

# Mickiewicz's Pretexts, or Comments on the Margins of Archival Research\*

Helena Markowska-Fulara

ORCID: 0000-0003-1219-3084

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## Margins

This article was written during quarantine (hence the somewhat limited bibliography), but it is a result of nearly four years of research in the archives and libraries in Vilnius and Krakow. My research focused primarily on literature courses taught at Vilnius University. Thus, I wandered on the margins of what literary scholars usually do (browsing through student notes, reports from faculty councils or library reports) and I did not intend to make spectacular discoveries at the center of my field of studies. While I believe that working on the periphery is worthwhile in itself, coming across a “big” name, for example, the name of Adam Mickiewicz, was nevertheless exciting.

I experienced such joy in the Lithuanian State Historical Archives while I was reviewing examination reports of the Department of Literature and Liberal Arts. On page 10 of manuscript No. 1114, I read: “The Dean opened the session with the presentation of the candidate Adam Mickiewicz.”<sup>1</sup> The examination report includes questions on the history of Greek literature, mythology, “the study of antiquity” and Roman antiquities (asked by Professor Gottfried Groddeck), aesthetics, poetry and rhetoric (asked by Leon Borowski), the history of Russian literature and the Russian language (asked by Professor Jan Czerniawski) and logic (asked by Father Anioł Dowgird). It should be emphasized that both questions and answers were in three languages: Latin, Polish and Russian. They provide us with an insight into Mickiewicz’s literary consciousness. However, questions on aesthetics, poetics and rhetoric, i.e. questions on the nature of art, including literature, and the structure of a literary work of art, are particularly interesting for a literary scholar.

Before I examine them in more detail, I shall discuss questions that were easier to answer. It has been known that Mickiewicz’s examination report, hidden among many other reports, exists. The date of the exam and the fact that such an examination report was made are recorded in *Kronika życia i twórczości Mickiewicza*<sup>2</sup> [The chronicle of Mickiewicz’s life and work]. It is also mentioned in *Kronika...* that the latter is discussed in *Korespondencja Adama Mickiewicza* [Adam Mickiewicz’s letters], published in 1885 in Paris, although it should be noted that the volume of this edition is not quoted correctly, which makes it more difficult to find the right text.<sup>3</sup> *Korespondencja* also contains other documents from the Vilnius University archives. Indeed, in order to get to know the exam questions one does not need to visit Lithuania or decipher microfilms – the digital version of the text is available online.<sup>4</sup>

This discovery, which was not really a discovery, raises the question of why, as far I know, contemporary researchers were not interested in Mickiewicz’s pre-text. In order to answer this question, at least partially, we must refer to the foreword to *Korespondencja*. The motivations of the publisher who published the documents in the 1880s in Paris are easy to understand. In the *Foreword*, Władysław Mickiewicz argues that the letters written by the poet’s friends should be published because they constitute “a very valuable source for Adam Mickiewicz’s future biography.”<sup>5</sup> He further observes: “For the greater convenience of future biographers, we also present the documents concerning the Mickiewicz family.”<sup>6</sup> Although further reasons for publishing all documents related to the Polish bard are not convincing and have little in common with the examination report (Władysław declares that he published everything, because the manuscripts, especially letters, were published without his consent and knowledge anyway, and he wished to put an end to harmful “anecdotes”), they explain that the publication was motivated by biographical inquires. University files and reports were apparently

<sup>1</sup> Lietuvos valstybes istorijos archyvas (LVIA, Lithuanian State Historical Archives), manuscript. f. 721 o. 1 no. 1114, k. 10r. Contemporary spelling.

<sup>2</sup> *Kronika życia i twórczości Mickiewicza. Lata 1798–1824* [The chronicle of Mickiewicz’s life and work 1798–1824], ed. Maria Dernałowicz, Ksenia Kostenicz, Zofia Makowiecka (Warsaw: PIW, 1957).

<sup>3</sup> *Korespondencja Adama Mickiewicza* [Adam Mickiewicz’s letters], vol. 4 (Paris: Księgarnia Luxemburska, 1885), 42–43. Vol. 1 is given in *Kronika*.

