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## “True Is the Pole when He Gets Drunk”. On the Persistence of Romantic Sarmatism in a Contemporary Liquor Store\*

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**ABSTRACT:** Drawing upon inspirations from anthropology of everyday, visual studies and analyses of Neo-Sarmatian issues, the article is devoted to the subject of vodka (and, in its broader context, also the motif of consuming strong alcohol) in Polish literature of the first half of the 19th century, especially in reference to works by Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki. The impulse for analysis was the appearance of vodkas whose names are connected with the figures and the oeuvre of both Romantic poets in the Polish alcohol market. Tracing their oeuvres with regard to the motif of vodka, the attitudes of the writers to alcohol, reconstructed on the basis of (auto)biographical documents, as well as analyzing visual and textual elements of the vodkas made it possible to pose a thesis concerning the durability of social influence of Romantic Sarmatism in commercial space.

**KEYWORDS:** Romanticism, Neo-Sarmatism, alcohol, vodka, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki

This sketch will ask more question than it will bring answers. There is more being surprised in it than certainties. The object of the description presents itself only visually as crystal clear. In cultural perspective, however, it is far from unambiguous.

I am interested in vodka as an object culturally and socially significant, surrounded by various discourses. It is simultaneously funny, it evokes smiles and facetious associations – and very serious, taking into account the social

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effects of abusing alcohol. On the one hand, it is perceived as banal, inscribed into our everyday life (one would like to say that to a too large degree), on the other – associated with the unusual nature of festivities or holiday ritual. When abused, it isolates, while in small dosages it stimulates social life and frequently becomes an element of culinary culture. It happens to be affirmed and happens to be an object of shame. Generally, writing a historical literary critical text about vodka is entering slightly muddy water. I am aware of that.

### Methodological Inspirations

The present reflections have stemmed from being inspired by writings of Roch Sulima (2000, 2022) and Wojciech J. Burszta (1996). In the book *Czytanie kultury. Pięć szkiców* [*Reading culture. Five sketches*] the latter writes about the specificity of the approach of an anthropologist of culture to contemporary times. Among those, he lists the following features and perspectives:

however, the particular nature of anthropological approach to culture is not determined by any officially designated subject scope of this discipline, but, rather, it is defined by a way of seeing the world and being sensitive to these aspects thereof that seem either trivial or peculiar but in which certain basic subjects, obsessions and motifs accompanying humanity can be noticed (Burszta 1996: 158).

For this theoretician, a consequence lay in the methodological indefiniteness of thus understood practice: “anthropology is not academic craft as much as a difficult, and sometimes treacherous art of interpretation” (Burszta 1996: 158). This might lead both to the aforementioned interdisciplinarity, and to differentiating discourse within a single text. However, the final element of the description was the most important: “anthropologists of contemporary times make into a privileged territory of their interest that which is at hand’s reach, and what we usually pass by and never notice” (Burszta 1996: 159).

In Poland, vodka is located literally “at hand’s reach”. For years now this unproblematic, brazen availability in almost every shop, at petrol stations and 24/7 liquor stores has been the subject of discourse in the field of public policies. It has intrigued me how the visual phenomenon of presence of high-proof

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1 It is worth to specify terminological issues pertaining to the strength of alcoholic beverages. What I will follow here is the Act of 26th October 1982 concerning upbringing in sobriety and counter-acting alcoholism (in its 2023 version, updated with novelizations), whose Article 9, concerning permits (concessions) for sale of alcohol, contains the following division of beverages: “1) containing up to 4.5% of alcohol and [...] beer  
2) containing over 4.5% to 18% alcohol, excluding beer  
3) containing over 18% alcohol”.

For the purposes of this article, according to the linguistic usus, I will describe the first as low-proof beverages (alcohols), the second – as medium-proof, and the third – high-proof. Synonymously, I will use the division into weak alcohol (the first group) and strong alcohol (the second and third group).

alcohol in our daily lives is shaped and revealed, and this is where anthropological inspiration met with that resulting from a visual turn in cultural studies. In the introduction to the monograph *Badania wizualne w działaniu* [*Visual Studies in Action*] we read:

The shift [in social visual studies – J. W.] under discussion has its sources in becoming aware [...] that our lives are immersed in what is visual and are realized by images and practices that accompany them. Not only are studies in visuality indispensable in order to understand contemporary world, but they also bring the kind of information that cannot be gained in another way, focusing only on linguistic representations of social life (Frąckowiak, Krajewski, Olechnicki 2011: 13).

What knowledge is brought by taking a look at a shelf in a Polish liquor store? The ways vodka is presented in the store create a cohesive message of masculine adventure; some of them are subtle in their creativity, which is, undoubtedly, a derivative of the fact that advertising alcohol in Poland is forbidden (but the ban is efficiently bypassed in social media).

What has drawn my attention is the segment of vodkas whose names are indebted to the history of Polish culture. I leave aside dominating adjective names (e.g. Żytnia [Rye], Luksusowa [Luxurious], Wyborowa [Choice], Żołądkowa [Abdominal], Lubelska [From Lublin], Saska, Barmańska [Bartender's], Absolut [Absolute]), proper names (e.g. Amundsen, Finlandia, Belvedere, Björn), names of animals and derived (e.g. Żubr [European Bison], Żubrówka [European Bison's], Bocian [Stork], Wataha [Wolf Herd], Grey Goose, Dzika Kaczka [Wild Duck] – referring not to Ibsen's play, but to a bird), names of food ingredients and dishes (e.g. Orkisz [Spelt – a crop], Krupnik [Barley – grain], Żurek [sour cereal soup]), words referring to values and phenomena (e.g. Stumbras [Lithuanian for tradition], Gool [Goal], Bohema [Bohemia]). This is not an onomastic treatise, and thus the list of names is not finite, and the way they are categorized – is open to being expanded upon and discussed. Having excluded the abovementioned names, there is still enough beverages for the thirsty on Polish liquor shelves.

