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The “French” History of Polish Literature or Two Languages — One “Oeuvre”

The Poetic Prose of Young Zygmunt Krasiński in French and Polish (1829–1831)

Abstract: This chapter examines the French history of Polish literature in the first half of the 19th century. During the 18th century the French language was the vehicle of classical culture and literature in Poland. However, only few Polish writers used it in their artistic expression. On the verge between the Classic and Romantic epochs the vivid discussions about a new vision of the literature did not concern the question of the “language”. At the same time, the day-to-day knowledge of French was expanding. The most eminent Polish writers of a new Romantic generation were able to use it for evident stylistic purposes or as a hidden bilingual basis – like Adam Mickiewicz. The case of the young Polish Romantic writer, Zygmunt Krasiński, is quite unique. His will to construct his Romantic literary and biographical (pseudo-biographical) myth was based on his bilingual French and Polish oeuvre: poetic prose written in Switzerland, in the short period between the end of 1829 and 1832. The writer, coming from an aristocratic family, used French as a so-called natural language but never came back to it in his literary career again. Still, it could be his early French work that constructed the literary basis of one the most important Polish Romantic authors. This case study concludes the chapter.

Keywords: Polish literature, French language, Romanticism, Classicism, Poetic Prose

1 Introduction: The French language in Poland

In the 1820’s and 30’s there was no significant French-language literary production in Poland that would be comparable to, for example, that in Russia (cf. Baudin 2013: 81–91; *French and Russian in Imperial Russia* 2015: 228–242).

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Throughout the entire 18th century and during the transition to Romanticism, numerous Polish authors wrote in French but, above all, they translated foreign-language works into their native language. Initially they translated mostly from French, and as the years passed, also from Italian, German, and English (Bajer 2020: 13, 308–310, 312–314; Jędrzejewski 2016: 19, 34–35).¹ However, few achieved mastery in the field of French-language writing equaling that of King Stanisław August Poniatowski (1732–1798), Jan Potocki (1761–1815),² and Wacław Seweryn Rzewuski (1784–1831).³ But when we pose the question of the actual awareness and popularity of their works among readers, the perspective may change substantially. The history of these texts' reception is not a simple issue, and in the case of the journals written by the last king of Poland it is particularly complex (Casanova 1999: 34, 104, 130).⁴

Somewhat paradoxically, French-language texts were widely circulated: works originally written in French (of purely literary, publicistic, historical and political nature) and translations of classical (mainly dramas) and modern French literature (philosophical treatises, novels, poetry, also including low-brow works — serving as day-to-day entertainment, such as romances, idylls, song texts, etc.). This must have led to a strong embedding of this literature along the Vistula (Bajer 2020: 299–300, 307–309, 313–314).

Until now, the study of such texts and reading practices has been, if not omitted, then at least neglected by historians and critics of literature wishing to

1 See also *Pisarze polskiego Oświecenia* [Writers of the Polish Enlightenment] ed. T. Kostkiewiczowa, Z. Goliński, Wyd. Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1994–1996, vol. 1–3, passim.

2 He wrote substantially more in French than in Polish. His most original and interesting work, *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* long remained unknown, until the first edition of Edmund Chojecki's translation (actually, only one of the versions of this work) appeared in 1847, Księgarnia Zagraniczna, Lipsk [Leipzig] (further – ibidem, 1857). French edition: Jan Potocki, *Œuvres*, ed. F. Rosset, D. Triaire, Editions Peeters, Louvain-la-Neuve-Paris, 2004–2006, vol. IV and VI. Pocket edition: Flammarion, Paris 2008. See also *Pisarze polskiego Oświecenia* [Writers of the Polish Enlightenment] op. cit., Warszawa 1994, vol. 2., p. 426–428, 433–437 (Janusz Ryba). About his pluricultural education and practice cf. Ryba 2007: 123–124, 126–127.

3 Wacław Seweryn Rzewuski, *Sur les chevaux orientaux et provenant des races orientales / Concerning the Horses of the Orient and those Originating from Oriental Breeds / O koniach wschodnich i wywodzących się z ras orientalnych*, ed. Tadeusz Majda, t. I, Rękopis, t. II, Album i Opisy, t. III, Eseje, The National Library of Poland, Warsaw 2017.