<sup>4</sup> On the website of the National Library “Polona.”

<sup>5</sup> *Korespondencja, Przedmowa* [Foreword], no page is given.

<sup>6</sup> *Korespondencja*.

considered important, since, as evidenced by a relevant footnote, they were extracted from the Prince Władysław Czartoryski archives.<sup>7</sup>

We thus interpret this and other texts, often discovered and published in the nineteenth century, in a particular context, one that is archaic and has little in common with literary studies. When we read them in the context of the publications on Adam Mickiewicz's life or letters, it is implied that they will primarily provide us with information about what Adam Mickiewicz did on May 29, 1819. The examination report appears to be an interesting secondary source, at best, because Mickiewicz's exact words are not recorded in it – it only records the exam proceedings and questions. Therefore, we should ask if and how this document may become relevant in literary studies.

### Laboratory: Probable history

I did not find Mickiewicz's examination report in the Lithuanian State Historical Archives by accident or without prior research. Indeed, I analysed the reports of the Department of Literature and Liberal Arts to gather as much information as possible about the rhetoric and poetry course taught at the university, first by Euzebiusz Słowacki, and then by Leon Borowski. I was interested in all examination reports and not only in the exam taken by Mickiewicz, which seems to be the most interesting to the modern reader. The very fact that such records exist is discussed in a little-known article by Anna Kaupuž, published in the Lithuanian journal *Literatura* [Literature].<sup>8</sup> Kaupuž also names the archive in which they are kept. In her article, the scholar examines Slavic philology (i.e. Polish and Russian literature) courses at Vilnius University<sup>9</sup> and analyses exam questions to reconstruct Leon Borowski's views on literature. However, she does not mention that Mickiewicz took this exam as well.

Kaupuž's article demonstrates that the same document may be used differently in different contexts: the scholar uses it to describe the history of an academic institution. The biographical and institutional perspectives employed to analyse Mickiewicz's examination report could not be more different from one another. The first perspective appears to be outdated today, while the second perspective is not particularly encouraging for the researcher (it involves a long and difficult research process) and the reader (no spectacular findings are described). The analysis of dozens of exam questions allows one only to determine more or less the issues and problems discussed in Borowski's course and his eclectic views on aesthetics, which were in fact typical of late classicism.

Kaupuž's article provides a theoretical and methodological framework for analysing the exam questions, but it is also important for another reason. The researcher tries to reconstruct the

<sup>7</sup> *Korespondencja*, 41.

<sup>8</sup> Anna Kaupuž, "K woprosu o problematike kursa literatury w starom Wilniuskom Uniwersitietie", *Literatura*, no. XIII (3), (1970).

<sup>9</sup> Her unpublished Ph.D. thesis is also devoted to this topic. It is an invaluable source of knowledge about manuscripts related to Vilnius University. I had the opportunity to read the typescript of the Ph.D. thesis courtesy of Dr. Irena Masojć.

expected answers using study notes made during Borowski's lectures, which are also deposited in the archive. The notes focus on aesthetics, and the respective sections of the text correspond to some of the exam questions. This peculiar experiment, combining questions and answers, may also be used in a more precise analysis of Mickiewicz's questions.

Before I analyse them in more detail, however, the mode of matching questions and answers should be verified. Upon closer analysis (i.e. when we compare this document with an identical manuscript found in the Vilnius University Library), the manuscript which Kaupuž considers to be study notes turns out to be a fragment of a translated textbook used by professor Borowski.<sup>10</sup> The issues discussed in the extract from the original German textbook correspond to the questions on aesthetics Leon Borowski asked during the exam. The questions on poetry and rhetoric are more difficult to reconstruct, as we do not have access to a document which summarizes these parts of the course. The original German textbook may be helpful: literary genres are discussed in the second part of the book. Finally, the third source which may provide us with some clues are Eusebiusz Słowacki's essays *O poezji* [Poetry] and *O wymowie* [Rhetoric] published in *Dzieła z pozostałych rękopismów ogłoszone* [Other published manuscripts].<sup>11</sup>