This remaining space will be filled by – appearing in the role of patron saints of the products – significant works and figures significant for Polish literature and music. It is worth noting that thus far, I have not come across a vodka named after a creator or an artifact in the fields of painting, film or theater.

Therefore, we have the following vodkas: Soplca, Adam Mickiewicz, Chopin, Pan Tadeusz, Juliusz Słowacki, Ogiński, Wokulski (announced as a craft vodka – moonshine of Polish production), plum vodka Witkacy. The order in which I have listed them is not accidental – the first three have the most developed lines (clear vodka, flavored vodka, liqueur), Pan Tadeusz is limited to the clear form, while the Juliusz Słowacki vodka appears on the shelves with decreasing frequency, similarly to Ogiński. Wokulski and Witkacy, the only

post-Romantic namesakes, are not easily available and take up a marginal position on the shelves.

No great insight is necessary to ascertain a strong position of Polish Romanticism in this segment of the high-proof alcohol market. Where is the source of the marketing productivity of this era when it comes to selling vodka? This was the first question – followed by subsequent ones.

### Questions about Vodka and Romanticism

I will list the most important of these:

1. How is vodka present, what is the function of meaning of its consumption in Romantic literature?
2. How do contemporary Polish vodkas, with their namesakes of the era, tell the story of Polish Romanticism?
3. Is there a connection between Polish Romanticism and drinking vodka? What is the influence of literature, and what – the biographies of the creators?
4. What does a strong presence of Romantic creators (Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Chopin, partly Ogiński as a creator of the turn of the 18th and 19th century) on vodka labels result from? In addition to popularity resulting from constant presence in the canon of national culture (including school lists of required reading and figures presented in the course of musical education), is there any role played by other cultural aspects of Polish Romanticism, including Romantic Sarmatism?

An attempt to answer the two latter questions yields two theses of the present text. Firstly, given the nuanced, and to a large degree – critical attitude towards vodka and drunkenness in Słowacki's and Mickiewicz's body of work, it is impossible to talk about a positive relationship between the content or meaning of literary texts and the choice of the vodka names. There exists a similar lack of close dependence in the case of biographies – according to historical testimonies, neither of the great Romantic poets showed himself to his contemporaries as a vodka lover or connoisseur.

Secondly, in addition to popularity resulting from the canonical character of *Pan Tadeusz*, Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, a significant role in constructing the message of alcohol industry products under analysis is played by the Romantic interpretation of Polish landowning traditions, which, to a large degree, contribute to the notion of Romantic Sarmatism. In this manifestation of everyday life – “Romantic” vodkas in a contemporary liquor store – Romanticism is reduced to idyllic Romantic Sarmatism<sup>2</sup>.

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2 What I follow here is a division of Romantic Sarmatism proposed by Piotr Żbikowski. He ascribes an idyllic vision of Sarmatism to Mickiewicz in *Pan Tadeusz*, while in Słowacki's texts, Sarmatian characters are defined, above all, by “internal dilemmas and anxiety, a nervous anticipation of failure and catastrophe, dramatic collision of good and evil, tragism and triviality, greatness and human poverty”. Their world “is marked by fear and increasing awareness of threat, suffering, the bitterness of disappointment and lack of fulfillment” (Żbikowski 1999: 261–262). Vodka producers (regardless of the presence of Słowacki as their namesake) opt for the first option of Romantic Sarmatism.

At this point, it is worth to define some concepts. According to the dictionary definition and the bibliography behind it, I take Sarmatism to mean "a cultural formation" which appeared in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the end of the 16th century to the middle of the 18th century" (Maciejewski 2006: 548), created among Polish (or Polonized, or in the process of being Polonized) nobility, connected with the so-called Sarmatic myth. It was characterized by the following dominating attitudes and values:

traditionalism, conservatism – stemming from the cult of the old, lack of criticism – a result of trusting faith, xenophobia – a result of the cult of the familiar, democratism (within the noble state) – stemming from the sense of equality, individualism (aversion to subordination, inclination to anarchy and *warcholstwo* [trouble-making] – derived from a particular love for liberty (Maciejewski 2006: 550).

This is supplemented by the lifestyle: lavish, focused on entertainment, connected with contempt for work. A perfect Sarmatian was strong in fight, in a hunt, but also in eating and drinking.

Sarmatism was not a uniform social phenomenon; it also underwent discursive transformations, revealing a more or less changed face with every iteration. For Polish Romanticism, it constituted one of the elements of "discovered tradition". The romantic interpretation of Sarmatism, although expressed in genealogically and meaningfully diverse texts (it is enough to juxtapose H. Rzewuski's *Pamiętki Soplicy* [*Soplica's Souvenirs*], A. Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* [*Sir Thaddeus*], and J. Słowacki's *Samuel Zborowski*), contributed to the phenomenon of "Romantic Sarmatism", described by Andrzej Waśko in a book of this very title. He pointed out that "for the first time in the history of modern Polish culture Romantics started to treat Sarmatism as a custom and style *sui generis*, comprehensible and consistent against the backdrop of their own values". Indeed, Romanticism is "the only longer period of a cease-fire in the fight against Sarmatism" (Waśko 1995: 14). Incidentally, the question arises if another such period of "cease-fire against Sarmatism" can be seen in the contemporary Neo-Sarmatian turn.

In Sarmatism, Polish Romantics found familial and neighborly rituals of everyday life, ones that served to confirm and cherish the Polish cultural separateness. Intimate geography – interior design of the house, one's close surroundings – gained meaning. A connection was made between the cult of Sarmatian liberty, distrust to strangers, conservatism and the much desired resistance to external (including Western) influences. The Bar Confederacy was inscribed into the list of national insurrections – in a position giving raise to repeated armed insurrections.