4 Was the situation similar with the treatise of another king-author, Friedrich II, who deliberated in French about causes of the development (conceived as the “delay” of German literature? Friedrich II, *De la littérature allemande*, 1780, here after: P. Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, Seuil, Paris 1999, p. 34, 104, 130. Cf. also A. Rivarol, *Discours de l'universalité de la langue française*, published in 1784, after: ibid., p. 104.

ascribe literary works to a strictly defined, narrow and impassable cultural circle (Fumaroli 2001: 463–465).⁵

When critics and historians of literature investigate the transition from the classical to romantic vision of the world and literature, they do not consider a possible different attitude towards native / foreign languages. The question of language remains hidden or neglected – as if writers used to read and create in an abstract manner. The practice of most nowadays editions, even the academic ones, of literary texts, but also of letters, sketches, and writers’ notes are usually translated and “clean”, deprived of any error or hesitation. They don’t give the reader the opportunity to realize how rich and various the linguistic reality of many writers could be. Unfortunately, it does not concern only the Polish field. A single remark about notes in many languages, mixing even some of them in a one single sentence, that Stendhal used to put in margins of his autographs, can help us to look differently at his particularly limpid style in French: was this a kind of game, a way to relax during periods of intensive work – hidden in front of his readers (Martineau 1957: VIII). A more consistent example of the same Romantic period is this of Niccoló Tommaseo, an Italian writer, linguist and critic, provides a more consistent example from the Romantic period. His pluri-lingual work *Scintille / Iskrice* [The Sparks] (the first edition is from 1841) had to wait until the first years of our century to be edited entirely and appear in a critical version (Bruni 2008: XI, XCIX). Still, today both Croatians and Serbians dispute his paternity for their literary modern tongues (Pietrzak-Thébault 2021: 42, 44). This work, consisting in short fragments in prose and in verse, in Italian, French, Latin, modern Greek and the disputable “*illirico*” has rarely been investigated or appreciated in its integrality – because it has been considered (too?) disparate, odd, and chaotic (Pietrzak-Thébault 2021: 46).⁶ Hence, it is clear that this way of composing proceeded from a deliberate romantic vision and a new linguistic attitude – quite different from the common use: not only to

5 M. Fumaroli, *Quand l’Europe parlait français*, Ed. de Fallois, Paris, 2001, p. 463–465. Entire edition : Stanislas Auguste, *Mémoires*, ed. A. Grzeškowiak-Krwawicz, D. Triaire, Institut d’études slaves, Société historique et littéraire polonaise, Paris, 2012. Cf. also *Writers of the Polish Enlightenment*, op. cit., Warszawa 1992, vol. 1, p. 381–382, and rich bibliography p. 382–385 (Jerzy Michalski). About relations of Poniatowski with French writers see L. Fabre, *Stanisław August i literaci francuscy*, in: idem, *Od oświecenia do romantyzmu. Studia i szkice z literatury i kultury polskiej* [Stanisław August and French writers, in: idem, *From enlightenment to romanticism. Studies and sketches from Polish literature and culture*], ed. K. Kasprzyk, Tow. Literackie im. A. Mickiewicza, Warszawa 1995, p. 32–79 (French original: *Stanislas-Auguste et les hommes de lettres français*, “Archivum Neophilologicum”, Kraków 1936, II, p.1–53)

6 See below about the character of Krasiński’s poetic prose in Polish and French.

employ languages already learned to write, but also to learn a new language (on and with an ideological purpose, as Tommaseo did when he had discovered his Slavonic roots) – with the purpose to use it in artistic creation (Bruni 2008: XV–XVII, XIX, XXI; Pietrzak-Thébault 2021: 41–42, 48–49; cf. Maingueneau 1993: 104–106). These examples show how investigating plurilingual works can help us to better understand the oeuvre of poets and writers. Knowing who wrote and in which language can give us insight into the 'main' national, native language of the oeuvre.

If we consider their oeuvre in this way, we see clearly that there are many writers and poets whose works cannot be fully ascribed to one linguistic area, which, at the same time, enriches the heritage of any literature they “belong to”.

In practice, at the time, French was treated as a common idiom for literature and as a means of communication for intellectual elites and aristocracy throughout Europe, and it had little in common with the national identity of “Frenchness” as such (Casanova 1999: 99–104). In Poland, in the first half of the 19th century, knowledge of this language was cultivated in aristocratic circles (cf. Czapska 2004: 17–158) and taught to youth (of both sexes), in both home-schooling and institutional educational environments. Over 60 textbooks, grammar books, dictionaries and anthologies (“readers”) were used, and in schools, the number of class hours dedicated to teaching the language reached up to 40 per week (Birn 1949: 386–389; Cieśla 1974: 88–109, 142–174, 198; Glixelli 1922: 155–159, 164–165; Zaleska-Stankiewiczowa 1935: 66–67, 105–106, 108–110, 132; Czapska 1958: 26–32; Brunot 1934: 470–471, 483–487). Today, it is difficult to determine the extent to which these efforts in Poland succeeded in making French into more than just a dead language, i. e., a very conventionalized language used exclusively in the context of transferring cultural and literary heritage considered to be universal (Fabre 1980: 305; Beauvois 1991: 358–364).