Słowacki, the head of the Department before Borowski, prepared handwritten notes for his university classes. They were published between 1825 and 1826 in *Dzieła z pozostałych rękopismów ogłoszone*, with a preface by Borowski. Fragments of Słowacki's handwritten notes had been published earlier in *Dziennik Wileński* [The Vilnius Daily Newspaper],<sup>12</sup> where Borowski also published his texts. Borowski took over as the head of the Department in the fall of 1814, shortly before Słowacki's death. It seems that Borowski used Słowacki's notes when he began teaching (Słowacki had to resign on account of his illness). It should be added that Słowacki also used Eschenburg's textbook. Finally, if we compare some exam questions with the order of argumentation presented in *O poezji*, it turns out that the two are indeed very similar, which probably resulted from the fact that Borowski and Słowacki used the same textbook.

Thus, it seems that we can try and conduct our experiment and formulate the answers to the questions Mickiewicz was asked during his exam. We can refer to literature textbooks used at Vilnius University, translations used by students (and some original passages) and Słowacki's texts (which were connected with his lectures). This procedure seems to strike a balance between too narrow and too wide a choice of sources. Too strict a procedure would actually make it impossible to recreate the answers, because we do not have access to notes from Leon

<sup>10</sup>I explain in detail why there are two copies of Johann Joachim Eschenburg's *Entwurf einer Theorie und Literatur der schönen Redekünste* translated by Leon Borowski in the Vilnius archives in the book *Odnajdywanie języka dyscypliny. Literaturoznawstwo wileńskie i warszawskie 1809–1830* [Finding the language of the discipline: Literary studies in Vilnius and Warsaw 1809–1830] (Warsaw: IBL, 2020), in the chapter *Ustęp metodologiczny. Archiwa i Leon Borowski* [Notes on methodology: Archives and Leon Borowski].

<sup>11</sup>Eusebiusz Słowacki, *O poezji* [Poetry] and *O wymowie* [Rhetoric] in: *Dzieła z pozostałych rękopismów ogłoszone* [Other published manuscripts], vol. 2 (Vilnius: Józef Zawadzki, 1826).

<sup>12</sup>The essay *O sztuce dobrego pisania w języku polskim* [On the art of good writing in Polish] was published in "Dziennik Wileński" 1815, vol. 1, in issues 3 (pp. 202–246), 4 (pp. 301–330), 5 (s. 404–445) and 6 (pp. 489–513). *O przekładaniu z obcych języków na ojczysty* [On translating from foreign languages into the native language] was published in "Dziennik Wileński" 1820, vol. 3, no. 12, pp. 405–426.

Borowski's lectures. Respectively, in a more liberal perspective, we could also take into account the popular views on specific issues in a given era. Naturally, we could also reconstruct the answers on the basis of other historical treatises, but then we would lose sight of the Vilnius perspective. Such answers would reflect the principles of late Classicist poetics, but they would not reflect what (Mickiewicz) was taught at Vilnius University.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to refer to texts which not only address the issues indicated in the questions but also seem to be structured as study notes. The exam procedure did not change much over time. Mickiewicz was asked three questions on aesthetics, poetry and rhetoric, which corresponded to the organization of Borowski's lectures. The answers to the questions could be found in the notes (it is impossible to determine whether students had access to Słowacki's notes in 1819, but they certainly used Eschenburg's translation, since two copies have survived; the professor probably gave it to them, asking them to rewrite it).

Naturally, I create a research structure at this point: a possibility that does not exist as a textual fact in the historical reality. The expected answers to the exam questions will always function in the sphere of the probable, not to mention the actual answers given by the student. It seems, however, that although we are working in a literary studies laboratory, beyond the sphere of the historiographically proven, we have the right to formulate answers to such questions. Did Borowski use Słowacki's notes and conduct the exam accordingly? Did he translate the German textbook and did he recommend that students use it? Textual similarities are significant, though not conclusive.