It is worth noting that in the context of Romantic Sarmatism, the notion of "Neo-Sarmatism" (in quotation marks) is used by Aleksander Nawarecki in his dictionary definition (Nawarecki 2009: 861), in reference to national literature

created in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s. The contemporary researched “Neo-Sarmatian” turn in Polish literature, essay writing or narrative creativity would not be the first such actualization of Sarmatism in Polish culture. According to Paweł Bohuszewicz, a scholar studying these tendencies, contemporary Neo-Sarmatism “is a conscious choice of inscribing actions one undertakes into a system of signs referring to the noble cultural heritage” (Bohuszewicz 2021: 77). The object referred to in the title is not Sarmatism as such, but, as suggested by Tomasz Plata (2017: 128), its Romantic (to a large degree, Mickiewicz-based) simulation (interpretation, creation). I believe that selective references to the 19th century vision of Sarmatism, transforming it for contemporary needs, constitutes one of significant elements of the Neo-Sarmatian turn. It is my claim that vodka producers work with an efficient marketing juxtaposition in their message: of the greatness of Polish Romanticism with the familiarity of Sarmatian code, actualized and positively re-valued in Mickiewicz’s and Słowacki’s bodies of work.

I focused on four vodkas and two poetry authors connected with them, excluding 19th century Polish composers from my analysis and assuming analogous motivations of their producers. Słowacki is represented by a single product under his own name, while three of the alcohols offered in the market create a Mickiewicz universe: these are the vodka under the writer’s first and last name, Pan Tadeusz and Soplica. There is a certain interpretative issue with the last one. As we know, in Polish Romantic literature the Judge Soplica from *Pan Tadeusz* is not the only significant literary character bearing this name. It was also put by Henryk Rzewuski in the title of his *Pamiętki*. However, this work, although popular in Mickiewicz’s times, now functions at the margins of literary awareness; it is almost absent in school, or even university education. For that reason, it is difficult to see *Pamiętki Sopolicy* as the direct source of the name and popularity of contemporary alcohol named Soplica.

### **Vodkas in the Discourse of Literary Studies**

There is one more doubt. Is vodka, or, more broadly, alcohol, a subject for analysis on the grounds of humanities, cultural studies, literary studies and literature in Poland? A positive response can find support in Czesław Miłosz’s *Traktat moralny* [*Moral Treatise*] (Miłosz 1981: 199): “The vodka phenomenon is of interest / it is worth analysing”.

Polish writing on alcohol situated outside literary studies is dominated by self-help books: guides (how to make it, how to taste it, how to choose alcohol) or didactic, moralizing, alarmist, popularizing abstinence, bringing awareness of the harmfulness and the scale of influence of alcohol and alcoholism. In the last segment, a significant place is taken by works of sociology and reports of PARPA or public opinion research centers.

It is not possible to claim that intoxicating beverages are absent from Polish academic works in the field of history of literature, but, on the other hand, the

scarcity of their presence does not leave one with the sense that the motif is significant in this area of research.

Explorations confined strictly to literature and literary studies can take place under the patronage of Julian Tuwim, with his *Polski słownik pijacki i antologia bachiczna* [*Polish Drinking Dictionary and a Bacchic Anthology*] (Tuwim 1959), a book initially published in 1935. The latter part of the work is especially engaging. As it turns out, for reasons unexplained in the author’s introduction, the poet-compiler stops in his anthology in the era of Alexander Enlightenment (or Post-Stanisław Classicism), finishing with Michał Brodowicz’s rhymed dialogue *Rozmowy z gorzałką* [*Conversations with Booze*] from 1810. We will not find any Romantic-period pieces in the collection.

In academic discourse, reflections connecting alcohol and Polish Romanticism appear incidentally and have not yet resulted in a monograph “vodka and Romanticism”, not even a collective work of this kind<sup>3</sup>. However, one cannot not mention Grzegorz Godlewski’s, Alina Witkowska’s and Leszek Libera’s works in this context. In her text *Cześć i skandale. O emigracyjnym doświadczeniu Polaków* [*Glory and Scandals. On the Poles’ Emigration Experience*] Witkowska, an excellent scholar of 19th century literature and culture, wrote about alcoholism as a symptom of material poverty of Polish refugees, clearly differentiating between the culture of consuming wine at meals and the increasing drinking of vodka.

[...] the poverty of lonely [men] had its separate features. They used their modest budget in a different way, in the structure of spending a significant place was taken by, for example, alcohol. When Seweryn Goszczyński’s *Dziennik Sprawy Bożej* [*Journal of God’s Cause*] was published, and he carefully registered his expenses, it turned out that alcohol had a fairly significant position, and that it was vodka, not wine. In one of the letters of the so-called ordinary emigre there was a report of

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3 In the pioneering collective publication in the field of cultural and literary studies, entitled, promisingly, *Sztuczne raje... Użytki w literaturze* [*Artificial Paradises. Stimulants in Literature*], edited by Michał Kuziak (2002), out of the 15 texts only Maciej Szargot’s article (*Wódka i fajka w opowiadaniach Józefa Bogdana Dziekońskiego* [*Vodka and Pipe in Józef Bogdan Dziekoński’s Short Stories*]) pertains to high-proof alcohol and Romanticism. In the context of current reflections, it is worth noting a sketch by Jacek Leszczyna, discussing the specificity of Maurycy Gosławski’s poem *Banko*. However, it concerns becoming drunk on wine in an uprising camp.

Another collective publication with a title promising for my reflections is the volume *Oblicza alkoholu w kulturze elit od średniowiecza do współczesności* [*Images of Alcohol in the Culture of the Elites from the Middle Ages to Contemporary Times*], published in Lublin (Bubczyk, Hołub, Sołtys 2015). None of the papers collected pertains to the first half of the 19th century, and the notion of modernity stops at the era of Enlightenment.

The motif of “Romanticism and vodka” is treated with similar lack of grace in the book *Użytki w literaturze i sztuce* [*Stimulants in Literature and the Arts*], published in 2016 (Żychlińska, Głowacka-Penczyńska 2016). The sketches printed therein and concerning alcohol do not refer to Romanticism, and the ones that touch upon this era focus on narcotic experiences (Anna Kowszewicz’s texts following earlier conclusions by Anna Kubale, Jan Tomkowski and Jan Zieliński).

expenses, where 42 francs were spent on bread and 38 on vodka. The time over which this money was spent and the number of people spending it is not important, what is significant is the proportion. Vodka and bread remain in close proximity (Witkowska 1997: 48).

