, on some gleaming balcony,  
To whisper ancient stanzas, cherished still,  
And watch the rosy mist each treetop fill.*

*And still remains in him the secret of that  
dream -  
Enshrouded land, wrapt in the mist of that most  
verdant stream,  
The green-hued Niemen, as it flows caressingly  
along  
The border of that land of verse and song.*

*For hostile arms may trample it and burn  
Its homes, may carry off its children, turn  
Its meadows to a waste by some decree of hell.  
But break its power, — never! Though a hundred times  
they fell  
It, still a hundred times again 'twill spring  
To life, to murmur in White Russian, and in Polish sing.*

— Stanisław Baliński (1941)

Tr. by Albina Kruszevska

## THE SERPENT AND THE FIR TREE

The simple folk of Polish Litwa believe that once upon a time all the various objects of nature, both animate and inanimate, were able to talk and to behave in every other respect as human beings. They thought, for example, that the serpents they often saw on the shores of their many lakes had once been beautiful princes and that the fir tree which they loved so well had once been a lovely maiden. Here is one of their stories — the tale of Żaltys and Egle, or to translate these two names, of The Serpent and The Fir Tree. . .

Once upon a time there dwelt near a lake a rich and beautiful maiden named Egle. Every morning, singing happily, Egle would walk in the forest at the edge of the lake, gathering flowers.

One day as Egle wandered near the lakeside the waters seemed suddenly to separate and a huge green serpent arose from their depths.

“Hail, beautiful maiden!” called out the serpent, “I too was once a human being like thyself. I was a Prince, a King’s son. But the gods wished to punish me and so changed me into this serpent that you see. My name is Żaltys, and I dwell in a palace of amber amid gardens of pearls. There I lack nothing. There, even, I am still a Prince. Yet I am drowned in sorrow, for, despite my riches, despite my fine palace of amber, I am lonely. My days pass in grief and longing, for no one will yield to my wooing. Come, thou beautiful Egle, be thou the Queen of my Kingdom. Be thou my wife!”

Egle fled in terror, but the next day something lured her again to the place where the serpent had been. Again the waters parted and again Żaltys appeared and renewed his pleading. The third day Egle was there again, and once more Żaltys plead with her.

This time, at last, Egle yielded and went with the Serpent-Prince to be Queen of the waters, to dwell in the amber palace. Deep in the heart of the lake Żaltys shed his green scales and became a creature beautiful as dawn. There, loving each other as the sun loves the flowers and the flowers the sun, Żaltys and Egle lacked nothing of perfect happiness.

Years passed, and three children were born to the Serpent-Prince and his bride. Egle, meanwhile, had all but forgotten her parents. But now a time came when she remembered, and longing to see them overcame the beautiful Queen. She asked Żaltys if she might



not visit them.

Żaltys hesitated for a long time but finally gave his consent. "Go," he said reluctantly, "but return quickly. When you come to the rim of the lake, call out my name, and I will swim to the surface to meet you. If I am alive I will come swiftly, but if, instead of myself, you see on the surface of the water a bright crimson foam, you will know I shall never come, for I shall be dead.

With this warning ringing in her ears and striking coldly on her heart, Egle bade Żaltys farewell and hastened with her three children to the home of her parents. There she was plied with questions as to where she had been for so long and whence she had come, but she refused to answer and enjoined her three children also to silence.

But Egle's brothers were determined to learn the secret of their sister's long absence and especially the source of the rich presents she had brought them. So on the first night, when they went out to tend the horses, they took with them Egle's eldest child and beat him and tortured him, hoping to learn the secret from him. But the boy told nothing. The second night the brothers did the same thing with Egle's second son, but again to no avail, for the boy kept his lips tight sealed.

On the third night, however, the brothers took the youngest of Egle's children, a little girl, and beat her as they had done her brothers. This time they learned the secret of the Serpent-Prince Żaltys.

Then, seizing in their hands two sharp swords, the brothers went to the lake and, standing on its rim, called "Żaltys! Żaltys! Żaltys!" The Serpent-Prince, thinking Egle had returned, joyfully rose to the surface. The brothers fell upon him and cut him to pieces. A thick red foam spread swiftly across the unhappy waters.

Egle, meanwhile, knowing nothing of what had happened, began, after a week of visiting, to long for her husband and for the amber palace at the bottom of the lake. Bidding her parents farewell and gathering her children about her, she prepared to return home.

"Żaltys!" Egle called, at the edge of the lake. "Żaltys! It is I, Egle, returning. Come to me, Żaltys!"

