

# Realpoetik in Poland

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In his book *Realpoetik. European Romanticism and Literary Politics* Paul Hamilton describes European romanticists as the successors of the ethos of the republic of letters, nurtured despite the grim historical reality which followed the fall of the great revolution. However, the open resistance against terror and dictatorship did not mean acceptance for returning to the old order. Poets and novelists went beyond national borders and the dominating ideologies, drawing elaborate, literary-political visions of future Europe thanks to using an alternative language of freedom, i.e. aesthetics which gained independence after the publication of the third critique by Immanuel Kant: “The Romantic transformation of the republic of letters recovers an older literary republicanism and stages its *ricorso*, rerunning it in terms fitting the new age (RP 24)<sup>1</sup>. Hamilton’s comparative reflection focuses on England, France, Germany and Italy, omitting – as usual – regions which are the most inaccessible, including Slavdom. A question arises to what extent the concept of a community of letters, i.e. “undogmatic public sphere” (RP 26), is relevant to the Polish literature, produced in a partitioned country, either under the despotic eye or in exile – in Rome, Paris or Dresden? Could the cosmopolitan debate regarding the future of Europe after the Congress of Vienna (which is Hamilton’s main point of reference) be of any attractiveness to writers who came from a country which Maurycy Mochnacki defined as “explored, pushed away from the stage of action” (LP 201)<sup>2</sup> whose inexistence was confirmed in the very first points of the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna?

<sup>1</sup> In the main text notes from Hamilton’s book are indicated with RP and the page number following P. Hamilton, *Realpoetik. European Romanticism and Literary Politics*, Oxford 2013. Other abbreviations used in this article include: LP – M. Mochnacki, *O literaturze polskiej w wieku dziewiętnastym*, in *Rozprawy literackie*, edited by M. Strzyżewski, Wrocław 2004; DŻ – *O duchu i źródłach poezji w Polsce*, in *Rozprawy literackie...*; ML – *Myśli o literaturze polskiej*, in *Rozprawy literackie...*; KM – *Kilka uwag o wpływie tłumaczeń z obcych języków na literaturę polską...*, in *Pisma krytyczne i polityczne*, edited by J. Kubiak, E. Nowicka, Z. Przychodniak, vol. 1, Kraków 1996; SK – *[O stronnictwie tak zwanym kaliskim]*, in *Pisma krytyczne i polityczne*, vol. 2; PB – *Pierwsza broszurka Maurycyego Mochnackiego. Co rozumieć przez rewolucję w Polsce?*, in *Pisma krytyczne i polityczne*, vol. 2; TN – *O terroryzmie nierozumu i obskurantyzmie politycznym*, in *Pisma krytyczne i polityczne*, vol. 2; RN – *O rewolucji w Niemczech*, in *Pisma krytyczne i polityczne*, vol. 2; PN – *Powstanie narodu polskiego w roku 1830 i 1831*, vol. 2, Poznań 1863.

<sup>2</sup> All translations of quotations (except for Hamilton’s book and unless indicated otherwise) mine, PZ.

Could this republic of letters be established by scholars from a puppet kingdom, which already in the twenties experienced the hardships of censorship, which meant that one could never be sure how many people had access to one's correspondence?

In search for the answers one has to go back to Hamilton's book. The ingenious term *Realpoetik* is an ironic reference to *Realpolitik* – calculation based on the relations of power is contrasted with a policy of creativity of a sort. Both “doctrines” also share the love for diplomacy, i.e. the art of compromising. However, as far as in case of *Realpolitik* the contrasts and differences always turn out to be ostensible or insignificant, the Romantic alternative (following the discredited and forgotten Spring of Nations) celebrates them. As Hamilton puts it: „in *Realpoetik* the interplay of differences musically establishes the new harmony” (RP 4), thus employing one of his favorite metaphors – the concert of superpowers. Artists look for forms which would allow them to fully express the diverse, often contradictory world views which were polarized following the revolution, proposing a valuable counterbalance for the political pragmatism, which was characterized by the reversed dynamic: it absorbed a variety of devices, subjecting them to achieving the subordinate goal, i.e. preserving the European order.

*Realpoetic...* is a conceptually coherent story about European Romanticism. The action takes place during the Congress of Vienna – the revolutionary enthusiasm and disillusion with it, the Jacobin terror and Napoleonic campaigns left an imprint on the works by the authors discussed in the book, including Germaine de Staël, Benjamin Constant, François-René Chateaubriand, Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, Friedrich Schelling and Giacomo Leopardi. However, the author is mostly preoccupied with the literary encasement accompanying the paradoxical process of bringing the old order back to the continent, as a result of which a completely new order was created: “everything had to change so that everything could remain the same” (RP 23). Although the public self-agency of poets seemed to be minor, as the initiative was taken over by seasoned yet controversial diplomats, ready to sacrifice the republican ideals for the sake of the balance of powers, such as lord Castlereagh, to whom lord Byron referred to as „intellectual eunuch”, “fine arteries butcher”<sup>3</sup>. In the light of the after-Congress relations, which would give birth to the idea of *Realpolitik* in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the views of the rebellious poets such as the author Byron were seen as detrimental in the worst case, and in the best – as insignificant to the social order. The scathing essay by Carl Schmitt on “political Romanticism” (1919) which presents the views of the German authors as naïve, secondary, and insignificant marked the peak of this line of argumentation<sup>4</sup>.

Hamilton argues with this style of thinking. The stamp *Realpoetik* on the works of selected romanticist authors means that they used fiction with “realistic” intentions, i.e. that fiction “fundamentally contributory to the purposes of non-fictional discourse” (RP 1). The works of Leopardi are an extreme example. However, as Hamilton claims „there is something about Leopardi's negativity that is profoundly positive” (RP 198). The poet is alienated from society, but at the same he is capable of sober assessment, “demonstrates an exemplary coherence

<sup>3</sup> G.G. Byron, *Don Juan*, translated by E. Porębowicz, Warszawa 1955, p. 430. The first term comes from the scathing dedication to the poem: G.G. Byron, *Don Juan*, w: *Poetical Works*, red. F. Page, London–Oxford–New York 1970. The second one is translated by me, PZ.