However, this is emigrant, post-November experience that was an inseparable element of Polish fate in the 19th century; how characteristic was it for Romanticism, though, and how much did it fit into a paradigm of social phenomena ascribed to forced emigration? In later written records, there is no shortage of examples of repeated practice of one dampening hard, humiliating and frustrating condition of an emigre by the means of alcohol.

In addition to Witkowska, two aforementioned scholars took up exploration of the meaning of alcohol, including medium and high-proof alcohol, in Polish Romanticism. Leszek Libera assumes an analytical perspective, studying Mickiewicz's alcohol practices on the basis of contemporary reports and mentions in the poetry of the national bard. The result of his studies were collected in two sketches: *Wszyscy byli jak najzupełniej trzeźwi... (O improwizacjach Mickiewicza)* [*Everyone Was Completely Sober... (On Mickiewicz's Improvisations)*] and *Chyba się nauczę pić... [I Should Learn to Drink]* (Libera 2015). The first concerns the role of alcohol in Mickiewicz's delivering improvised poetical texts. During the meetings of the Philomath Society wine was drunk, and intensely so, given that, as Libera quotes, Czeczot complained about "throwing up" and "headaches" in his letters. Among the Filarets, led by Tomasz Zan, things were different. Mindful of the experiences of the preceding society, Zan "introduced a ban on alcohol drinking, recommending fresh milk instead" (Libera 2015: 112). In the conclusion the scholar states that Mickiewicz was strongly influenced by ancient tradition connecting the impact of alcohol with the poetic sense and inspiration; this is visible not only in the early Philomath works, but also in his Lausanne lectures (Libera 2015: 118–119).

The second sketch is an analysis of Mickiewicz's alcohol-related practices over the course of his entire life. We learn, for example, that porter was a strong competition for wine. For the present reflections, the final statement is the most significant:

Alcohol played a considerable role in Mickiewicz's private and daily life since his youth. We can only guess as to how addicted he was. [...] Nevertheless, it would be an overstatement to call Mickiewicz an alcoholic in the medical sense. The poet drank a lot and on a regular basis, especially at later age, but he managed to avoid alcohol disease leading to personality disintegration. [...] In any case, the poet never hid his inclination to the bottle and glass (Libera 2015: 144).

One has to admit that "alcohol-minded" Mickiewicz, thus described by Libera, may be, to a degree, a fitting personal choice as a namesake for vodka.

In 1989 Grzegorz Godlewski's book *Bachus w kontuszu. Z dziejów motywu alkoholu w literaturze polskiej* [*Bacchus in a Kontusz. From the History of the Motif of Alcohol in Polish Literature*] (Godlewski 1989) is published. His synthetic overview of the history of beer, wine, mead and vodka in the mirror of literature (the author references Stendhal's sentence in the introduction) is conducted chronologically. The era of Polish Romanticism is covered by the chapter *Pijani geniuszem* [*Drunk on Genius*]. Godlewski's analysis concerning the presence of the motif of alcohol includes the following texts: Adam Mickiewicz's *Pieśń filaretów* [*The Filaret Song*], *Dziady cz. III* [*Forefathers' Eve, part III*], *Pan Tadeusz* [*Sir Thaddeus*], Konrad Wallenrod, Antoni E. Odyniec's *Wiwaty* [*Cheers*], Juliusz Słowacki's *Beniowski*, *Lilla Weneda*, *Poema Piasta Dantyszka o piekle* [*Piast Dantyszek's Poems on Hell*], *Zawisza Czarny* [*Zawisza the Black*], Józef Dunina-Borkowski's *Zeżnanie* [*Confession*] and Kazimierz Brodziński's *Do gospodarza* [*To the Host*].

I will return to ideas found in Godlewski's text later, at this point, however, it is worth noting that out of the great figures of Polish Romantic poetry there are two creators included: Mickiewicz and Słowacki. According to the author of this synthesis of literature distinguished by the motif of alcohol, such material could not be provided by the oeuvres of Zygmunt Krasiński and Cyprian Kamil Norwid.

### Towards Mickiewicz's Poetry

Based on the research and literature review conducted thus far by Libera and Godlewski, one can distinguish between three approaches to alcohol and its abuse in Mickiewicz's literary work. The first can be termed as anacreontic: it appears in the early stage of Mickiewicz's writing, at the time of building friendships in the Philomath Society. Describing this perspective as "anacreontic" is justified not only by positive approach to alcohol consumption as a glue for good company, but also by rhetorical kinship between Romantic texts with the ancient Anacreontics. The appearance of this approach begins with the *Pieśni filaretów*, ending – symbolically – with the prison scenes in *Dziady* part III.

The second group of texts is characterized by depiction of abusing strong alcohol (wine, vodka) in an illustrative, historical perspective. Here, *Pan Tadeusz* comes to the fore, but drinking in this function appears also in *Pani Twardowska* [*Twardowski's wife*], with its initial stanza:

Eating, drinking, smoking, laughter,  
Reverly and wild to-do –  
They shake the inn from floor to rafter  
With huzzahing and halloo  
(Mickiewicz 1993: 93; trans. Mickiewicz 2025: n.p.).

It is easy to notice that the historical reference point consists in noble past. In *Pan Tadeusz*, this Sarmatian drinking, successfully reaching for the strongest

beverage, as if it were a communal magical drink, is focused on the character of Konewka (Bucket), a *zaścianek* nobleman.

At first, Bucket had shown few signs of courage,  
though he was first to be freed from the stocks,  
...But he wasn't anxious  
to fight, not trusting his aim when sober;  
so he took a mug full of spirits,  
and drank to nourish his upcoming labor.  
He adjusted his hat, picked up his gun,  
ramrod, cartridges, and primed the forelock,  
surveying the grounds and the damage done  
(Mickiewicz 1995: 263; trans. Mickiewicz 2017: n.p.).