But only a mournful echo replied, and only a bright crimson foam was to be seen on the lake's surface.

"Żaltys! Żaltys!" Egle kept calling in terror, as she saw the dread crimson warning. But no Żaltys answered her call.

Egle knew now that Żaltys was dead. "It is I who have killed him!" she mourned, and could not be comforted.

Soon, however, the gods of the forest, seeing Egle's plight, took pity on her and transformed her into a fir tree. The two sons who had kept Żaltys' secret the changed also, one into a fine, sturdy oak, the other into a splendid ash tree. But the little girl who had betrayed her father they transformed into a cowardly, trembling aspen.

Years have passed since the time of Egle and Żaltys, but there still, on the edge of the lake, stand the four trees together, their branches yearning toward the deep, gloomy waters. And the breeze, as it sighs through the fir branches, sounds strangely like the voice of Egle herself, as once she called from the rim of the lake to her dear Serpent-Prince.

"Żaltys! It is I, Żaltys! It is Egle, your Queen! Come to me, Żaltys!"

And still, as long ago, no Żaltys comes.

— Adapted from *Dewajtis* (1889)  
by Marja Rodziewiczówna, con-  
tributed by Regina Okleyewicz

## YEARNING

*Unto the land where e'en a crumb of bread  
Is plucked in reverence from the ground  
As manna yet! . . .*

*I yearn, O Lord!*

*And for the country where 'tis held a sin  
To harm, in pear tree crotch, the nest of stork  
Who serves us all! . . .*

*I yearn, O Lord!*

*Unto the land where folk give greeting  
In the words of Christ's own faith:  
"May God Himself be praised!"*

*I yearn, O Lord!*

— Cyrjan Norwid (c. 1840)  
Tr. by Martha Kozłowska

## THE FOREST ON THE DAUGIELE ROAD

The forest rose on both sides of the road, a mass of reddish-gold columns of pine, around whose bare and thorny branches twined streamers of raspberry and blackberry. Moss, green and soggy with rain, spread over all like a carpet, dark in the valleys and glades, bright on the knolls. Here and there towered a fir tree, sentinel-like, its thorny black arms raised protectingly over the trampled clusters of juniper, with their trimming of berries. From somewhere above, drops from a previous rain, hidden up to now from the eye, fell now and then on the dried up leaves that still clung stubbornly to the dying branches. The forest depth was pervaded with a bluish-gray mist chill, dank, mouldy and full of melancholy.

— Zofja Bohdanowicz (1938)

Tr. by Zygmunt Bazanowski

*"He had been possessed, as it were, by the wonder of discovering the nameless kinship that exists between human beings and the rest of nature. . ."*

— Józef Weysenhoff (1911)

Peasant and prince alike in Poland know well this sense of kinship with the soil and with all Nature. This Mickiewicz was careful to point out repeatedly in his lectures on the Slavs in Paris. To illustrate what he meant by this sense of kinship, Mickiewicz told how the peasants of Litwa, to whose tales he had listened enchanted as a boy, had used the props of Nature herself and Nature's own setting in order to make their own story-telling the more real and dramatic.

In the story, for example, of the knight who goes seeking a magical bird, when the story-teller comes to where the hero finds a golden feather that the bird has lost in his flight, instead of relying on words alone to describe the wonderful radiance given off by the feather, stoops down and, picking up a handful of dry kindling, flings it swiftly on the fire, so that flames leap to the very ceiling and the listener sees with his own eyes a radiance like to that of the feather in the story.

Or in the tale of the enchanted princesses, as like as the stars in the heavens, who dwelt in a crystalline castle. When the storyteller reaches the point where the hero is endeavoring to decide which of the princesses is the one he is seeking, he breaks off his recital abruptly and, moving to the door, flings it suddenly wide open, so that the very castle itself, or so it seems, is revealed, in the crystal arch of the winter sky, and the princesses in the lustrous, glittering stars!