<sup>4</sup> See C. Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, translated by G. Oakes, Cambridge–London 1986.

in response to a loss of value” (RP 218), which is reflected by “the formal virtues of a verse capable of mastering inner chaos” (RP 194). In the subtle, figural interpretation mastering chaos transforms into a social diagnosis, and – predictably – a prefiguration of the future consolidation of Italy born in the poetic “proto-*Risorgimento* imagination” (RP 205).

Thus Hamilton strengthens the melodic lines of the great „concert of Europe” that interest him, bringing up the political aspect of literary fictions from the background. The stronger the sound of the poetic symphony, the more evidently absent – and so paradoxically audible – the foreign tone seems to be. This is a musician from the last row (a Pole, of course): “He purposely kept touching that/ traitorous string and breaking up the melody, striking/ louder and louder that angry chord, confederated against / the harmony of the tone”<sup>5</sup>. A motif borrowed from the most famous concert of the Polish Romanticism refers to the events of the Confederacy of Targowica which preceded the second partition of Poland. This context again encourages questions whether our literature, openly political, harmonizes more with the more ambiguous atmosphere of the concert of the republic of letters.

Hamilton often returns to the claim that political visions pushed into a corset of a literary form “do not sublimate the material of politics but, at certain moments, can be the substance of politics” (RP 24). This idea may seem to be groundbreaking<sup>6</sup> for a reader who was raised on *Prelude* by William Wordsworth, however for a reader raised on *Konrad Wallenrod* by Adam Mickiewicz it will not be sensational. *Realpoetik*, i.e. romantic “literary realism” (RP 38) has a research tradition in Poland, whose details of course diverge from Hamilton’s interpretative line. It is not about poetics based on mimetic aesthetics (typicality, probability, etc.), nor about the ideology promoting “progressiveness” in the depiction of historical process as in the 1950s discussions<sup>7</sup>. What I mean is the somewhat natural gift of the Polish romantic authors to „transform art into politics, and literature – into ideology”<sup>8</sup>, i.e. to translate them into “non-fictional discourses”. If the attempt at conceptualizing messianism as another version of *Realpoetik* causes resistance, this resistance is unjustified. Hamilton teaches a lesson in non-literary reading, thus explaining this tradition of interpreting thoughts of “a mystical politician”<sup>9</sup> who reaches for “practical meaning of mysticism”<sup>10</sup> who should be recalled in this context – then it turns out that “Romanticism is a fuller and braver version of realism than the epoch preceding it”<sup>11</sup>.

The high efficiency of the literary-political switch in the Polish Romanticism should make it easier to transplant the *Realpoetik* concept onto the Polish ground – and yet paradoxically it makes it more difficult. This results from the fact that Hamilton’s examples – especially the

<sup>5</sup> A. Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*, translated by George Rapall Noyes. London 1917.

<sup>6</sup> According to Rosa Mucignat. See R. Mucignat, *Review of Paul Hamilton, „Realpoetik: European Romanticism and Literary Politics”*, „Comparative Critical Studies” 2014 (October).

<sup>7</sup> Kazimierz Wyka can be treated as a representative attempt at conceptualizing romantic realism, K. Wyka, *O realizmie romantycznym*, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 1952, No 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> S. Pieróg, *Maurycy Mochnacki. Studium romantycznej świadomości*, Warsaw 1982, p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> A term by Wiktor Weintraub: „Applying the study into Redemption to politics is the most striking and best known characteristic of Mickiewicz’s political ideology”. W. Weintraub, *Mickiewicz – mistyczny polityk*, Warsaw 1998, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> B. Urbankowski, *Mysł romantyczna*, Warsaw 1979, p. 120.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 21.

German romanticists with their concept of Kant – are a negative, “aesthetic” benchmark for the formation of the ethos of civic poetry. According to a popular interpretation the reaction of the followers of Peter Petersen to the failure of the French revolution’s postulates was their sublimation, allowing to transform the promised liberties to the virtual artistic domain. Meanwhile, as Maria Żmigrodzka wrote trying to explain the lack of interest in irony which was the subject of broad contemporary discussion in the West, „the contemporary Polish poet was generally not looking for either freedom or overcoming the antynomy of ideal and reality in the sphere of art”<sup>12</sup>. The scholar conducted an aesthetizing reading of contemporary German Romanticism, referring to the seminal book by Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, which discusses the works of Schlegl, Teck and Novalis stressing “the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere: it is not its contents, problem, or idea itself that characterizes art”<sup>13</sup>.

As Hamilton argues the complete opposite, accepting *Realpoetik* in Poland would require abandoning the comfortable literary studies cliché, which kept the European scene in order: aesthetics and poetics (Germany), aesthetics and politics (us). At the same time Hamilton rejects the “autonomy of the aesthetic sphere”, even if this autonomy has the air of a quasi-political, paradoxical (egalitarian-elite) “republic of artists” as in the concept of Literary Absolute by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luca Nancy<sup>14</sup>.

Hence Hamilton believes that Schlegel “produces a poetics of the real rather than an aesthetic idealization” (RP 35). Schlegel unsurprisingly starts his argumentation from his early *Essay on Republicanism* (a review of Kant’s *On Perpetual Peace*), in which democracy is shown as *fictio iuris*, “a surrogate of common will”, a symbol of striving towards the elusive ideal of freedom. Thus the scholar sees in it “fiction whose fictionality makes the moral law real and not ideal” (RP 36), and as a result – a model attempt at breaking free from Kant’s imperative, which is impossible to incorporate into any constitutional structure – the majority does not equate the wishes of society, but merely mediates them in a way that make them more familiar. Hamilton’s discourse allows a double movement of ideas: it reveals the fictional spring of an openly political essay, only to reach out for a literary text moments later, in order to reveal its political motif. One characteristic example is the reading of the scandalous novel *Lucinda*, an aesthetic orgy, which was famously subjected to refutation by Søren Kierkegaard precisely due to its extreme anti-realism, “an attempt at undermining a given reality and replacing it with another one”<sup>15</sup>. Meanwhile Hamilton evidences the political subtlety of the text, trying to argue that the scandal it caused was related to the difficulties with accepting the equality of female sexuality, the „democratization of love” (RP 128). The author’s argumentation goes along similar lines in the chapter devoted to the emigration contexts of de Staël’s works, whose story should feel especially familiar to the Polish romanticists. Traveling, being forced to constantly be in motion, gives birth to such categories of imagination

<sup>12</sup>M. Żmigrodzka, *Etos ironii romantycznej – po polsku*, in *Przez wieki idąca powieść. Wybór pism o literaturze XIX i XX wieku*, edited by M. Kalinowska and E. Kiślak, Warsaw 2002, p. 201.