Such an education certainly contributed to a familiarity with the language, and moreover, a vision as to what function it was to serve, and a desire to use this language in specific social situations. Love correspondence, a genre at the intersection of practical, day-to-day communication (the need to arrange the date and time of a rendez-vous) and quasi-literary ambitions (expression of emotions), provides a meaningful example here: letters written to Adam Mickiewicz by Maryla Wereszczakówna, the love from the poet's youth, from the years 1822–1830, and by Joanna Zaleska, written in Odessa in the spring of 1828 (Kleiner 1848: 517, Pietrzak-Thébault 2011: 213–216).⁷

7 At Musée Mickiewicz, Paris, MAM 640, ff. 1–3, Library of KUL (Catholic University of Lublin), 733, f. 78. French originals have not been published yet. MAM 702, f. 1–2].

In modern Polish literary history, attention has been paid on more than one occasion to the transformations that the poet’s literary portrayal of his acquaintance with Maryla during his youth underwent, and the difficulty, or rather the impropriety, of separating reality from literary inspiration, and later – from legend. Wereszczakówna’s letters (actually, already Mrs. Puttkamer at the time) demonstrate, however, that a similar desire also existed on her side although her overtures, when viewed as a literary transformation of reality, were comparably more modest (cf. Stefanowska 2007: 7–12). The letters from Joanna Zaleska are, in turn, a testimony to consciously constructed emotional tension. The way in which both ladies used the French language is proof of a familiarity with literature of rather Romantic origin, as well as of a certain fluency in French sentimental rhetoric; however, it also betrays obvious deficiencies in grammar, phraseology and lexis (Pietrzak-Thébault 2011: 213–217).

The examples of modest texts originating from the fringes of literature help to understand the circumstances determining the choice of the given language. On this occasion, one can notice without difficulty the extent to which the language of a literary work is something other than language used by the common user (including a literary author) for communication purposes (cf. Beretta 2013: 9–10; Pirlot 2013: 37–38). This occurs even when a literary work is being written in the native language. This is because the language of literature is a conscious, artistic realization done in the matter of language, whether it be natural or learned (Casanova 1999: 16, 23, 63–64, 68).

2 Was the major Polish poet also a French-language writer?

It is simply impossible, while writing about Polish Romantic literature not to mention Adam Mickiewicz. We focus here briefly only on few, but very significant examples of the strictly literary field, leaving apart the conspicuous lectures on Slave literature from Collège de France (1840–1844), delivered in French, in the obvious Paris context (see Mende 2020: 50, Prussak 2011: 17–20). *Dziady* (1832) [Forefathers’ Eve], written around the same time as Krasiński’s prose, exemplifies how multilingualism can function within a single literary work. In scene VIII of the third part, the Russians, the Senator (Novosiltzov) and Baïkov as well as the traitor Docteur (Bécu), weave French expressions into their speech, thereby showing their alienness with respect to the Polish heroes of the drama. The French language takes on an unambiguously negative undertone in

this context. In conversation, those who are hostile to and have contempt for young Poles and their ambitions of independence use the French language (Stefanowska 1976: 135).

Another very interesting example of hidden bilingual writing can be found in an autograph n° 84 (Musée Mickiewicz, Paris). It was somehow “omitted” (“forgotten”?) by editors of Mickiewicz’s writings not only because of its complicated context, related to Towiański’s messianic ideology, but also because of a lyric distich in Polish is followed by a piece of French prose, probably being a poet’s version of another person’s. The text demonstrates an internal tension and reveals intellectual process occurring in two different directions and in two languages letter. (Szczeżłacka-Pawłowska 2013: 195). Apparently simpler but surely not better known and still very impressive are cases in which Mickiewicz uses in French in his last years. Who is the intended audience of *Conversations des malades*, a short prose sketch written in Constantinople where Polish, Hungarian, and French officers are discussing cholera morbus and attempting to find a remedy with the assistance of French cognac? The very illness described with much black humor in his last literary work killed the poet suddenly two weeks later (Pietrzak-Thébault 2013: 491–504; Stefanowska 2005: 75–77). Even more intimate testimony of Mickiewicz’s use of the literary French remains hidden in his notes. He copied some fragments of the Lamartine’s poem *Quatrième méditation. Le Soir* together with “titles”: *L’étoile* and *Inconsolé* by Gérard de Nerval. He put this literary collage on the same blue letter paper he took then to Constantinople. According to the testimony of his daughter, he did it at his wife’s deathbed. Visibly, the Polish poet considers French contemporary poetry the most appropriate remedy / way to express and a remedy for his own pain. But, at the same time, he was probably looking for a new literary expression, appealing to French contemporary poetry. Has, in the space of twenty years, the foreign language become so much intimate, so well-known that he could draw from it as from his native tongue (*Katalog...* 1996: 67–70; Pietrzak-Thébault 2018: 19–20; Suchet 2014: 40, 43)?⁸ It is not easy to understand the real meaning of these literary and linguistic “games”.