In this character Mickiewicz presented a kind of a Sarmatian ideal of an intensely drinking Pole: a nobleman by origin, not by wealth, likes medium and high-proof alcohol; has a strong head, can drink others under the table, which translates to his knightly features and is a sign of vitality. In an earlier book of the poem, in which the foray intrigue is only just being put in motion, Konewka issues threats towards Soplica, revealing, simultaneously, a class difference regarding alcohol (the intensity of its consumption):

“Nothing!” the Bucket yelled, “because he comes  
from petty landowners; he’s too puffed up, I think,  
he holds his nose up high when he is in our homes.  
my daughter’s wedding, I offered him a drink  
that he refused. “I don’t imbibe as much  
as you lesser nobles who drink like gadflies”,  
He’s just a fox inside a rabbit’s hutch,  
a magnate who prefers delicacies.  
A milksop! He did not drink, so we poured  
it down his throat. “This act I won’ forget”,  
he protested, though I clearly assured  
him, next time I’d pour it from my bucket”  
(Mickiewicz 1995: 206–207; trans. Mickiewicz 2017: n.p.).

The internal differentiation of the noble social stratum in regard to the kind of alcohol they consume and the intensity of said consumption, found in *Pan Tadeusz*, is also present in Rzewuski’s *Pamiętki Soplicy*. In the tale Pan Borowski, a dialogue between the *krajczy* Płaskowicki and the impoverished Leon Borowski reveals an alcohol-related distinction in its initial phase (Rzewuski 2009: 184–185). Mr Borowski, experiencing poverty, drinks to his guest with vodka, while Mr Płaskowicki, enjoying a position with the magnate, asks for wine in return. Drinking this more noble beverage together foretells the return of lost Borowski

to the graces of Duke Karol Radziwiłł. Zygmunt Szweykowski mentions that *Pan Tadeusz* owes “some custom-related details” to Rzewuski’s work (Rzewuski 2009: XXXIV); this thesis could be confirmed by the analogy noted herein.

If we were to define the emotional mode of the cited scenes of Mickiewicz’s poem, we would say it is neutral-favorable. Stupefying oneself with alcohol is an element of the flavor of the (disappearing) world of the Polish nobility; a world presented with a warm, sympathetic sentiment, slightly seasoned with a small dosage of slightly biting humor. Non-elitist Polishness, but, rather, the most popular and essential Polishness of gray nobility is national identity distant from abstinence. In *Pan Tadeusz*, there is no *expressis verbis* criticism of getting drunk, but it can be found both in Jacek Soplica’s biography and confession (“from such sins, new sins will surely grow / I drank too much” – „z grzechów w grzechy / Zacząłem pić”; Mickiewicz 2017: n.p.), and in the paradoxical fate of the foray<sup>4</sup> as such. It is worth noting that efficient weapon of a consistently sober Jacek Soplica against the Muscovites lies precisely in strong drink.

In the third group of texts, attitude towards alcohol becomes unequivocally negatively valorized. This is what happens in *Konrad Wallenrod*, although one should not forget that alcoholism in an element of the portrayal of a protagonist tragically entangled, touched by depression:

Konrad loved not the riots of the world,  
Nor mingled Konrad in the drunken feast.  
Though truly, in his secret chamber locked,  
When weariness or sorrow tortured him,  
He sought for solace in a burning draught;  
And then he seemed a new form to indue,  
And then his visage pallid and severe  
A sickly red adorned, and his large eyes,  
Erst heavenly blue, but somewhat now by time  
Dulled and extinguished, shot the lightnings forth  
Of ancient fires  
(Mickiewicz 1994: 75; trans. Mickiewicz 2017: n.p.).

The poem does not contain an *expressis verbis* condemnation of alcohol abuse, but it is difficult to put the scenes of drunk Teutonic Knights and Konrad’s

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4 Grzegorz Godlewski interprets the subject of the nobility’s drinking in *Pan Tadeusz* from the perspective of political and military efficiency: “The scenes of the foray and the battle that lie at the climax of the story [...] depict the destructive role played by alcohol in the nobility’s collective pursuits. The early celebration of victory with general drinking ends with the foray participants becoming imprisoned by the Muscovites; luckily, the latter die by the same weapon. Despite the heroicomic, to a degree, tenor of the story it hides a bitter reflection on the results of the nobility’s mixing alcohol into public pursuits” (Godlewski 1989: 72–73). This is not balanced by Gerwazy’s reminiscences wherein he identifies the good old times with the era of famous drinking. Gerwazy remains a controversial figure of ambiguous morality.

lonely drinking in the same line as idyllic meetings at the Soplica table. Drinking without measure is a sign of decadence regardless the patriotic significance of the text.

Mickiewicz conducts a direct judgment on drinking in *Księgi Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego* [*The Books of the Polish Pilgrimage*]. The sentence is crushing and made from the perspective of patriotic obligations.

The issue of drunkenness appears in Chapter V of *Księgi*, devoted to defining what real civilization is. The historiosophic reflections are supported by a parable of older and younger siblings sent to “high-school”. The older go down the wrong path and leave the “Father”:

And they soon felt dissatisfied and grew mournful: they resolved upon seeking solace in drunkenness and dissipation, saying to themselves: “Our father hath often warned us against the injurious effects of drunkenness and dissipation; but we are now come to the age of our own reason; let us try if we cannot be consoled by indulging in wine and the other joys of life, in the measure becoming reasonable men”.

But they soon lost moderation, and turned out to be drunkards, and complete rakes, and swindlers, alive to commit any iniquity for the sake of money. And the usurer having brought a law-suit against them, and, by a decree of the tribunal, having established his claims to their inheritance, ceased to give them any supplies at all (Mickiewicz 1833: 35–36).

Drunkenness becomes a figure whereby the nations of France, England and Germany (the older siblings in faith) deviate from Christian truth; in this parable, Poland, together with Ireland and Hungary, belongs to the “younger brothers”, virtuous and respected, as they do not sink into drunkenness, usury and perdition.