<sup>13</sup>I. Strohschneider-Kohrs, *Die Romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung*, Tübingen 2002, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup>See P. Lacoue-Labarthe, J.-L. Nancy, *The Literary Absolute. The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, translated by P. Barnard, Ch. Lester, New York 1988, pp. 69. Hamilton argues with the concept of „Literary Absolute” – see RP 14.

<sup>15</sup>S. Kierkegaard, *O pojęciu ironii z nieustającym odniesieniem do Sokratesa* [On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates], translated by A. Dżakowska, Warsaw 1999, p. 285.

in the title protagonist of *Corinna*, in whom all the best things from the Italian, French and English cultures are synthesized (RP 71) as: enthusiasm, mixture, mobility, accumulation, constituting the essence of de Staël's feminist cosmopolitanism.

I have mentioned that “domesticating” *Realpoetik* would require opening up to revisionist readings of the works of the German Romanticism. However, the difficulty that Hamilton places in front of researchers of the Polish Romanticism is more fundamental: the book was conceptualized as a novel about continuing attempts (of all the characters) at transgressing the antonymy of phenomena and things themselves, i.e. the critical reception of Kant's philosophy. Let us go back to it for a moment: Kant argued that humans are conditioned, subject to environmental necessities, which takes away their freedom, although they simultaneously belong to the unconditioned order of things and thus also remaining free: “I cannot cognize freedom [...] nevertheless I can think freedom to myself”<sup>16</sup>. It was rather not enough for romantics, which is why – as Hamilton explains – they took up and strengthened Kant's argumentation from the third critique, which gave voice to “our power in some sense to experience freedom” (RP 7). It is possible thanks to breaking free from the harsh judgment of the cognition force (theoretical reason) and the ethical imperative (practical reason) and delegating control to non-philosophical discourses, which can dismantle the phenomenal-noumenon trap not through speculation, but through “literary openness” (RP 35) – a romanticist uses aesthetics to real the unreal. In *The Critique of Judgment* the analysis of beauty and sublimity was the negotiation field, but it was Schelling who turned out to be the real author of “metaphysics of *Realpoetik*” (RP 17), who on each stage of his cognitive path “continues to rephrase his sense that philosophy cannot describe reality literally, and so has to delegate its authority to other discourses – aesthetic, theological, mythological – to accomplish its purpose” (RP 17).

Hamilton carefully positions his protagonists on this philosophical ground. His attitude towards Kant allows him not only to draw the subtle differences between authors who play in the same team (on different positions), but also to highlight the key opposition, over which Hamilton constructs his story – he contrasts the British romantics with “Kant's real heirs” (RP 2), i.e. continental romantics. For the former the appropriation of Kant's philosophy “was almost entirely psychological” (RP 1) and it led to subjecting oneself to the power of imagination, the *primum mobile* thanks to which the subject sublimed reality, whereas for the Jena romantics it was the opposite – imagination was not just the starting point, but also the answer to the historically motivated “the need for new forms of representation” (RP 8). The movement from one object to another, from reality to imagination, from practice to speculation – all this laid foundations for the new “literary realism” (RP 38), i.e. *Realpoetik*.

And thus new difficulties with assimilating this cognitive construction on the Polish ground emerge: poor reception of Kantianism in the Polish Romanticism (I mean literary rather than philosophical reception<sup>17</sup>), limited productivity, and consequently lack of clarity of the polemically conceptualized opposition of Britishness and continentality.

<sup>16</sup>I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated into English by P. Guyer, Cambridge 1998, p. 116

<sup>17</sup>See for example H. Hinz, *Kilka uwag o wczesnej recepcji Kanta w Polsce* and A. Walicki, *Polska recepcja Kanta w okresie międzypowstaniowym*, in *Dziedzictwo Kanta. Materiały z sesji kantowskiej*, edited by J. Garewicz, Warsaw 1976.

As Elżbieta Zarych put it, „the Polish researchers either ignore the question of the influence of Kant’s philosophy on the Polish romantic literature, or they completely deny its existence”<sup>18</sup>. Alternatively its impact can be presented only indirectly and it is typically related to the reception of “poetic Kantianism”, i.e. aesthetic writings of Friedrich Schiller<sup>19</sup>. In Germany the birth of the romantic literature was closely related to intense philosophical activity, whereas in the Polish reception the literary and the philosophical trends were typically separated from each other, due to the mistrust toward the intellectual nature of the latter. Mickiewicz’s preface to *Wacław dziejów* by Stefan Garczyński is telling; the poet was opposed to Hegel’s cognitive abstractionism (Hegel was the best known philosopher amongst the Polish romanticists). Mickiewicz used the tendential portrayal of the poet (who is broadly forgotten today) to formulate a harsh judgment: Garczyński, who attended Hegel’s lectures in Berlin immediately saw through his philosophy “and even explained it to some German professors”, he understood that “it was unkind to Poland” and contrasted it with the Slavonic philosophy “based on the heart”<sup>20</sup>. Later, in one of his Paris lectures Mickiewicz summarized the newest Teutonic thought (including Kant) in a superficial way, and partially on the basis of secondary sources, treating it as subordinate to the French social thought. He was critical of agnosticism and speculativeness of this philosopher, who “often seems to be detached from reality”, being comfortably seated “in a Slavonic country, which fed him and provided for him with tax money”<sup>21</sup>. This ethics-based (rather than content-based) negative approach stemmed from the mistrust towards abstract and general opinions of the alienated philosopher who knew little about life, a Robespierre of philosophy who guillotined God<sup>22</sup>. Hence it is not surprising that Mickiewicz would ally even with... Jan Śniadecki against Kant: “when it comes to Kant or Kantu (I don’t know how to decline his name), I would like to remind Śniadecki’s warning that Kant messed with a lot of heads [...]. Kant is always dangerous”<sup>23</sup>.