— Adam Mickiewicz (Apr. 4, 1843)

(Adapted)

### POLESIAN MARSHLANDS

*Still in my waking dreams I can see that expanse  
Of marshland, the forests, gloomy and dense  
As caves, and the streams winding in and out  
Of rushes and osiers, winged cavalcades of uneasy insects,  
A tiny green butterfly skimming above the water.*

*I remember the air, wrapt in the uttermost silence,  
Unbroken save by the call of a crane, or a stork's sharp clatter,  
The splash of a boat on the wave, as a fisherman  
Scoured the depths with his circular net.*

*The place had a charm one can never forget,  
With its golden sands and its wonderful awesome trees,  
Its tattered huts dotting the peat-black waste,  
Its Russian churches, covered with mouldy thatch,  
Its graves, marked by a fir tree or stunted pine.*

*Here, shadowed by forests and flooded over with water,  
A race of people lives out its life  
With never a change of habit or fresh idea  
From one generation on to the next penetrating  
Its speech or garb or its manner of tilling the soil.  
No new spirit, reflecting the changing times,  
Ever reaches them here, to alter a single beat  
Of their hearts or to vary the time of their songs:  
As in centuries past the earliest Slavic folk  
Wore flowing great-coats, so now do these, and beards*

*Identical too with theirs: even the hatchets  
 With which they hew down the oak, and the churches  
 They pray in, are still the same. Honey and fish  
 And millet they eat as of yore: nothing is altered,  
 Save only the need, perhaps, is more black. . .*

— Władysław Syrokomla (c. 1850)

## KUPALLO

The young folk had been stirring since dawn, gathering branches dripping with resin, all freshly-cut, since dead branches were never used for the fires of Kupallo. . . Even the branches of living wood that were dry had to be freshly broken off, since in those that had lain on the ground death was lurking already.

Women could be seen everywhere, gliding about in their white garments, carrying chains of leaves and garlands of greenery. Young men too were to be seen, their thick russet cloaks flung over one shoulder. In the groves and the forest depths could be heard the low murmur of a song that heralded great doings, doings that were to begin at nightfall. At the edge of the wood a fireplace had been made ready under the oak trees and small branches, split with stone axes for kindling, had been piled.

Each group was in its appointed place and the sound of merry-making reechoed through the forest. The old women sat on the ground, with their pails and pitchers and kneading troughs filled with meats and cakes and holiday goodies about them. There girls were standing in a circle, while the boys, casting sly glances at them the while, rubbed twigs of dry wood together to make bonfires, the glowing embers of which would be carefully gathered and taken home, to be kept alive till next Kupallo.

It was Nature's Great Day: the Day when the Sun and the Moon plighted their troth, and when Day and Night met! It was the day when all criminals were set free, when the Night was believed to hold certain secrets, when the growing things of the forest possessed magic properties, and when honey was flung into the fire as an offering to the White God.

A singer sat under an oak tree. Under another oak sat another singer and the two sang antiphonally:

*O little Sun, thou eye of bright day,  
Shine down upon us and give us thy blessing.  
Banners of light are coursing across the heavens,  
Let the rays of thy light fall upon us,  
Kupallo!*

*Let no black dragons dare dim thy face,  
O Kupallo.  
Thou, O Kupallo, art Life, thou art Joy,  
Thou art Hope, God — Kupallo.*

*Thou King, rule our days without clouds,  
To life wake thou Joy and desire  
O thou Giver of Life,  
God, Kupallo!  
Cut our chains, give us Life,  
Awaken us, O thou Kupallo.*

Soon the sun began to go down in the west and at this the faces of all turned to each other and everybody looked breathlessly at his neighbor, waiting in an agony of expectation and ecstasy for the last ray of the sun to gild the trees.

As soon as darkness fell the torchlight procession began. . .

— Józef I. Kraszewski, *Stara Baśń*  
(An Old Fable), 1876, — Adapted

## PODOLIA

*"If e'er in yonder land of mine  
Thou art, in vales where twine  
My Ikwa's silver threads, where wells  
Of azure bathe my dusky hills, and bells  
Toll forth, where honeysuckle's sweet cascade  
Of bloom runs riot over cottage, crag and glade. . ."*

— Julius Słowacki

## KRZEMIENIEC. . .

“How fair that land of boundless steppes and bare declivities, and how little known! Hillocks and glens, the ruins of historic castles, manorhouses and palaces, churches and cloisters, very souvenirs of a bygone age, — a kaleidoscope, in a word, running over with rich scenes both of nature and of art. . .

Fairest of all in Podolia is Nature itself, the gold of the sun, the emerald of the lush steppe grasses, the ebony of Podolia’s famous “black earth”. One of the most picturesque of all the various regions of this glorious province is the hilly upland of Krzemieniec.”