⁸ However, when he started to deliver his lectures in the Collège de France, in December 1840, he said this: “La langue française est pour moi comme une chaîne...”

3 Between two epochs

As already mentioned, reference to the French language did not have clear nationalistic connotations at the turn of the 18th century nor did it. Thus, the choice of the French language did not raise controversy, as it had primacy not only in diplomacy, but also in salon conversation and literature and philosophy. In the new era, in which the thought of Herder and then Schelling was widely propagated and strengthened, in which Byron became an obsessive point of reference for the literature created throughout Europe and in which the Romantic paradigm sought its identity in language and turned towards translations rather than towards universalism, using the French language required courage (Berman 1985: 21–22, 25–42, 101–103; Fabre 1980: 328; Zgorzelski 1961: 8). All the more so since reference to a classical idiom also entailed an attempt to transform it in accordance with the requirements of the aesthetic of new Romantic literature (Prussak 2011b: 423–437).

The French language was also considered a vehicle of literature associated with by a very high level of prestige, the one that transmitted and created classic European heritage (cf. Maingueneau 1993: 107). Thus, it was present in a Polish cultural area, treated not as an “example” but as a “source” (Rejman 2007: 241, 243, 246, 252). Though, the clash between the classics and romantics that occupied very much the literary and cultural life of Poles at the turn of the 18th century did not take up the question of language or languages (Wyka 1989: 169–170; Jędrzejewski 2016: 23–26). These debates concerned much more the nature of poetry in general than the existence of a “national” or “patriotic” element that it should contain (Jędrzejewski 2016: 21, 26–29, 49, 50). So, paradoxically, the multiplicity of inspirations and a new vision of literature could lead writers and poets also to look for new linguistic adventures in the same way they looked for new genres, new rules (or a lack of them...) of composition, and new syntactic or semantic experiments. Thus, a “foreign” learned language could become new artistic raw material, without provoking any ideological assessments or any theoretical debates on its existence or role (Suchet 2014: 42).

4 Zygmunt Krasiński as a French-speaking aristocrat

The voice of young Zygmunt Krasiński seems to be significant in these struggles (Berlin 1991: 39, 194; Pietrzak-Thébault 2013: 22–23). As an aristocrat and cos-

mopolitan, for whom the French language was naturally inscribed into the day-to-day practices of his environment, Krasiński did not have to deal with difficulties of a purely linguistic nature. Belonging to the aristocratic class meant (and means) belonging to a thin social layer of similar people, regardless of their country of origin. Therefore, this layer, while few in number, is present practically everywhere and has a distinctly cosmopolitan character (Czapska 2004; Pietrzak-Thébault 2019: 481–483). The very fact of belonging to this privileged group did not necessarily cause the works of a writer among its ranks to be classified as part of the literature of the country of his origin. However, the direct points of reference are changed because of this, as the circle of what is accepted as available, understandable, and finally, “own”, is widened (Prussak 2011b, *passim*). The ease with which the son of the Napoleonic general Wincenty, born in Paris and educated from his youngest years by a French governess, used the French language, puts his literary and language choices in a different light (Janion 1962: 24–25). It is in just such cases, when the boundaries between methods of using two languages are fluid and inconspicuous that the issue of the manner in which the writer creates gets pushed into the background (cf. Maingueneau 1993: 105–111).⁹

Meanwhile, the view of literature that had dominated for many decades until that time, as developing solely within the framework of a single language, made such a perspective practically impossible. Being the inheritor of nationalistic thought, from the mid-19th century and for many decades of the 20th century, this vision saw in literature the sole, justified expression of national belonging. Largely based on the idea of nation-states and criteria of belonging to them on the awareness of language, it remained faithful to this conviction for many long decades (Thiesse 1999: 83–94; Baggioni 1997: 74–77; Casanova 1999: 58–59).

The works of Zygmunt Krasiński, especially from the 1820’s and 30’s, were exploratory ones (Bałajewski 2018: 235–236), and as such can be read in context of the many conscious choices made by the author. Among these decisions, the issue of language as creative matter played a significant role. The French language appears next to the Polish language on equal terms (cf. Szczeglacka-Pawłowska 2015: 404–406).¹⁰ The “naturalness” with which Krasiński approaches

⁹ The value of a sculpture does not depend only on the fact if it is of stone or marble, of bronze or alabaster...

¹⁰ The new edition: Zygmunt Krasiński. 2017. demonstrated it very clearly. A chronological order of texts, regardless of the language in which they were written, was adopted. See in particular vol. 6.

and uses the French language arises not only from his cosmopolitan freedom of association with various high circles, but also his freedom of movement, ease of travel, and the possibility of choosing the places where he stays. This arises from a sense of belonging to a European cultural community, to the “common classical capital” (Casanova 1999: 28, 32, 37–38; Larbaud 1936: 11). This underlines the fact that literature, despite rising nationalist tensions, was becoming “pan-European” at the time, that it was at times detached from national or state affiliation to the detriment of no one (cf. Casanova 1999: 60).