Indeed, *Księgi Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego* reveal a (postulated) image of strong, alcohol-free Poland. In the beginning of Chapter XII we find the following advice:

In your councils and in your speech, never imitate idolators.

For some amongst you used to begin their councils and their schemes, and their conspiracies, which require wisdom and concord, at dinners and suppers – at eating and drinking.

For who has ever seen that the stomach gave wisdom, and that a giddy head gave concord, or that a country was resuscitated by meat and wine?

And therefore, all such conferences and schemes must end in nothing, for as the beginning so is the end.

Physicians know that a child sprung from a father, full of meat, and full of wine, must be stupid, and does not live long

(Mickiewicz 1996: 36; trans. Mickiewicz 1833: 49–50).

A drunk head offers no national concord. Alina Witkowska wrote about the “honorable” hypersensitivity of “lonely men”, resulting in a plague of devastating duels among Polish emigration. Many a conflict was stimulated and accelerated by the consumed alcohol. However, this fragment of *The Books* may be interpreted also outside of this historical context.

What happens here is a fundamental disagreement between communal alcohol sampling in Soplicowo<sup>5</sup> and intense Sarmatian and national drinking in the *zaścianek* in Dobrzyń, and the abstinence that *The Books* understand as patriotic obligation<sup>6</sup>. It is worth noting that Mickiewicz’s emigration catechism, taking the side of abstinence, is inscribed into the context of the customs of the era. As Iain Gately writes in *Drink. A Cultural History of Alcohol*, despite the existence of Christian ascetics, the conviction about alcohol belonging to “indispensable life needs” lasted for hundreds of years prior to the 19th century. The revolution begins at the time of Romanticism:

The age of steam, however, seemed receptive to abstinence, and the act of renouncing alcohol absolutely and forever acquired a name – teetotalism. The neologism was coined by Richard Turner [...] at a meeting of the Preston Temperance Society in 1833 (Gately 2009: 273).

*Księgi* and *Pan Tadeusz* are separated by two years, and, as is worth noting, the poem about the last foray in Lithuania is the one published later. What is Mickiewicz’s final message regarding the role of alcohol in the Polish case? Would drinking vodka as inseparable element of Polish tradition and identity already belong to history and the future prosperity of the nation lie in abstinence or greatly limited consumption?

### Towards Słowacki’s Writing

As a youth, Słowacki is not anacreontically delighted with high-proof beverages. If the subject appears, it is a purely literary conceit, far from a candid tone. In fairly loose translations of two poems by an Irish poet, Thomas Moore (Bąk 2010), there appears the motif of a goblet full of wine “humming in hearts”, but

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5 This ritual meaning of collective consumption of alcohol is referenced by the Warden Gervazy in his reproaches:

“Oh Count”, cried the Warden, ‘What do you think?  
It’s not enough that your honor is stained —  
must you with these Soplicas eat and drink?  
Must I, Gervazy Rembajło, named  
Warden of the Horeszko castle estate,  
endure insults in the house of my Lord?”  
(Mickiewicz 1995: 160; trans. Mickiewicz 2017: n.p.).

6 These moralizing pieces of advice were not devoid of social context. In Jadwiga of Działyński Zamoyska’s recollections of the 1830s, the post-uprising time led one to daily societal renunciations: “My Mother, if asked why she does not throw dancing evenings, despite having an appropriate apartment and growing daughters, would say: *When Poland is free, we shall dance and have balls, not before*” (Jarosińska 1994: 96).

it is far from ecstatic intoxication. In poems written by the author of *Godzina myśli* [*The Hour of Thought*] himself, the subject of alcohol is absent.

His later work, mature and late, mystical, references alcohol either as a neutral element of the presented world (not infrequently depicted ironically, when it comes to Sarmatian drunkenness), or in an unequivocally negative manner. This differentiation is overlaid with another division. Słowacki consistently ascribes getting drunk on vodka to lower strata: peasants, soldiers (whom he contemptuously refers to as *żoldactwo* [soldiery]) and Muscovites. Polish nobility and townspeople prefer wine (French or Tokay). In Słowacki's view, consuming high-proof alcohol generally puts one at lower position when it comes to class and nation.

While wine appears in early dramas, the protagonists do not drink vodka. Generally, wine remains a prop devoid of a significant role, it is not, for instance, an important element of the portrayal of characters. In *Mindowe* wine appears as an element of the Mass, Rogneda adds poison to wine, there is talk about French gifts in the shape of this noble drink. Maria Stuart, the drama's eponymous heroine, wants to revive a dying Page with a drop of wine. The Page responds, ambiguously, that he drank wine in the morning, which can refer to the moments of happiness at the side of the beloved queen. In *Beatryks Cenci* drunkenness characterizes the worst character of the entire drama – a father who, while blacked out on alcohol, wants to rape his daughter. A sentence spoken by the mother defending Beatryks shows the entire atrocity of alcohol: “Idź spać, jesteś pjany!... / Gadając toczysz pianę z ust...” [“Go to sleep, you're drunk!... / You're foaming at the mouth...” – trans. E.B.] (Słowacki 1959b: 18). There is no possibility of happy drinking. A call to drink, if it appears, is purely conventional, like Kirkor's and Balladina's invitations to feasting, or ironic, like *Śpiew nieznajomego* [*The Stranger's Song*] in *Kordian*:

Drink wine! Drink wine!  
 You don't believe it's a miracle  
 When wine flows in streams  
 Though the folk don't plant vines  
 [...] Drink wine! Go dream!  
 But the dawn will glimmer  
 Wine needs be made into blood  
 Remade wine drunk!  
 (Słowacki 2025: 281; trans. E.B.)