The insular-continental parallel as the basis for argumentation is another peculiarity of Hamilton’s book. *Realpoetik* is a campaign against unruly imagination, i.e. this „unfathered vapour”, as William Wordsworth put it in *The Prelude*. When arguing with Kant’s reductionist interpretation which led to the apotheosis of the British romanticists’ imagination, he also conducts a veiled polemics with the apotheosis of this apotheosis, i.e. an influential research tradition with Meyer Howard Abrams as its patron. “Freedom – transplanted to the regions of pure speculation or linguistic games –

<sup>18</sup>E. Zarych, *Romantycy, myśliciele, inspiratorzy. Badania nad wpływem filozofii niemieckiej – od Kanta do Hegla – na literaturę polskiego romantyzmu*, Gdańsk 2010, p. 40.

<sup>19</sup>Ibidem, p. 54.

<sup>20</sup>A. Mickiewicz, *Przedmowa*, in S. Garczyński, *Wacława dzieje. Poema*, Paryż 1868, pp. II, V.

<sup>21</sup>A. Mickiewicz, *Literatura słowiańska. Kurs trzeci*, in *Dzieła*, t. X, edited by J. Maślanka, Warszawa 1998, p. 213. However, a brief overview of the lecture on the German philosophy offers a more positive conclusion in Hamilton’s spirit – the out of touch with life abstractions of Kant are an introduction to something better: “in Schleiermacher, Schlegel and Schelling we see the dawn of a new idea for the German philosophy, the idea of community”. Ibidem, p. 223.

<sup>22</sup>Jan Garewicz discusses the Robespierre-Kant association in his paper *Kant i gilotyna*, in which he presents the history of this political-philosophical parallel – interesting from the perspective of *Realpoetik* – between Germany and France, discussed by Heinrich Heine, among others. Kant, as a destructor of the old order, was compared to Robespierre; Fichte – as the one who put “I” on a pedestal – to Napoleon, Schelling – as the one who wanted to synthesize the old and the new rule, matched the restoration rule. See J. Garewicz, *Kant i gilotyna*, in *Dziedzictwo Kanta...*, pp. 111-114.

<sup>23</sup>A. Mickiewicz, a letter to Franciszek Malewski [Kowno, 14/26 July 1824], in *Listy. Cześć pierwsza 1815-1829*, edited by M. Dernałowicz, E. Jaworska, M. Zielińska, Warsaw 1998, p. 317.

has been finally manifested by romanticists”<sup>24</sup>, which encouraged Abrams (as explained by Marek Wilczyński) to treat *The Phenomenology of Spirit* by Hegel as a “definition analogy of a poem about the stages of an individual’s development”, i.e. the matrix for *The Prelude*. In that case the “objection to the reservations to external circumstances”<sup>25</sup> in Abrams’s concepts is understandable. In this frame of reference Hamilton’s book seems to be a rehabilitation of the mirror metaphor (put aside when the metaphor of the lamp of imagination became popular), which however does not wander around unproductively and cannot be explained with a simple formula of mimetic presentation, but rather returns carrying the heavy baggage of contexts packed in the term *Realpoetik*.

Hence on the side of the main line of argumentation Hamilton deals with internal, British-British problems. And just as a Polish football fan (who does not know who Jimmy Greaves was) does not understand the mutual dislike of the fans of Chelsea and Tottenham, two London clubs (from non-adjacent neighborhoods), Hamilton’s criticism of “unfathered vapour” of imagination will be unclear to the Polish reader (who does not know who Abrams was). The evident irrelevance of the British Romanticism (elevation of imagination, different religious culture, etc.) to the Polish conditions encouraged Wilczyński to ask a provocative question without an answer: “do the Polish literature studies need Abrams at all?”<sup>26</sup>. One just cannot help but to paraphrase this question: do the Polish literature studies need Hamilton?

Maurycy Mochnacki was a romanticist distinguished by the fact that during different times of his activity he was interested in and well-acquainted with the works of all the protagonists of Hamilton’s book (maybe except for Leopardi). There is no doubt that this main literary critic of pre-November Uprising Romanticism and later the most important ideologist of the uprising had no problems with declining Kant’s name. Schelling’s philosophy of nature impacted all his work, his early cultural program was inspired by de Staël, Novalis i Schlegls, whereas later, during the Polish-Russian war he was convinced that Constant’s liberal doctrines... “will not be worth half a squadron of cavalry” (SK 89). Any attempt at a comprehensive description of Mochnacki’s works is faced with a challenge: his works are clearly divided into a literary phase (before the November Uprising) and a political one (during the uprising and after the insurrection), sanctioned by the author himself in the preface to the treatise *O literaturze polskiej w wieku dziewiętnastym* written right before the Polish-Russian war: “It is high time we stopped writing about art, as we are busy thinking and worrying about other things. We improvised the fundamentals of the national uprising! Our life is poetry” (LP 191).

The conceptualization of this breakthrough is more difficult than in the case of “the political and cultural turn in Schlegel’s thought” (RP 124). This member of the officer cadets’ conspiracy incites the crowds, co-creates Klub Patriotyczny [Patriotic Club], tries to stage a coup and create a revolutionary government, miraculously gets away with it without lynching, joins the regiment of shooters –all this happened over just a few weeks, which justifies the change of topic, tone, inspirations, and eventually the theses of Mochnacki’s articles. Internal contradictions which tear his work are often mentioned in this context. Mirosław Strzyżewski goes

<sup>24</sup>M. Wilczyński, *Historia literatury jako metafora. Romantyzm M.H. Abramsa*, in *Siła komentarza. Romantyzmy literaturoznawców*, edited by J. Borowczyk, W. Hamerski, P. Śniedziewski, Poznań 2011, p. 129.

<sup>25</sup>Ibidem, p. 127, 128.