The category of "probable history" coined by Danuta Ulicka may be useful in our analysis. Describing the "probable" relationship between Bakhtin and Stefan Srebrny (it is "probable" because it is based on one statement), Ulicka postulates that such a form of writing history should be recognized as a valid practice in the study of the history of literary studies.<sup>13</sup> In view of the inevitable scarcity of sources, it allows one to examine and record new historical connections and problems that have not been critically examined before. The latter is the measure of the success and legitimacy of writing "probable" history. The practice is substantiated: it is firmly rooted in the historical context which justifies textual events and relationships. Indeed, it must lead to valid conclusions, allowing one to reclaim historical reality that would otherwise be lost. It is time, therefore, to write "probable" history based on Mickiewicz's pre-text.

## Classicist Q&A

The exam questions were as follows:

### I. Aesthetics

1. Aesthetic illusion (*illusio*) in the fine arts.
2. The illusion of the external senses in the visual arts.
3. The relation between illusion and partiality in the speech arts.

<sup>13</sup>See Danuta Ulicka, *Słowa i ludzie* [Words and people] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2013), 63–67.

4. This impression combined and intensified in the dramatic art.
5. Does illusion in art exhibitions can be so advanced and so perfect that imitation seems to be reality?
6. Even if illusion could be perfected to such a degree, does art moderate and soften it, why?
7. Different degrees of illusion in different types of fine arts.

## II. Poetry

1. The epic poem: definition and types.
2. Action and the unity of action in the heroic novel.
3. Do digressions hinder unity?
4. Importance and greatness of action.
5. The characters of heroes.
6. Best examples and comments on the characters.

## III. Rhetoric

1. Rhetoric in preaching, its beginnings.
2. How does it differ from ancient rhetoric?
3. Rhetoric principles shared by preachers and other speakers.
4. The best examples of rhetoric in preaching in French literature.
5. The rhetoric talent of great Polish historical preachers (Skarga, Birkowski) and contemporary Polish preachers (Krapowicz, Kaliński).<sup>14</sup>

Let us look for answers.

Eschenburg discussed “aesthetic illusion” in the introductory part of the textbook translated by Borowski. It is described in paragraphs 14, 15 and 16 (in the 1817 version from the Historical Archives; in the 1819 version from the University Library, it is described in paragraphs 13, 14 and 15<sup>15</sup>). The answers to the exam questions may be found in paragraph 14. While they are rather general, they correspond to the first three or four questions on the list:

The goal of art is to create *illusio*, that is, to mislead the external or the internal sense so skilfully that artistic imitation is believed to be reality created by real objects. This illusion is external, generated by one’s partiality to works of art, and it is stronger when both these aspects work together in one’s imagination. The degree of their power, however, depends not only on the talent of the skilful artist, but also on the tenderness and understanding of the viewer or the reader, as well as on the voluntary surrender of one’s imagination [...].<sup>16</sup>

One may wonder whether the examiner asked all the questions at once or one by one, so that the student answered one question and his answer was recorded (in bullet points) in the report. In relation to the quoted fragment of the textbook, the questions specify what kind of illusion applies to what kind of art (according to the commonly accepted division into the

<sup>14</sup>*Korespondencja*, 43. The questions were arranged in a list in the original manuscript.

<sup>15</sup>Vilniaus Universiteto Biblioteka (VUB, Vilnius University Library), manuscript. F2-DC236.

<sup>16</sup>VUB, manuscript. F2-DC236, k.4v. Supplement based on the 1817 version.

“speech” arts, such as poetry and rhetoric, and the “pictorial arts,” i.e. the fine arts). The answers to the respective questions may be deduced from the questions that come first. This is the case with questions 5 and 6: it is implied in question 6 that the answer to question 5 should be: yes, imitation in art may seem like reality; it depends both on the talent of the artist and the predispositions of the reader; however, art moderates and softens the power of such illusion. Notwithstanding this, neither the questions nor the textbook explain why.