— Anon., adapted by  
Zygmunt Bazanowski

*Far off, with memory’s eye, half hid by two  
Dark hills, I see the town, its spires  
Forth springing from a valley draped in blue.  
Enchanted ‘tis at dusk, when sunset fires  
Glowing in every pane a garland wreath  
Of gold, transforming gardens green  
And small white homes to jewels, each  
Bright dwelling place a pearl, with emeralds between.*

*There stands the peak christened with Bona’s name;  
Topping the other ridge, its shade bedims the plain.  
A castle grim and old its forehead lines,  
The ruin changing shape with each new cloud:  
Becoming now a sentinel by day, with porthole eyes,  
And now by night a crown, in mourning shroud.  
Anon the castle’s ancient visage smiles,  
To greet the silver of the rising moon,  
While in the valley, deep ‘mid poplar aisles,  
A callow stripling dreams of destiny and doom.*

— Julius Słowacki (1832)

## A COUNTRY CHURCH

*In the distance was heard the sound of a country  
church bell.  
Long it had rung, and from every side the people  
Were hurrying toward it across the fields.  
The day was a holy one, a day when no work was per-  
formed,  
When the plow stood idle and the furrows were left  
to grow up to weeds.  
Maidens had garnished the altar with blossoms be-  
forehand  
And the youths had tuned up their voices for singing.  
Now the priest, bent over with age, came forward,  
The songs of the people were smothered and died away.  
Silence descended. . . only the voice of the priest  
could be heard,  
And the soft swish of the birch as it brushed the pane,  
Or now and then the mournful tinkle of little bells,  
An elder making response to the priest,  
The twitter of sparrows, or the sound of a swallow  
Timidly flying down from the top of the spire  
To alight on the cornice.*

— Julius Słowacki (1830)

## POLESIE

“They say there are two roads in life: one smoothe and gay that leads to Hell, the other hard and tedious, leading to Heaven. Well, if this is so, the roads of Polesie must lead straight to the Kingdom of Heaven.”

— Ignacy Kraszewski (1840)

## LITWA

*“Naught but thy deathless verse  
Thy fame uprears,  
Above the ruin  
And the wreck of years.”*

— Jan Kochanowski (1530-1584)



## THE FORTRESS-CASTLE OF THE BORDER

In Podolia, wherever you look you are likely to see a hillock rising from the plain like a sentinel, with a fortress-like castle crowning its summit. These castles were, centuries on end, the watch-towers and guardians of the Polish realm.

One of the most historic of Podolia's many fortress-castles was that built by King John Sobieski as a lookout station against the Turks at the point where the Zbrucz flows into the Dniester. Completed in 1692 by the Hetman Stanisław Jabłonowski right in the midst of a fierce attack by the Turks, the fortress came to be known as Okopy or the Ramparts. The hill itself from which Okopy arose was known as The Mount of the Holy Trinity.

When the poet Krasieński was a boy he was taken to Podolia for a visit to his grandmother and the sight of Okopy, together with the tales he was told of its heroic history, made a deep impression on him. Years later, when he came to write his epic of man's struggle upward — *The Un-divine Comedy* — Krasieński made Okopy the scene of the final struggle in human history between the forces of Progress and Reaction.

*Perched like an eagle, high among the rocks,  
Stands the old fortress Holy Trinity.  
Now from its bastions nothing can be seen,  
To right, to left, in front, or in the rear,  
But morning mists, unbroken, limitless;  
A spectral image of that Deluge wrath  
Which, as its wild waves rose to sweep the earth,  
Once broke on these steep cliffs, these time-worn rocks.  
No glimpses can be traced of vale beneath,  
Buried in ghastly waves of ice-cold sea,  
Wrapping it as the shroud winds round the dead.  
No crimson rays of coming sun yet light  
The clammy, pallid, winding-sheet of foam.*

*Upon a bold and naked granite peak,  
Above the spectral mist, the castle stands,  
A solitary island, in this sea.  
Its bastions, parapets, and lofty towers*

*Built of the rock from which they soar, appear  
 During the lapse of ages to have grown  
 Out of its stony heart (as human breast  
 Springs from the centaur's back), — the giant work  
 Of days long past.*

— Zygmunt Krasiński (c. 1840)

Tr. by Martha Walker Cook (1864)