<sup>26</sup>Ibidem, p. 135.



as far as to write about “the fall of the myth of romantic panpoetry”, “an astonishing paradox”, “a tragic dilemma” or “a personal drama”<sup>27</sup>. On the other hand there are also comments searching for continuity between the two periods in Mochnacki’s life, arguing – like Zbigniew Przychodniak – that poetic mythology was not definitely crossed out and “there is definitely no [...] crack in his literary-political activity, no breakdown into two separate parts”<sup>28</sup>. Thus the problem worth consideration can be put into questions, at the same time testing how useful the tools provided by Hamilton: How much *Real* does the early romantic *Poetik* contain, and, on the other hand, do the useful fictions created earlier co-create the reality of later works?

The question of Mochnacki’s „literary realism” concerns us in the context of engagement in „the realization of non-fictional discourse’s goals”, and not because of the traditional understanding of the term, which the Polish critic used in a pioneering way, which is worth remembering. In the treatise *O literaturze polskiej w wieku dziewiętnastym* the author uses the terms „realism” and „poetic realism” (LP 331-333) a few years before those terms started to function in the French novel discourse, as synonyms of the terms used previously, such as “real”, “woodcarving”, “figural”, “realistic” in the meaning similar to the modern one<sup>29</sup>. However, does our critic’s work have the “more generous realism” (RP 125) resource, hidden after the *Realpoetik* idea? It is hard to ignore the impression that Mochnacki’s writing temperament perfectly matches Hamilton’s vision of the romantic culture, which is confirmed in the synthetic portrayal of “the most modernist man in Poland in a lot of respects”? Exactly! Almost a hundred years before coining the term *Realpoetik* Stanisław Brzozowski interpreted the work of the most distinguished pre-November Uprising critic in this spirit. Hence, let me remind that for Brzozowski, Mochnacki is the only red-blooded representative of “masculine position”, i.e. “modern national realism”<sup>30</sup>. This engaged attitude was described as “an attempt at breaking into history”: the romantic critic “creates with himself, with all of his surface, his selfhood, entangled in a moment, in history”, presenting philosophy, literature and art with deeper connections, as “moments of emerging historical action, conscious living in one’s own nation”<sup>31</sup>. Mochnacki’s realism is characterized by incredible zealousness or, if we stick to Kant’s terminology, *Schwärmerei*, which goes beyond the moderate, diplomatically suppressed *Enthusiasmus* pointed out by de Staël or Schlegel. The difference stems from the historical *milieu*; it does not undermine the fact that the Polish critic belongs to the republic of poets, promoters of *Realpoetik*. To the contrary – it completes the gallery of attitudes towards the after-Congress order with an additional, previously ignored idiom.

In Brzozowski’s works this “selfness entangled in a moment” seems to be intensive and coherent, although the author mentions that when Mochnacki was fascinated with natural philosophy, “he could write this and another sentence that would contrast with what I am talking about here”<sup>32</sup>. In Mochnacki the ability to “break into history” becomes proficient after

<sup>27</sup>M. Strzyżewski, *Wstęp*, in M. Mochnacki, *Rozprawy literackie*, Wrocław 2004, pp. LXXXIV-LXXXVII.

<sup>28</sup>Z. Przychodniak, *Wstęp*, in M. Mochnacki, *Pisma krytyczne i polityczne*, edited by J. Kubiak, E. Nowicka, Z. Przychodniak, Kraków 1996, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup>See H. Markiewicz, *Dyskusja o realizmie*, in *Tradycje i rewizje*, Kraków 1957, pp. 45-47.

<sup>30</sup>S. Brzozowski, *Głosy wśród nocy. Studia nad przesileniem romantycznym kultury europejskiej*, Warsaw 2007, p. 232.

<sup>31</sup>Ibidem, pp. 240, 231-232, 237.

<sup>32</sup>Ibidem, p. 234.



developing the idea of “accepting oneself in one’s selfhood” (LP 234-235), showing a gradual arrival at reflection in nature, individuals, and ultimately – in whole nations, in which at first literature plays the role of a mediator, and after 29<sup>th</sup> November – political acts or actions.

The treatise *O duchu i źródłach poezji w Polsce* (1825) can be treated as evidently contrary to the rule of “modern national realism”. There Mochnacki is passionate about fighting with the “aesthetic split” (this is how he referred to the conflict between romanticists and classicists) and he controversially argues that “The Slavonic antiquity, northern mythology and medieval spirit are the sources of the Polish romantic poetry” (DŻ 42). This is wishful thinking, searching for a tradition that could play the role of the midwife for the modern Polish consciousness, constructing rather than discovering it. The ground was dubious: enigmatic ideas about historical Slavdom, cut off from written sources, medieval knight culture which had not developed yet in Poland, finally completely exotic stories of Odin, Freya and Thor... This peculiar vision of the future “Polish poetry” has been criticized since the very beginning due to its detachment from reality. Mochnacki miscalculated his attempt at “breaking into history” and so eventually instead he bounced against its surface. The thesis reviewer, Joachim Lelewel, a historian sympathetic towards romanticists (a few years later he would establish the revolutionary Klub Patriotyczny with Mochnacki)<sup>33</sup> also shared that conviction. After all, how reliable is an author who criticizes the Francophile taste of Stanisław August’s epoch for the lack of a “national feature” (DŻ 5), at the same time himself presenting a vision of Polish literature characterized by heavy Germanophile sentiment? In another paper written in the same year Mochnacki unmasked the negative consequences of translations from foreign languages, which according to him inspired unoriginal reflection, evoked “stagnation, not only in terms of language, but also in terms of imagination and thoughts” (KM 88) – whereas in the said treatise the critic himself broadly and systematically summarizes the Nordic mythology, known from *Poetic Edda*, which was translated a few years before by... Lelewel. Collecting evidence that would prove the inconsistency of Mochnacki’s ideas is easy, and moreover the peculiar syncretism of the postulated “Polish poetry” means that Mochnacki faces another risk, which – from the perspective of his worldview is a heavy accusation – namely that of being inorganic.