The (rather general) answers to most questions on aesthetics, may be found in *Rys teorii* [Theory outline] (this is how Borowski translated the beginning of the title of the textbook he used<sup>17</sup>). The answers to the questions on rhetoric are more difficult to find (I will discuss poetry at the end of this article): I was not able to identify what part of the German textbook or what part of Słowacki's essays provide direct answers to the exam questions. The analysis of other sources does not bring any spectacular effects either. Borowski discussed the influence of cultural changes on literature in his professorial dissertation a year later, arguing that there is a fundamental difference between ancient and Christian poetry and rhetoric (closely related to the socio-political system), insofar as the two approach the supernatural sphere in a completely different way.<sup>18</sup> However, he did not discuss rhetoric in preaching. The only scholar from the Vilnius circle who discussed rhetoric in preaching in one chapter of his textbook was Filip Neriusz Golański, a Biblical scholar and earlier a lecturer in rhetoric and poetry. In a fairly long chapter in the 1808 edition of *O wymowie i poezji* [On rhetoric and poetry], he discussed the role of the preacher and his texts, as well as the fact that the preacher was no longer respected by his contemporaries in the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Although Golański writes about rhetoric in preaching in general, his observations do not give us answers to the exam questions. If we want to discuss only sources directly related to teaching rhetoric at Vilnius University, and not rely on general knowledge and beliefs held in the early nineteenth century, we must accept that we fail in this respect.

We may, however, find answers to the questions on the epic poem. The answers to the six exam questions correspond to the respective paragraphs in Eschenburg's textbook and thus, in turn, in Słowacki's notes as well. Eschenburg describes the epic poem in chapter VIII, i.e. the chapter devoted to poetry and epic forms (*epische Dichtungsarten*; he divides all genres into epic and dramatic forms).<sup>20</sup> Słowacki describes various types of epic poetry in “class III” devoted to epic forms (he also distinguishes “lyrical forms,” “didactic forms,” and “dramatic forms”).<sup>21</sup> The answers to all questions in Eschenburg's and Słowacki's texts are presented in the table below:

<sup>17</sup>In an essay devoted to late Leon Borowski, Dominik Chodźko openly states that the professor used Eschenburg's textbook in his lectures: “he used modest Eschenburg in his classes.” Dominik Chodźko, “Leon Borowski. Wspomnienie” [Leon Borowski: *In memoriam*], *Athenaeum* 1, issue 1 (1847): 137.

<sup>18</sup>Leon Borowski, “Uwagi nad poezją i wymową pod względem podobieństwa i różnicy” [The similarities and differences between poetry and rhetoric] in: *Uwagi nad poezją i wymową i inne pisma krytycznoliterackie* [Notes on poetry and rhetoric and other critical literary writings], ed. Stanisław Buśka-Wroński (Warsaw: PIW 1972), 68.

<sup>19</sup>Filip Neriusz Golański, *O wymowie i poezji* [On rhetoric and poetry] (Vilnius: Józef Zawadzki, 1808), 415–460.

<sup>20</sup>Johann Joachim Eschenburg, *Entwurf einer Theorie und Literatur der schönen Redekünste* (Berlin–Stettin: Friedrich Nicolai, 1783), 120–143.

<sup>21</sup>Słowacki, 97–116.

Questions	Eschenburg	Słowacki
1. The epic poem: definition and types.	Allgemeine Erklärung	§55. A heroic poem, or an epic poem, is [...].
2. Action and the unity of action in the heroic novel.	§1. Handlung derselben und deren Einheit	§56–57. The most essential attribute of the matter which is the subject of the epic must be unity [...].
3. Do digressions hinder unity?	§2–3. Episoden	§56. To render his text more diverse, without which,  as we have already observed, it can be neither beautiful nor engaging, the poet may add digressions [...].
4. Importance and greatness of action.	(§4. Interesse und dessen Beförderung durch Hindernisse der Handlung)	§58. It is equally essential that the epic is devoted to great and important things [...]
5. The characters of heroes.	§5–6. Handelnde Personen und deren Charakteren	§59. The characters of the people acting in the epic [...].
6. Best examples and comments on the characters.	§18–22.	§69–76.