### A SNOWBOUND HUT

*Hut of the Polish peasant! Blanketed with snow!  
 When over thee at night the tempest howls  
 Thou'rt like a gravemound: who would guess that men  
 Reside in thee who, snatching scarce a wink of slumber,  
 Soon will rise to start the weary day!  
 Scarce have the birds nesting beneath thy thatch  
 Announced the hour of midnight, when thou dost waken,  
 And, by light of pine-torch, women tune a yearning song  
 Above the spinning wheel, winding, together with the flax,  
 A filament of longing 'round the spindle!  
 The husband, meanwhile, half-asleep, stretches his arms  
 And, striding down the room, sits on a bench a moment,  
 Then gets up and, going to the doorway, scans the morning sky,  
 Only to find black darkness, there as in his thoughts, still master. . .  
 Over his couch no szlachta sabre gleams,  
 Gilding his dreams with memory of fame. . .  
 But then. . . the dawn bursts through! His spirits soaring,  
 Quick he grasps a shovel and begins to dig his hut from  
 Underneath its gloomy blanket, into the outer world,  
 And light, and better days!*

— Kornel Ujejski (1852)

Tr. by George Szymański

Światopłk Karpiński was one of the most promising younger poets of Free Poland. *In Taking Flight* was written in Warsaw after the capital had been forced to capitulate to the German invaders in September, 1939 and just before Karpiński himself, who participated in the defense of Warsaw as a soldier in the ranks, took flight from the doomed city.

The poem reached Wilno when its author arrived in that city after a long and perilous journey on foot in the winter of 1940. Set to music by Szeligowski, a well-known collector of folk tunes, it was popularized at once by Hanka Ordonówna, a singer of continental renown who had herself spent the first six months of the German occupation in a Warsaw prison. Because of the national fervor aroused by the singing of the poem among the Poles gathered in Wilno, it was suppressed by the Lithuanian authorities.

In May, 1940, Karpiński suddenly died and at the memorial celebration held in his honor Ordonówna was permitted to sing *In Taking Flight*. Needless to say, the singing provoked a response little short of a national demonstration.

## IN TAKING FLIGHT

*This time, O native storks, when you return  
To springtime verdure 'neath an azure sky,  
The straw-thatched roof toward which your memories yearn  
Will not be nigh. . .*

*Frantic, you'll wheel and circle near,  
Screaming to heaven as in baffled strife:  
That once a hamlet nestled here,  
Rye grew, and there was life.*

*Cease writing clamorous circles across the air.  
Nothing is left. Grass will overgrow the site,  
Earth hide it soon, with gravemound bare  
And black, to match the ashes of its plight.*

*Fly swiftly then into the blue.  
To other lands from yonder ruin flee,  
To other marshes, vales and meadows new,  
Where welcome waits white-winged birds and free.*

*And though, 'mid fair designs of foreign scene,  
These meadows still nostalgic toll shall take,  
Or frogs in croaking chorus make you dream,  
The glowworm's flicker bitter yearning wake,*

*Despair not of the spring! Winged, 'twill free  
Your wings unto the wind, to blow  
You where the hamlet and the thatch shall be  
Again, and tears of gladness flow.*

— Światopełk Karpiński (1940)  
Tr. by Blanche Zborowska.

### GREEN BOUNDARY

*Yonder past the willows, beyond the forest stream,  
Where the music of the nightingale is lost,  
When the spectral autumn moon had draped the earth in silver sheen,  
Our first 'green boundary' was crossed.*

*While the nightingale was warbling to the moon,  
The 'straight and narrow way' was quickly seen,  
The path that unto heaven, they said, would lead us soon,  
The heaven past the boundary of green.*

*You flowed along before us, boundary green, that night,  
While all the stars chill echoes seemed to roar,  
While color from the frozen cheek took flight,  
And you a smile of hopeless longing wore.*

*Still drags that first 'green boundary' of ours  
Its endless length across our moonless night,  
Staining the magic e'en of moonlit bowers,  
And staying ever near, 'mid tragic flight.*

— Ryszard Pobóg (1941)  
Tr. by Sigmund Słuska

## LIST OF TRANSLATORS

Bazanowski, Zygmunt  
Bielawska, Charlotte W.

Chybowska, Halina  
Coleman, Arthur P.  
Coleman, Marion Moore  
Cook, Martha Walker

Depkowska, Florence

Gutowska, Adriana C.

Jakubowska, Wanda

Kiełbińska, Eugenia  
Kozłowska, Martha  
Krason, William S.  
Kruszewska, Albina

Laskowski, C. J.

Marek, Anne

Narolska, Janet

Okleyewicz, Regina  
Orzechowska, Emily E.

Pruszyńska, Julia C.  
Pyszkowska, Irene

Rogozińska, Caroline Ratajczak

Sikorska, Helen  
Słuszka, Sigmund J.  
Strobel, Laura  
Szymańska, Michalina  
Szymański, George

Zborowska, Blanche



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