Inspired by Schelling’s conviction that “the depths of nature are the origins of a work of art, growing with definiteness and limitation”<sup>34</sup>, the critic presented a vision of the Polish culture that was subjected to the romantically overrated idea of mimesis<sup>35</sup>, based on the equivalence of organic growth and the creative process (inspiration as the analogy of the unconscious forces of nature), where mimicking is understood as “the creative, productive, life-giving process” (ML 143), unreduced to recreating “the beautiful nature”, i.e. external expressions or literary patterns of preserving them. This analogy has become intrinsic to Mochnacki’s language, disseminating organic metaphors, constituting – what Przychodniak will notice – a strong argument in favor of the continuity of conceptual categories in the pre- and after-

<sup>33</sup>Lelewel considered all of Mochnacki’s ideas as “non-national”, and he most strongly opposed importing the Nordic element. See J. Lelewel, *O romantyczności. Z powodu drugiego numeru „Dziennika Warszawskiego”*, „Biblioteka Polska” 1825, vol. 4, p. 186.

<sup>34</sup>F. Schelling, *O stosunku sztuk plastycznych do przyrody*, in *Filozofia sztuki*, translated by K. Krzemieniowa, Warsaw 1983, pp. 508-509.

<sup>35</sup>See M. Bąk, *Mimesis romantyczna. Teoria i praktyka w Polsce*

November Uprising literature<sup>36</sup>. The problem is that “the tree of national poetry” seems to be poorly rooted – can literature that would allow the nation to recognize itself in its selfhood grow out of the Polish-Nordic hybrid?

The evident arealism of the early concept of “the Polish poetry” was sometimes treated as evidence of ideological backwardness, and so completely contrary to the republican spirit of *Realpoetik*. Jerzy Szacki interpreted the early attitude of Mochnacki as evidence of anti-capitalist “hostility towards the present time”, heading towards its “complete and total rejection”, and as a result to Schiller’s “escape from reality”<sup>37</sup>. Although Szacki notices the nuances (the positive evaluation of the Middle Ages did not mean acceptance of feudalism, the past had a predominantly poetic value: “let us accept its value in terms of feeling and imagination”, (DŹ 74), nonetheless considering Mochnacki’s concept against gentry’s revolutionism, he placed it close to the conservative extreme identified with the German (pre) Romanticism. Szacki’s argument can be supported with, for instance, quotations from Novalis’s essay *Christianity or Europe* (1799): “Christianity must again be reborn and act above national borders, create a visible Church which [...] will become a mediator between the new world and the old one”<sup>38</sup>. And „those were beautiful, splendid days...”<sup>39</sup> – Novalis described his utopian vision in the autumn of 1799, depressed after learning about the cruelties of the secular revolution, not long before Napoleon’s coup. The literal interpretation of similar elegiac densifications is responsible for the adjective “incorrigible” becoming a collocation with “romanticists”.

But also in such moments – when the volume of fiction grows and the relationship with the political reality gets weaker – Hamilton does a conceptual switch and thus the interpretation clearly diverges, heading towards new conclusions: according to the romanticist it is exactly “fiction helps us get on terms with reality” (RP 152). “All I know is that the fable is a complete conceptual tool of my present-day world”<sup>40</sup> – Heinrich confirms. Stories which nourish the protagonist of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* refer to the legendary order (love in the mythical land of Atlantis), fable (the adventures of the personified Fable), or prehistorical (treaties on bones by the miner) – those are all volatile works of fiction, which Novalis attached to the main, quasi-historical narrative, in order to make it possible for it to go beyond the level of annalistic facts. Thanks to that the presented reality, i.e. the medieval roads, villages and towns during the time of crusades seems to be an illusion, “qualitatively escalated”: “The world needs to be romanticized. This way we can find the primal sense”<sup>41</sup>. In Hamilton’s understanding such a technique of presentation constitutes not only an expression of longing for Europe brought together, but also the recipe for achieving it, hidden after a figural (i.e. “romanticized”) veil.

<sup>36</sup>Z. Przychodniak, p. 21. This is a representative sample of Mochnacki’s thought from the inside of the organic metaphor: All the leaves on the national poetry’s tree, which was for a long time fossilized and mute, rustled. Something shook it with an invisible power from roots to the top, so that now it is rustling and moving its branches to the wind, and is humming and talking as if it broke out of a spell – a singing tree!” (LP 360).

<sup>37</sup>J. Szacki, *Ojczyzna – naród – rewolucja. Problematyka narodowa w polskiej myśli szlacheckorewolucyjnej*, Warsaw 1962, pp. 151-152.

<sup>38</sup>Novalis, *Chrześcijaństwo, czyli Europa* [Christianity or Europe] in *Uczniowie z Sais. Proza filozoficzna – studia – fragmenty*, translated by J. Prokopiuk, Warsaw 1984, p. 170.

<sup>39</sup>Ibidem, p.148.

<sup>40</sup>Novalis, *Henryk von Ofterdingen*, edited by E. Szymani, W. Kunicki, Wrocław 2003, p. 183.

<sup>41</sup>Novalis, *Poetyczmy*, in *Uczniowie z Sais...*, p. 202.

Novalis wanted to make “romanticizing” a method for achievable “breaking into history”, and so he presents the reader with a vision of “bringing together the cosmopolitan and nationalist strains in a federal idea of Europe” (RP 145). Its mood was supposed to be shared by the reader of the unfinished novel in which the circular fullness of the medieval time (the Crusader’s story, heading towards the sources of the Christian culture, and then going back home) was contaminated with the inevitability of the linear modern time (the ticking of the anachronistic clock in Heinrich’s middle-class house). The works of the poet who died in 1801 expressed the post-revolutionary climate, anticipating protests which eventually led to the reconstruction of the old order following the Congress of Vienna. In Hamilton’s reading the romantic dialectics of a fragment and a whole constitutes the figural description of Europe, at the same time Christian and national (and as such – deeply ironic), a mixture of universalism and particularisms whose synthesis, i.e. the True Holly Alliance constitutes the analogon of the romantic ideal of the novel: “it can eternally pose itself, and never fulfill itself”<sup>42</sup>.