As can be seen, the questions correspond to the content and the structure of both dissertations. There are minor differences between the two textbooks. Eschenburg does not directly address the question of the “importance and greatness” of action, focusing instead on the narrative structure that would keep the reader engaged (according to the table of contents, this question is discussed in §4; in fact, it is discussed in §4, §5, and §6; the importance of action was discussed in those sections as well; however, “characters” are discussed only in §7 and §8). Respectively, Słowacki does not discuss digressions in a separate section, commenting on this question in a section devoted to the unity of action. Indeed, Słowacki employs exactly the same terms as the examiner (although it should be noted that they were also translated from German), and develops his argument in keeping with the order of the exam questions. Before they discuss examples, both authors also discuss “the marvellous” in the epic. Students were asked to answer this question in the second, written, part of the exam (June 4).<sup>22</sup>

Thus, if we refer to appropriate historical sources, we are able to assume the role of the examiner and answer the questions on poetics (fully), aesthetics (quite generally), and rhetoric (to a limited extent). A fundamental question now arises: what is the value of such an approach? What new literary perspectives does such a reconstruction open up?

### A digression on digressions

The answer to each question requires that the student possessed a considerable knowledge of literature from antiquity to the nineteenth century. Thus, for example, issues related to *illutio* were at the time connected with the questions pertaining to the essence and purpose of art in general, the types of arts and the types of signs, linguistics and the art of speech, and the nature

<sup>22</sup>*Korespondencja*, 45. Professor Onacewicz also asked general questions on world history.



of artistic *mimesis*.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, I will take a closer look, though I will not discuss it exhaustively, with only one, exemplary, question on poetics.

Leon Borowski asked: Do digressions hinder unity? Euzebiusz Słowacki thus answers this question in his notes:

To render his text more diverse, without which, as we have already observed, it can be neither beautiful nor engaging, the poet may add digressions and episodes, but, even though they result from the central theme, they should not distract from it; indeed, they should render it brighter and more vivid. The epic may be compared to a river; it may come across obstacles, but despite meanders and deviations, it does not stop flowing in the direction indicated by its slope. It is divided into various distributaries, embraces islands, streams, channels and new rivers, but it is one. While it may reach the ocean as either one or many estuaries, it is always one and the same river, which follows its elemental direction.<sup>24</sup>

As the question itself suggests, the issue of “digressions” is closely related to an important classicist aesthetic category: unity. Słowacki also mentions the second aesthetic principle: variety. A proper use of “digressions” provides for balance between the two. The term “digression” was sometimes used interchangeably with the Greek word “episode;” nevertheless, the former was used more often in nineteenth-century texts. It referred to a fragment of a literary work which constituted a whole, separate from the main text and not directly related to the main course of action or theme. It may be defined in more detail in relation to specific literary genres.<sup>25</sup>

Why is the problem of “digressions” and the unity of the work particularly interesting in relation to Mickiewicz? It should be noted that the poet discussed this topic independently in his review of Dyzma Bończa-Tomaszewski’s *Jagiellonida* [Epic of Jagiełło] published in January 1819 in *Pamiętnik Warszawski* [Warsaw Diary]:

Action is truly action when all, even smaller, events introduced into it develop from the same point, in a constant dependence on one another, become entangled and are finally resolved; descriptions and images which do not contribute to the main action are only episodes which, though necessary, must be used properly. It is true that our imagination, preoccupied with the main action, feels the need for smaller images, because they and their beauty may be comprehended more easily, so that our mind can rest and nourish itself in a way [...]. The use of digressions, therefore, serves the purpose of easing the tension, and therefore, although they are combined into the main action, adding variety and charm, they cannot constitute poems in their own rights, for such poems, without interest, would, as Voltaire says, be similar to a framework in which, according to

<sup>23</sup>Some of these issues, especially the role of language in imitating real objects, are discussed in: Zdzisława Kopczyńska, “Malowanie słowami” [Painting with words] in: *Język a poezja. Studia z dziejów świadomości językowej i literackiej oświecenia i romantyzmu* [Language and poetry: Studies in the history of linguistic and literary consciousness in the Enlightenment and Romanticism] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1976), 48–85.