The writer ostensibly only took style lessons from his Genevan teacher, François Roget (of whom he wrote in a letter to his father dated June 12th, 1830) and avidly read contemporary French literature (Szczegłacka 2005: 136, 144; Clément 1964: 183–184 and in nota). He is proud of that fact – at the time when the direct relation master / pupil seems to be definitely broken (Wyka 1989: 89–91, 141). Krasiński continues in the “classical” direction, using a “classical” language to create, paradoxically, one of the most romantic collection of texts in the Polish literature.

5 Between the Classical idiom and a Romantic expression

The young writer employs his mastery of the classical idiom and his skill in using this strongest and most far-reaching cultural tool of the time not to strengthen this idiom but rather in an attempt to dismantle it in search of a new language that would be “adequate”¹¹ for romantic themes, Byronic inspirations, and a new sensitivity expressed in sensations as a subjective experience, in the blurring of the boundaries between description and narration...

The French language is highly intellectualized, rational, and expresses thoughts precisely. Meanwhile, Krasiński, whose native tongue is undoubtedly more pictorial, uses French above all to create images. In crossing the frames and boundaries of his still nascent writing ability, he rejects easy and obvious choices. Yet, he does not always emerge victorious in these endeavors. He often suffers defeat, but has not a similar failure also been the lot of much French Romantic literature? For the new imagery had to yield to pressure from iron logic of French syntax and the centuries-old tradition of the skill and need of

¹¹ “Adequacy” – this is one of the key expressions used to denote what is desirable and proper in the French language and literature of bygone centuries.

clear leading of thought, speculative and narrative alike (Kraśiński 1963: 159). French literary language faced multiple dilemmas on the threshold of the Romantic era: how to develop an alternative to the “noble” style, how to deal with attempts to renew syntax, to inject romantic grandeur into the traditionally rigid, unchanging metric forms. This was not an unambiguous or easy period for French literary language (François 1959: 169, 175–179). This must be remembered when analyzing the struggles of Polish authors with this language, and of Zygmunt Kraśiński in particular. Kraśiński bravely “pushes the boundaries” of this language – “breaking” himself in the process.

The fact that the Count turned to the French language did not at all mean that he abandoned writing in the Polish language, and hence can be perceived as a courageous choice, betraying, despite the appearance of “youthful frivolity” a universal, universalist vision of literature, within reach of his quill (Kraśiński 2017: vol. 6/1 159–178, 187–204, 211–256, 269–409; vol. 6/2 15–96, 109–120, 135–370; vol. 6/3 11–243, 257–272, 498–522).¹² With these French-language works at our disposal, it is time to turn critical attention to these texts and their premises for an in-depth investigation. In doing so, these works, composed on the shores of Lake Léman (a place that has particularly made its mark on the European map of Polish literature)¹³ by the young writer, Count Zygmunt, can be restored to their rightful place.

Understanding the role that the French language played in Kraśiński’s development as a writer does not in any way depreciate his works in his native language. However, it does demand consideration of his works as a whole, and thus seeking their cohesion, with the need of arriving at this vision. So, this is one more piece of evidence indicating how significant this fragment of Kraśiński’s literary legacy is, both in the context of the entirety of his work (including his way of thinking about literature), and more broadly – in the European space of the new Romantic paradigm. The poet thereby stands in opposition to the general trend of separating “modern” linguistic and literary identity (Casanova 1999: 60–61; Berlin 1991: 307; Berlin 2004: 71–73, 85–107, 140–141, 192–194; Wyka 1989: 40–51, 77, 85), and explores the extent to which universal expression is capable of adapting to new literature. Deliberate contraction of them

¹² See the new edition of the writer’s works, which, thanks to a chronological arrangement of works of similar genre, makes it possible to perceive the interpenetration of plots and construction of parallel artistic visions in two languages, which is of particular significance precisely in the context of a global assessment of poetic prose.

¹³ See the outstanding *Liryki Lozańskie* — *The Lemman Lake Lyrics* by Mickiewicz. Written in 1839–1840, these texts were only recognized as new, original, modern poetry decades later.

forms the basis of writing, in which a fleeting moment is juxtaposed with a description of that which seemed most permanent on Earth to the author (the peaks of the Alps). That the young writer (born only in 1812) immersed himself deeper in the practice of the French language and in the common classical civilizational community than other Polish authors of the time gives proof of his autonomy of thought and artistic courage through his choice of linguistic apparatus, which is only ostensibly obvious. This did not mean in any way that Krasiński wrote French literature from spirit and tradition. Most texts contain an epigram from Byron, to whose poetry Krasiński directly refers. Stories set in the Middle Ages clearly relate to the Walter-Scott narrative, building the Romantic vision of that literary era (Berlin 2004: 194–196).