Mochnacki remained under the spell of Novalis’s thought when he enthusiastically wrote that “thanks to the wings of imagination we are going to the epoch which can be named as the spring in the lives of nations or the beautiful dawn of newer times” (DŹ 28). Reinterpreting this regressive utopia in the spirit of *Realpoetik* seems to be easier than in the case of the German-speaking inspirers. The early cultural program of the author of *Myśli o literaturze polskiej* is not just a voice in the conflict with the classicists, but also an answer to the systematically growing pressure of the censorship in the Kingdom of Poland under the rule of Nicholas I and political repressions, which severely affected him as well. The critic absorbed and then instrumentalized the conceptual constructions of the western romanticists, which was explained with “the position of an ideologist, who – in Poland’s complex situation, based on the romantic terminological system – wants to justify the positive cultural program, and at the same time a negative evaluation of reality”<sup>43</sup>. The Warsaw adaptation of the German thought was about lowering the level of abstractness and making things more realistic through filling them with more makeshift contents. Obviously reducing Mochnacki’s program from “the republic of dreams” to *Realpoetik* still requires non-literal reading, i.e. assuming that the critic treated the sources of “the Polish poetry” that he listed as a field of inspiration rather than a model of indirect imitation (this assumption is recommended by Pieróg, among others)<sup>44</sup>.

The first out of three pillars of the program, “the spirit of the Middle Ages” represents a model of community which is not “a result of a social order” (one that dominated the post-congress Europe), but “a faithful picture of our moral powers” (DŹ 29-30, after throttling the aspirations of many nations, Europe became their caricature). The second pillar, “Slavonic antiquity”, modernizes the system in a modern spirit, introducing the dialectics of the whole (the medieval universalism) and the fragment (romantic particularism). Slavdom makes the ethical backbone of the model, indirectly reminding that the cosmopolitan ideal of Europe „beyond borders” will be false if the borders beyond which it should go are *de facto* gone or fictional (like in the case of Poland in the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna). And yet the vision

<sup>42</sup>F. Schlegel, *Fragments* [Fragments], translated by C. Bartl, edited by M. P. Markowski, Kraków 2009, p. 62.

<sup>43</sup>K. Krzemień-Ojak, *Maurycy Mochnacki. Program kulturalny i myśl krytycznoliteracka*, Warsaw 1975, p. 55.

<sup>44</sup>See S. Pieróg, pp. 74-75.

of unified Europe connoted by Schelling's nature-centrism or Novalis's Middle Ages was not completely unfamiliar to Mochnacki – let us not forget the famous paper *Romantyzm polski wśród romantyzmów europejskich*, in which Maria Janion argued that also in Poland “«sympathies» and *correspondances* rule the romantic universe”<sup>45</sup> and she placed our protagonist in the very center of that movement.

In this context the interest in “the northern mythology” – the third pillar of “the Polish poetry” – can be treated as a symbol of the free market of ideas; new, syncretic mythology constitutes the common currency of European romanticists. Although it did not exist, it was postulated by Schlegel in *Discourse on mythology*. The inclusion of Nordic elements into the structure of the future national poetry also has a local and pragmatic context. In the article, the north plays the role of an aesthetic lever whose length is adjusted to the weight of the object whose role it is to undermine – it is deeply rooted in the Polish literature unrequited love for models from antiquity and from France. By imitating de Staël in contrasting the Nordic north with the Greek-Roman south Mochnacki argued not only with the classicist radicals, but also with moderate reformers, promoters of the happy medium, such as Kazimierz Brodziński.

The turn towards the poetic past of the North powered the treaties with proto-revolutionary energy in a somewhat paradoxical way. Mythology constitutes an aesthetic equivalent of the barbaric force which “was not shaped by social relationships” (DŻ 26), but rather a force able to break down the “sensual egoism” of empires represented by the “scepter of Roman despotism” (DŻ 30). Hence *O duchu i źródłach poezji w Polsce* expresses an objection against the European *status quo* in a deeply allusional way, not without a subtle threat. The critic pretends to casually recreate a model history of the people who – let me use the more openly political nomenclature of a later treaties, *O literaturze polskiej w wieku dziewiętnastym* – at first “pushed off the stage of action” (LP 201), “starts to reflect” (LP 203) and “accepts itself in its selfdom” (LP 223). Let me add that “the wild imagination” (DŻ 21), “uncouth fictions” and “fat ideas” (DŻ 26), i.e. the famous Nordic grimness and fierceness perfectly express the hot-tempered spirit of Mochnacki's critique, a style of thought full of radical contrasts and raw ideas subjected to a constant goal – “pulling up to the bright national thought” (LP 224), and as a result regaining its right for self-determination.

Eventually it is not the organic metaphor (prone to deconstruction), but rather the inorganic pragmatism that integrates the works of “the most modern man in Poland”. Looking for ways of impacting readers, he undertook the threads of current discussions, referred to popular philosophies and latest literature, he used the resources he had at hand (which changed according to circumstances), without losing sight of the goal (which remained constant). The side effect of this method were local (on the level of one text) and global (between different text written over many years) inconsistencies, surprising thought-skips, inconsistent sources of inspiration. Mochnacki incorporated every new thread into his argumentation subjecting it to the subordinate category of critique, which “was a school of patriotism, it taught political imagination, exercised readers in independent, deeper perception of the world”<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>45</sup>M. Janion, *Romantyzm polski wśród romantyzmów europejskich*, in *Gorączka romantyczna*, Gdańsk 2007, p. 47.

<sup>46</sup>B. Urbankowski, p. 143.

One can risk a claim that already on the stage of formulating an early project of “the Polish poetry” there was evidence of Mochnacki’s legendary Machiavellianism, associated mostly with his political activity and journalistic writing at the time of November Uprising. The ideas of Niccolò Machiavelli are an important point of reference for the idea of *Realpoetik*. Hamilton believes that 19<sup>th</sup>-century writers learned from Machiavelli how to “see conflict between different interests in the same state as healthy, productive of internal strength” (RP 30). Of course they reinterpreted this idea according to the needs of their renewed republic of letters: “The romantic difference, mediated by Kant, is between the actual civil strife approved by Machiavelli and mental fight” (RP 30).