Słowacki put an unambiguously negative assessment of drunkenness as a Polish vice (regardless the social class) into the depiction of the traitor Dziędużycki, who courts Aniela, Beniowski's beloved:

His choice thus made, he came without a matchmaker,  
 And made his intent plain towards the girl;  
 His tree contained nor crook nor father-faker –

He never boasted how the blood would swirl,  
 When he sent those Confederates to the undertaker –  
 But said the King would make him soon an Earl;  
 He smoothed his moustache, and the lease postponed –  
 He loved his drink and loathed all cats, he owned  
 [...]  
 Grasped Grandad with his greedy right hand tight,  
 Then stretched his left towards the cheering can,  
 And chirped in terms of cheer, “My good old man!”

“As I’m a righteous man and honest Pole!  
 I’ll make your daughter love my lover’s craft,  
 Believe you me, my steady Starost whole!”  
 Here, death-like vocals rattling as he laughed,  
 He sipped some wine; he drank without control,  
 And grimaced after each deep, gurgling draught;  
 So, having drunk a quarter of the jug,  
 His fulsome, furrowed brow clung o’er his mug  
 (Słowacki 2014: 46, 47; trans. Słowacki 2009c: 212–213).

In a dialogue with the Major in *Fantazy*, Jan speaks in a similar tone:

Had you seen this mother  
 Screaming at me in the most funny, most angry way  
 “You killed my child – go away, don’t stand close  
 You vile!... You smell of a simple soldier  
 You smell, smell like a butler does  
 I can smell simple vodka and rotten  
 Tobacco from you – Away from my sight!”  
 (Słowacki 1959a: 289; trans. E.B.).

What draws one’s attention is Jan’s bitterness, as he is reduced to a butler and a soldier by the smell of “vile” stimulants, which, after all, are a necessary and culturally grounded anesthetizing (for his own suffering and the surrounding nightmare of exile), escapist, mollifying hunger and socializing (“mother booze”, “sister booze” appears in his emigrant song [Słowacki 1959b: 229]) remedy. When one is enslaved, a comfortable situation of choosing one’s lifestyle is distant, which the Countess Respektowa, as sharing this common fate for some time, should be aware of.

A statement made by Ślaz in *Lilla Weneda*, who distances himself from the Lechites, a tribe that gave origin to the Polish nobility (according to the so-called conquest theory<sup>7</sup>, as extolled in the drama), straddles the boundary between negative assessment and irony:

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7 On the conquest theory – Wierzbicki 2019: 26–120.

I would spit in the eye of who asked  
 If I am a Lechite. – What? Do my eyes show  
 boorishness, drunkenness, gluttony  
 Seven deadly sins, a taste for screams  
 For pickled cucumbers, for coats of arms  
 (Słowacki 1959a: 384, trans. E.B.).

However, Słowacki reaches the highest moral tone in *Ksiądz Marek* [*Father Marek*]. The eponymous hero does not waver in his assessment in a sermon:

FATHER MAREK, *pointing to Kosakowski*  
 Here is the Satan's servant  
 A man of murder and robbery  
 A violent drunkard  
 Empty as the devil's chapel  
 Screamer as a chicken war  
 (Słowacki 1959c: 60; trans. E.B.).

Vodka, which is the subject of interest in the present sketch, appears in the context of peasants in many texts by Słowacki. In *Beniowski*, the servant Grześ „took great care / Of vodka in Gdansk flask, with leathern cover, / Which gurgled like a drunken witch's prayer” (Słowacki 2014: 18, trans. Słowacki 2009c: 185). Unable to resist, he finally becomes drunk, falls off his horse, and gets lost on the way. In *Balladina*, intoxication with vodka is the attribute and genealogy of Grabiec [Hornbeam]. He reminisces about his father in the following way:

My Father plied the pipes year after year.  
 He played like no one else when he was drunk;  
 When he was sober, though, he really stunk  
 (Słowacki 1959a: 29; trans. Słowacki 2009b: 48).

and it is the only such clear trace in Słowacki's texts that connected drinking with increased artistic abilities. However, given the nature of Grabiec as a character, as well as the drama as such, it is difficult to treat this peasant memory in a non-ironic manner.

Already at the beginning of *Sen srebrny Salomei*, in the letter by the nobleman Gruszczyński, we find the following passage:

The peasants are black  
 Bloody, furious and disobedient  
 Drowning in vodka and mead  
 Lied to by the priests  
 (Słowacki 1959c: 115; trans. E.B.).

While in the statement by the Regimentarz, initializing Act IV, there are the following words:

How is it, Sawa? Did you well  
 Deceive the drunken peasants?  
 (Słowacki 1959c: 208, trans. E.B.)

The motif of inhuman, cruel and primitive collective behavior after drinking alcohol pertains to the soldiers as much as it does to the peasants. In *Ksiądz Marek*, the adjutant reports to Casimir Pułaski:

There one of your sergeants, Tytow  
 Wanted to teach the sick  
 But the drunk soldiery  
 Tore him to bits  
 And so the ruddy body  
 (Horrid work of the sutlers!)  
 Suddenly vanished in my eyes  
 Almost like a miracle  
 (Słowacki 1959c: 101; trans. E.B.).

Against the backdrop of these examples, a fragment of an arch-ironic, grotesque text, a quotation out of which is included in the title of the present article, gains on ambiguity. This is what Słowacki has to say about Polishness and drunkenness in *Poema Piasta Dantyszka herbu Leliwa o piekle*:

True is the Pole when he gets drunk  
 Thinks of the homeland and starts to cry  
 Then, as senseless people  
 Laughs aloud upon forgetting  
 [...]  
 And so! When the lovely homeland is dead  
 Who can blame an elder for getting drunk?  
 Hey, bring in jugs! And put around,  
 Let them help us die happy.  
 [...]  
 Nothing – Poverty, sadness, worry everywhere  
 The homeland – a parcel of bloodied mud  
 A Pole – an exile, a martyr, an orphan  
 Drink and find forgetting in a jug  
 And wake your heart when country comes back to life  
 (Słowacki 2009a: 547; trans. E.B.).