6 What really happened on the banks of Lake Léman?

The bulk of Zygmunt Krasiński's work in French was written in Geneva, where the poet stayed intermittently between the fall of 1829 and the summer of 1832. He did not arrive there as a renowned author, certainly, but not as a beginner either. In Warsaw he had written and published prose poems, historical short stories and a longer historical novel, as well as a translation of Byron's *Parisina* (Markuszevska 2021: 26). However, he showed no indication of an exceptional talent for writing. The very intense years in Geneva resulted in a set of about fifty texts. The vast majority of them are short texts, which can be defined as poetic prose (Markuszevska 2021: 27). Many texts are, as we have already mentioned, “impressionistic” descriptions, or very brief reports of simple episodes or events which are presented as something experienced by the narrator (or claimed to be so), while the others have a narrative character, revolving around a protagonist, presented in the third person (“he”), who remains anonymous. There is also a collection of texts, all of them of a narrative character, set in a medieval setting and showing Walter Scott's influence on the writer, an influence which was already present in the Polish beginnings of his work, it is evident that this process continues in his French works. Still, other texts are plunged into a frenetic, dark and gloomy atmosphere, in a strongly gothic vein (Pietrzak-Thébault 2020: 343–356). Three texts are longer: two short stories: *Adam le Fou* [Adam the Fool], *Le Cholera*, and the *Journal* (Szczeglacka 2005: 155–159), a report of a long excursion to the Alps in August 1830. *Adam le Fou* is

indeed a multilingual creation as it has in fact two versions: neither of them is not the translation (or rather a ‘self-translation’).

The difficulty in defining these texts stems from the extremely uncertain, not to say vague, character of their genre and of the overall picture they create. Critics and literary historians usually emphasize this fragmentary, uncertain, chaotic character of Krasiński's Genevan legacy (Szczeglacka 2005: 130–133, Szczeglacka-Pawłowska 2015: 409–414). The reading usually gives the impression of something more than just an academic, stylistic, and even rhetorical exercise (Wyka 1989: 89–91, 141, Kowalczykova 1987: 67–74, 95–97).

The internal world of the many texts is also vague: geographically speaking, space is not defined: it can be a flowery path, the vicinity of a chapel, a cemetery, even “a corner” of the cosmic spheres. Time can be limited to a short moment before sunset, to a brief encounter, or it can extend over tens or even hundreds of years. Sometimes there are, all the same, very concrete references to places, such as the foothills of Mont Blanc, the banks of Lake Geneva, the surroundings of Geneva, the Sallanche pass. In most cases, however, the images are barely specified, leaving room for impressions, feelings, descriptions, maybe memories, full of shadows and colors. Such is the case in the text *Le coucher du soleil sur le Mont-Blanc. Extrait du journal d'un voyageur* [The Sunset on the Mont-Blanc. Extract from the diary of a traveler] (Krasiński 2017: 6/II: 111–120; Krasiński 2021: 167–169)."

Et je vis lutter le rayon contre l'ombre. Ce fut une agonie lente au commencement, rapide vers la fin. Des flots d'étincelles éblouirent la vue ; elles semblaient s'animer de plus en plus, mais toujours en se retirant vers le sommet ; et quand elles l'atteignirent, elles s'arrêtèrent encore un instant, comme si forcées dans leur dernier poste elles voulaient dignement se défendre. La nuit le poursuivait de l'aile de la destruction ; le combat fut court ; il sembla que tous les rayons, jusqu'au dernier, périssaient. Une contraction de douleur, une teinte blanchâtre et livide se répandit sur tous les cotes de la montagne, et tout était dit ; le jour n'était plus

[And I saw the ray fighting against the shadow. It was a slow agony at the beginning, rapid towards the end. Streams of sparks dazzled the view; they seemed to become more and more animated, but always retreating towards the summit; and when they reached it, they stopped again for a moment, as if forced into their last position they wanted to worthily defend themselves. The night pursued him with the wing of destruction; the fight was short; it seemed that all the rays, until the last, perished. A contraction of pain, a pale and livid hue spread over all the sides of the mountain, and all was said; the day was no longer] (Krasiński 2017: 6/II 112; Krasiński 2021: 168).

Here, as so often, Krasiński resorts to the method of personification — but he does it in his own way, uniting description with the narrative. Nevertheless, either the brief descriptions of the poetic prose, or the much more detailed ex-

planations of the *Journal* about the excursion to the Alps, reveal a great ability to observe, to impart color and movement to scenes, which are vivid still before the eyes of today's readers. However, the reader is often abandoned at the border between what is certain and what appears to be barely sketched out, even provisional.

As for the uncertain indications of time within the literary texts, it is countered by statements indicating the date, and often the exact time of the alleged composition of the text, almost always placed at the beginning of the texts. Is this a true fact or rather a literary game that the young author plays with his reader? Are they paratexts or should the reader see them as an integral part of the work?