<sup>24</sup>Słowacki, 98–99.

<sup>25</sup>In the definition of “digressions,” I refer to my earlier research. I have already written about this word as a concept and term of classicist poetics twice. First, in *Forum of Poetics* 2016, no. 5, “Additions’ and the Category of Unity in the Poetics of Post-Stanisław Classicism”, and then, more extensively in the book *Odnajdywanie języka dyscypliny*. A detailed analysis of the term may be found in these two texts.

one's liking, one may insert digressions like pictures, and from which one may choose what one likes. It can be seen in *Jagiellonida*.<sup>26</sup>

Apparently, the position of the young author is in line with what his teacher might have expected of him.

The problem of "digressions" is obviously related to two works by Mickiewicz, which occupy the most important place in Polish culture: Part 3 of *Dziady* [Forefather's Eve] and *Pan Tadeusz*. Moreover, "digressions" in both of these works are usually analyzed in a completely different frame of reference than the classicist theory of the unity of a literary work. Indeed, *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of literary terms] defines digression as follows:

1. a short textual unit, which is relatively independent in terms of content, usually in the form of a separate paragraph; 2. in romantic literature, a fragment of a work, independent in terms of content, but at the same time functioning as an element of a larger literary whole, as regards the main theme, idea, and attitude of the author, e.g. Part 3 of *Dziady*.<sup>27</sup>

Although this definition was written by an Enlightenment literature specialist, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, it does not refer to "digression" in the classicist sense. The first explanation is very general, specific to contemporary linguistic practice, and the second explanation concerns romantic literature and seems to be inspired directly by the third part of *Dziady*. However, it seems that the starting point for the analysis of digressions in *Dziady* should be the classicist understanding of the word digression, even if it is possible that it also gave rise to a new romantic meaning. This particular "digression" is a short fragment in an epic poem, synonymous with the "episode" discussed by Mickiewicz in his review of *Jagiellonida* and during his exam. It describes the journey of the protagonist, but it is separate from the main plot: such descriptions, which described the adventures of the protagonist that did not directly contribute to the main action, were very popular in classicist epic "digressions." What is unusual (of course, if we consider the normative poetics of late classicism as our point of reference) is the inclusion of epic "digressions" in the text of the drama. It is all the more puzzling, since authors were told to avoid adding episodes to dramatic works. This solution may be considered controversial.

In *Pan Tadeusz*, the role of "digressions" is consistent with, for example, principles discussed by Eschenburg and Słowacki: "episodes" allow the reader to rest and add variety. Critical academic discourse analyzes "episodes" in a different interpretive framework. Even a cursory review of such studies<sup>28</sup> shows that two terminological tendencies dominate in them, not without significance for the chosen interpretive context. Therefore, we sometimes talk about "digressions" (*dygresje*) in *Pan Tadeusz*, which directs our attention to the narrative "storyteller." The digressive poem, in which

<sup>26</sup>Adam Mickiewicz, "Uwagi nad Jagiellonidą D. Bończy Tomaszewskiego" [Review of D. Bończa-Tomaszewski's *Jagiellonida*], *Pamiętnik Warszawski* 5, vol. 13 (January 1819): 72.

<sup>27</sup>Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, "Ustęp" [Digression] in: *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of literary terms], ed. Janusz Sławiński (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1988), 550.