As Bronisław Łagowski wrote, at the time of the uprising Mochnacki practiced Machiavellianism, “considering politics only as a category of resources, i.e. taking it in the dimension of reality”, which allowed to “permeate the moralistic integument, ideological, religious or magical, which usually covers political practices”<sup>47</sup>. Mochnacki’s understanding of a revolution evolved with events, but he remained faithful to one conviction: “Revolution is a skill” (PB 33). Pragmatism translates into real and frequently controversial decisions (such as supporting a coronation conspiracy). It is also what drove Mochnacki when he wrote that “the terrorism of political non-reason” (TN 41-42), i.e. indecisiveness, obscurantism, as well as ideological over-organization of the leaders of the uprising, is far scarier than “the terrorism of factions” (Danton’s and Robespierre’s) and “the terrorism of genius” (Napoleon’s). Mochnacki sought the way to the end beyond the ideologies of factions, and even beyond political doctrines. He admitted it openly while working on the account of the uprising: “It was necessary to give something to Nicholas: either with the iron energy of absolutism, which he would not be able to digest, - or the systematic Jacobinic energy, implacable, horrible, bloody, - or finally with a dynasty” (PN 384).

In the face of his readiness to use such radically different means, the tensions between politics and poetry become more subtle, visible in, for example, *O rewolucji w Niemczech*. Mochnacki used the ineffective attempt at a coup in Frankfurt (revolutions in Germany and Poland are “like two interlocked wheels”, RN 187) as a pretext to analyze the state of the contemporary German society. Mochnacki saw the reason behind failures in the same thing that he previously saw as strength: “Germany is a *par excellence* philosophical, literary state” (RN 192). He claimed that the transcendentalism of philosophers “disaccustomed people from seeing things in a practical way”, thus making revolutionary impotents from Germans, only able to think “about a purely rational state” (RN 194). This is what he wrote about his former master’s – Schelling’s – philosophy: “A mind whose greatness can sustain a deduction such as A equals A [...] could probably – if it turned towards practicalities of life – wake up its nation from a dream” (RN 195). Mochnacki also disdained the German literature for its love for the Middle Ages in a hidden palinode which was about literal reading of his own theses “on the sources of the Polish poetry”: “Revolution and literature are two completely contradictory things. Literature irritates, kills time: this is why it is one of the great vehicles for restoration” (RN 197).

<sup>47</sup>B. Łagowski, *Filozofia polityczna Maurycego Mochnackiego*, Kraków 1981, pp. 155, 157.

The author concludes with the following punchline: “in the Frankfurt revolt the whole effeminacy, softness of the German character escalated”, only to immediately weaken it by adding that not all hope is lost: “But this is only the first attempt. They will grow manly, they will grow fierce. In this era fierceness will become an asset” (RN 197). Mochnacki’s line of thought is indeed intriguing! By distancing himself from the temptations of the idealized Middle Ages and pagan mythology (now they are symbols of effeminacy and obscurantism) he saves the Nordic fierceness, literally pointing out to its political function, which was alluded already in *O duchu i źródłach poezji w Polsce*. Revolutions do not need soulful skalds or troubadours (like in Novalis’s novel); they need fierce Christians, full of neophytic enthusiasm and with a barbarian twinkle in the eye (let me remind: Christianity gave “a poetic feature to what was left of paganism”, DŻ 17) – people who have not yet forgotten how to tear down empires.

The idea of *Realpoetik* holds together both sides of Mochnacki’s works, and it makes it easier to see that “politics without dogmas”<sup>48</sup> is justified in earlier, literature-oriented criticism without dogmas, even if sometimes it denies it on the surface. The Polish “exercise of the political imagination” (RP 139) is inevitably marked with the local specificity – the author who contemptuously talked about “rugged scrap from Vienna”<sup>49</sup>, is looking for “pragmatic compromise” (RP 36) not in the backstage of the dancing congress, but in the provinces of the empire, dressing up the scheming against despotism first in metaphorical literary constructions, such as “the Polish poetry”, and later in the Machiavellian “system of a revolution”. Thus eventually *Realpoetik* may be useful for a Polish scholar of literary studies, although not for convincing him about the discrete realism of romantic fiction. The benefits from literature will be surprising and unpredictable for the author. Firstly, politicizing European Romanticism (especially the German one) makes it more familiar: it weakens the sense of strangeness and encourages comparative studies, i.e. the post-romantic dialectics of the fragment and the whole, which heads towards defining our place in the European union of Romanticisms. Secondly, the whole force of Hamilton’s argumentation whose aim is to convince an English-speaking reader that “poetry leads to politics” (RP 219), should be intercepted and reused: one could remind the holders of the strongly politicized picture of the Polish Romanticism about the functions of poetics: both initial and evaluating the final results.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

<sup>48</sup>See S. Pieróg, p. 176.

<sup>49</sup>M. Mochnacki, *Towarzystwo Patriotyczne. Posiedzenie d. 16 stycznia*, as quoted in: S. Pieróg, p. 180.

# KEYWORDS

politics

MOCHNACKI

romanticism

**ABSTRACT:**

In his book *Realpoetik...* Paul Hamilton presents an ingenious attempt at a revision of European Romanticism. This comparative study interprets the works of German, French, and Italian romanticists as a strong, allusively politicized (for Hamilton the conditions and consequences of the Congress of Vienna are the most important context) development of the former ethos of the republic of letters, and at the same time evidence of polemic reading of Kant's philosophy, especially *Critique of Judgment*. The paper attempts to present the usefulness of Hamilton's concepts in the reflection on the Polish romantic literature. There are many obstacles that prevent an easy assimilation of *Realpoetik*, the title idea, such as poor and typically distrustful reception of Kant's philosophy, the limited liveliness of the British literary contexts (which are Hamilton's major negative point of reference), and, perhaps most importantly, the heavily political Polish Romanticism. The example of Maurycy Mochnacki allows to show that despite the difficulties with applying the theses from *Realpoetik...* on the Polish ground, they can still prove to be inspiring in reading the works of the Polish romanticists, and moreover, they complete the picture presented by Hamilton with an important, Slavonic perspective.



a e s t h e t i c s

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