28 octobre, Genève, 1830

Farewell – farewell! And it for ever

Still for ever, fare thee well.

Byron

L'heure du départ est proche ; les chevaux trépignent d'impatience ; l'air est frais, la route semée de feuilles d'automne ; le voyageur roulera doucement au-dessus. [...] Beau Leman ! [...] J'ai vogué sur tes flots bleus quand le soleil était à son midi ; sur tes flots rougeâtres, quand à son couchant, il s'environnait de gloire ; sur tes flots pâles et sombres quand le crépuscule s'étendait au-dessus. [...] La brise est fraîche, elle aura bientôt sèche cette larme qui coule sur ta joue ! Partons ! Les feuilles d'automne couvrent le chemin ; le voyageur roulera doucement au-dessus, et le sommeil endormira ses regrets

[The hour of departure is near; the horses tremble with impatience; the air is fresh, the road is strewn with autumn leaves; the traveler will drive gently over it. [...] Beautiful Leman! [...] I have sailed on your blue waves when the sun was at its noon; on your reddish waves, when at its sunset, it surrounded itself with glory; on your pale and somber waves when the twilight extended above. [...] The breeze is fresh, it will soon dry this tear which runs on your cheek! Let us leave! The autumn leaves cover the path; the traveler will roll gently over it, and slumber will put his regrets to sleep] (Kraśiński 2017: 6/II 241–244; Kraśiński 2021: 207–210).

The fragmentary character, perceived either at the level of each text – even underlined by the titles *Fragment d'un rêve* [Fragment of a dream], *Fragment d'un journal* [Fragment of a diary], or just *Fragment* – or of the entire corpus is surely deliberate. All this reveals a strong need to search for a new and clean literary expression. Kraśiński acts, from the very beginning, as a – modern – Romantic writer in his own right. He finds everything on his own through his readings and quickly understands one of the most important characteristics of Romantic writing and puts it into practice (Zgorzelski 1978: 160–162, 178, Kurska 1989: 16–18).

His world, like his writing, is composed of “fragments”, which becomes its true value. Poetic prose – absent so far in Polish literary practice – conveys a well-considered artistic vision in the writing of the young Kraśiński. It is perfect

in its expression but certainly not in the sense of leading to an artistic masterpiece (Kurska 1989: 33–35, 38, 47–50). What we are talking about is a perfection of artistic creation which pretends, feigns writing a real diary by building a literary creation out of real episodes. Yet the distance between one and the other is maintained, especially when the writer resorts to the character presented in the third person: the anonymous “he” (Szczeglacka 2005: 135–137, 144–145, Szczeglacka-Pawłowska 2015: 35, 407–409; Kurska 1989: 48–49).

7 Writing alone or with / for others?

Rarely does he go on to become the narrator of his own sentimental, aesthetic, and spiritual “adventures”. If critics have widely debated the undeniable value and complexity of this literary construction, they have not paid much attention to the fact that most of the “Genevan” texts are written in French. Looking at the context of this creative work perhaps allows us to understand this enigma. Up close, the multilingual context expands even further. For the most part, we can attribute the work to three British people: the poet G.G. Byron (Kurska 1989: 16, 56), Henriette Willan, with whom the author fell passionately and ‘emphatically’ in love, and, above all, Henry Reeve (1813–1895), a British journalist and translator. Byron appears as the author of several epigrams in Krasiński’s texts – he introduces here a real literary and poetic context in which the texts were written (see above).

His friendship with the young Englishman, Henry Reeve, endowed with a deep poetic sensibility who later became an important figure in the intellectual life of England throughout the 19th century (Kallenbach 1902: XVI–XVIII, XXV–XXXVII, Markuszewska 2018: 19–26), gave rise to lively abundant correspondence (about five hundred letters exchanged in the space of two years 1830–1832), in which both young people wrote about their tastes, readings, and feelings, but above all their literary experiences of the time. The letters, written in French, but with important insertions and poetic quotations in English allow us to perceive not only the intensity of the relationship between these two young people, but also that of creation – above all of Krasiński. It would be very careless to neglect the role of this long-lasting friendship and the letters documenting it. Krasiński wrote in French to give his friend a chance to read his own works. Thus, the language of their daily communication, confessions, exchanges of readings also became the language of artistic expression.

L’Étoile [The Star] is among the texts that were sent directly to Henri Reeve, the version in the *editio princeps* (1831) varies slightly from it, and the version

published in Paris in a Polish magazine (1834) is yet different. It is also one of those examples in which narrative and description are perfectly united, in which the main literary process consists of personalizing the protagonists who are at the center of the composition. Moreover, it is a good example of Krasiński's French style: somewhat emphatic, accumulating synonyms, ensuring an elegant and complicated syntax, never exceeding the limits of good taste.