<sup>28</sup>Google search provides material for preliminary research. If we search for "digressions (*ustępy*) in *Pan Tadeusz*," the results refer to the above-mentioned "digression on hemp" in the poem and "digressions" in the sense of any fragment of the text. On the other hand, if we search for "episodes in *Pan Tadeusz*" and "digressions (*dygresje*) in *Pan Tadeusz*," the results refer to popular websites for students, for example [sciaga.pl](http://sciaga.pl), [aleklasa.pl](http://aleklasa.pl), [brainly.pl](http://brainly.pl), [opracowania.edu.pl](http://opracowania.edu.pl).

the role of fragments which function “next to” the main action, was subjected to radical reevaluation, and thus becomes a natural point of reference. Such a context would be interesting and allow us to emphasize dialogical nature of the genre in contrast to the classic epic; however, it is not very productive in the context of Mickiewicz’s work. Alternatively, we can talk about “episodes” (*epizody*) in *Pan Tadeusz*, which brings to mind the classic school division of characters and plots into primary (main), secondary and tertiary (episodic). This division may be applied almost mechanically to virtually every epic. It is often used in schools to help students structure their knowledge of the plot. This approach is probably motivated by the need to emphasize the completeness and complexity of the fictional world, characteristic for the classicist epic and, later, novels.

Indeed, terminological choices are important. They locate the text in an entire conceptual literary system, allowing us to discover different relationships and dependencies. In *Pan Tadeusz*, Mickiewicz used the term “digression” (*ustęp*) in the above-mentioned meaning only once.<sup>29</sup> In Book VI, *The Hamlet*, there is a section called “A digression on hemp.” Perhaps such textual evidence is not enough to activate the extensive theory behind this term in the analysis of the poem’s structure. Naturally, the question of unity and diversity as well as question of the reader’s engagement in the classicist theory of the epic should be discussed considering the numerous links between the poem and this tradition. Nevertheless, the indication of two pre-texts: *Uwag nad Jagiellonią* and the exam questions allows us to highlight this issue and emphasize the fact that Mickiewicz must have been influenced by it.

## Pretexts and philological anthropology: Summary

The discovery of the exam questions on “digressions” (*ustępy*) allows us to interpret Mickiewicz’s works in the context of classicist poetics. Indeed, pre-texts may be used effectively in interpretation as a slightly modified “biographical strategy.” After all, the author is a pretext for analyzing different documents together. Moreover, we focus on the text itself, especially as regards outstanding works, and after all in our study of pre-texts we are driven by our interpretative desire. However, an alternative approach is also possible: we can modify the “institutional” approach, as exemplified by the study of the history of the university, and study the literary consciousness of a given era (e.g. on the basis of such documents as Mickiewicz’s exam questions), and then situate individual works within it.

It seems that an approach which combines these two strategies is the most productive. There should be a balance between the individual (“work”) and the collective (“institution”). In this approach, the pre-text is not only a pre-text of a given text, but also a building block that allows us to reconstruct literary consciousness and intellectual atmosphere of a given era. Traditional philological and archival work allows us to contextualize individual texts in a network of dependencies. It seems that philological anthropology could follow this path between “close” and “distant” reading.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

<sup>29</sup>In book XII, “digression” (*ustęp*) means, according to one of the meanings that was already archaic in the nineteenth century, a break in the session of the sejmik.

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# KEYWORDS

*Adam Mickiewicz*

**episode**

ARCHIVE

**ABSTRACT:**

The article analyses manuscripts and other archival documents as pre-texts of literary texts, with a view to demonstrating how they may be used most effectively in literary studies. An examination report with questions that Adam Mickiewicz was asked during his diploma examination at Vilnius University is discussed. The author analyses other archival and printed sources as well, trying to reconstruct the desired answers to the questions, and then outlines the benefits of employing such an archival procedure in the analysis of Mickiewicz's works.

## classicism

VILNUS UNIVERSITY

### NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Helena Markowska-Fulara (b. 1991), Ph.D., works at the Department of Poetics, Literary Theory and Methodology of Literary Research at the Faculty of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw, graduate of MISHiS UW (Polish Studies, Mediterranean Civilization). Her research interests include literature and literary studies of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, Juliusz Słowacki and Lithuania. She has published, among others, in *Pamiętnik Literacki*, *Ruch Literacki*, *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich*, and *Przegląd Humanistyczny*. |