De temps en temps il disparaît une étoile des cieux. On la voit briller pendant des siècles ; puis vient un moment où l'œil ne l'aperçoit plus parmi ses compagnes. [...] Vous avez-vous-même contemplé sa course aventureuse, comme elle traversait l'azur, météore d'un instant, faible comme le débris d'un globe puissant dispersé autrefois dans l'espace, belle comme un monde nouveau au jour de sa naissance, et pourtant destinée à périr quand ceux qui l'observaient croyaient une aurore. [...] Oui, c'était une jeune comète ; échevelée, flamboyante, indomptable, effrénée, elle s'élança d'un bout du ciel à l'autre, sans compter les années de marche, sans compter les myriades d'obstacles, ne voyant, n'adorant que son but, et poursuivant ses fins

[From time to time a star of the heavens disappears. One sees it shining for centuries; then comes a moment when the eye no longer sees it among its companions. [...] You yourself have contemplated its adventurous course, as it crossed the azure, meteor of an instant, weak like the debris of a powerful globe once scattered in space, beautiful like a new world on the day of its birth, and yet destined to perish when those who observed it believed it to be an early dawn. [...] Yes, it was a young comet; unbridled, flamboyant, indomitable, unrestrained, it launched itself from one end of the sky to the other, without counting the years of its march, without counting the myriads of obstacles, seeing, adoring only its goal, and pursuing its ends] (Krasiński 2017: 6/III 119–127; Krasiński 2021: 289–291)

Krasiński and Reeve exchanged about five hundred letters between 1830 and 1832. Much less numerous, but also significant, especially for the Polish poet's early stay in Switzerland, are the letters to his Polish friend, Konstanty Gaszyński (Szczeżlackska-Pawłowska 2015: 377–393). They are valuable to us because they allow us to see two versions of certain texts: in French and in Polish. Sometimes, as in the case of *Le soleil était derrière moi...* [The sun was behind me...], the Polish text follows the French one. It was sent in a letter to a friend in Poland, and then published in the homeland:

Le soleil était derrière moi et une des montagnes du Jura, qui couverte de noirs sapins et de neige, semblait un cercueil entouré d'un livide linceul prêt à s'appesantir sur moi ; tandis que devant mes yeux s'élevait le sublime Mont Blanc, dans sa robe d'un éternel hiver, et bravant de ses glaces de diamants tous les rayons d'un ciel de printemps

[The sun was behind me and one of the mountains of the Jura, which, covered with black fir trees and snow, seemed like a coffin surrounded by a pale shroud ready to cover me; meanwhile before my eyes rose the sublime Mont Blanc, in its eternal winter dress, and braving

with its ice of diamonds all the rays of a spring sky] (Krasiński 2017: 6/1 161 [161–163]; Krasiński 2021: 53 [53–55]).

In the case of the text *L'Exilé* [The Exile] the Polish version came first: it was written in February 1831, whereas the French one came a month later.¹⁴ Krasiński, therefore, is well aware of different needs of different readers and knows how to 'reinvent' himself in another language.

A particular osmosis of literature and correspondence, the constant presence of the epistolary element later became an important feature of Krasiński's entire work (Szczeglacka 2005: 145–148, Szczeglacka-Pawłowska 2015: 371–378). Inserting poems into private letters, writing several letters a day (and in different languages), created at the same time different visions of the events of one's alleged, already interpreted life. Sometimes contradicting each other, they revealed how the poet was taking life for literature and vice versa. This daily practice began in the years in Geneva.

At the same time, he did not write only for his friends. The so-called exercises in style were published extensively in the *Revue Universelle de Genève*. Some of these texts were also sent to Paris or Poland. Krasiński decidedly wanted to become a writer where he was. And where he was, people read in French. Since the autographs of his works are missing, the chronology of publications allows us to judge the intensity and evolution of this very particular way of writing (Szczeglacka-Pawłowska 2015: 414–415). This is a kind of writing, that plays with time, space, reality, friendship (Szczeglacka 2005: 148–154). Playing with languages is just one more element of this work.

Krasiński arrived in Geneva as a 17-year-old student who had previously written a couple of youthful texts. Soon after his departure, he wrote his most important masterpiece: the drama *Nie-Boska Komedia* [The Non-Divine Comedy] (1835). He continued his career as one of the most important authors of the first half of the 19th century. From then on, he wrote only in Polish, reserving French for political, critical and occasional writings and for certain letters. The Geneva "adventure" undoubtedly appears as an essential step on Krasiński's literary path: a unique path of an author and an important link in European Romanticism.

¹⁴ The Polish version was published in *Listy Zygmunta Krasińskiego do Konstantego Gaszyńskiego* [Letters from Zygmunt Krasiński to Konstanty Gaszyński], Lwów [Lviv], 1882 with a preface by the renowned writer, translator, and editor, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski.

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