This reflection precedes the appearance of a phantom of Catherine II, depicted as the worst of all rulers of the Partitioning countries. What is Polish drunkenness here? It is not quite a continuation, affirmative in its tone, of the Sarmatian tradition of communal, vital drinking that we can find in *Pan Tadeusz* (if seasoned with the author's distance, filled with warm humor). If it is not entirely ironic towards the figure of a Pole-drunkard, it is an agreement, full of resignation, that alcoholism is a result of the fall and, simultaneously, the only possible reaction of the Poles to a hopeless situation. It is understandable, but is it good and acceptable? Drunkenness becomes a metaphor of reaching the rock bottom of individual and social debasement; it will end, or at least – it should end with the homeland being reborn as a sovereign state, which unexpectedly meets the message of *Księgi Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego* on the subject.

In Słowacki's literary pieces there does not appear an unambiguous praise of alcohol as Polish tradition; there is also no justification for its abuse as something necessary for artists, leading towards "artificial paradises". What did it look like in Słowacki's lived experience? Jan Zieliński wrote about "narcotic-minded Słowacki", referencing both "the poppy drink" from *Lamber* and hashish in *Beniowski* (Zieliński 1999: 237–250). The author connects these motifs with Słowacki's personal experiences, as the poet had brought a glass hookah from an Eastern journey, to be used later. The subject of alcohol did not receive such an overview, for Słowacki, it seems, reduced alcohol in his life to drinking wine at meals – above all. He reveals distance towards excessive amounts of alcohol, although the below quotation from his letter to his mother should be read with certain suspicion – it should be kept in mind that Słowacki mitigated his experiences in front of his mother.

To prove how I gained the friendship of the priests I will just describe my departure to you. The good fathers, sad to see me leave, gave me all provisions for the road and wine. But when it came to load the donkey that was to carry the things, it turned out that he couldn't bear the enormous wine bottle. I was happy to see that, as I thought I would be able to excuse myself from accepting the gift, but alas! The priests send a man to follow me, and on his wiry arms, he brought the bottle, going foot by foot, to Beirut itself. If I had any house of my own in Europe, I would hide this excellent drink away until we met; but since it is impossible to wander with it around the world, I drink it, or, rather, every Sunday I offer it to six Capuchin Friars, who are returning on the same ship from the Holy Land, and thus I gain their great respect and (as they are Spaniards) the title of don to my name (Słowacki 1959d: 305).

Although it is consumed in a pleasant company, the bottle is presented as a nuisance more than a joy-giving gift.

In the light of the present overview, one can ask: how could creators so distant, sometimes: hostile to drunkenness, reluctant towards high-proof bev-

erages, if drinking at all, then wine or beer (Mickiewicz) become convincing namesakes for vodkas? How do the vodkas seen on store shelves portray Mickiewicz and Słowacki?

### **What Do Vodkas Say About Mickiewicz and Słowacki?**

This is impossible to establish by other means than treating bottles as artifacts that can be subjected to reading, semiotic analysis, regardless the content. The latter lies beyond my area of interest and research abilities. It is worth noting that there exist guide books for the connoisseurs of vodka which document taste variations of this beverage (Baron, Klesyk 2017).

Before the purchase and tasting, a client must be tempted by the message of the packaging. What can we find there? Let us begin with Adam Mickiewicz.

### **The Adam Mickiewicz Vodka**

At its front, the slender bottle informs that it belongs to the premium class; under the name consisting of the bard's first and last names we can see his portrait known from the 10 zloty coin produced in the years 1975–1977, at the time of the Polish People's Republic, according to Anna Jarnuszkiewicz's design. Around Mickiewicz's profile there is the inscription: \* distilled 7 times \* filtered. The neck showcases the bard's date of birth, however, it is not stated that it is a reference to the author's birthday. The text placed above the date informs us about the advantages of the beverage, creating a false impression that the poet's birthday begins the tradition of the vodka's production.

The bottle's back carries information about its namesake. The text is as follows<sup>8</sup>:

Adam Mickiewicz (24.12.1798–26.11.1855)  
 – an outstanding Polish poet of the Romantic era  
 counted among the so-called Three Bards.  
 He was a great man and artist, whose oeuvre  
 gained admiration both among his compatriots and abroad.  
 As homage to this Great Pole we dedicate  
 an exceptional product – the Adam Mickiewicz vodka.  
 The quality of the brand is overseen by the best specialists.  
 They carefully select ingredients and match  
 them to the process of production and recipes inspired  
 by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and thus times contemporary  
 to our hero.

I will not analyze the above text, its debatable style and rhetoric acrobatics in detail. Similarly to the case of the date, we are dealing here with a manipulation aiming to “age” the vodka and make it worthy. However, what is worth noting is the lack of direct reference to the namesake's consumption experi-

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8 All citations of the label texts approximate the text design.

ences or to the subject of alcohol in his oeuvre. Mickiewicz has his vodka because he simply deserves it as “a Great Pole”; by producing and – consequently – consuming it, we pay him deserved homage. One can have the impression that we are supposed to drink instead of re-reading the works by the author of *Grażyna*, that – in the dimension of social psychology – drinking Adam Mickiewicz is partly going to fulfill the cultural norm of new readings of his oeuvre. Mickiewicz’s biography is valuable and productive in another area. The pure Adam Mickiewicz vodka has its taste variants. In the *Wspomnienia z podróży* [*Memories from travelling*] series we will find the Cranberry variant. This is its description:

Inspired by Adam Mickiewicz’s journeys  
we created an exceptional taste of alcohol.  
Slightly tangy Cranberry has been long present  
in the Vilnius Region, inscribing itself into its culinary  
traditions. Our beverage connects high  
quality alcohol with the refreshing fruit  
with unusual properties

“The Vilnius Region”.

Another version of Adam Mickiewicz is Bitter Orange:

Following Adam Mickiewicz’s footsteps, we went  
to France. It is famous for original  
taste combinations. Our Bitter Orange  
is a meeting of the unmet. High quality  
alcohol put together with crystal clear  
water and gently tangy fruit  
guarantees a successful journey.

“France”.

The descriptions are supposed to influence our sense of taste. It is, however, easy to note that this happens entirely outside the biography of Mickiewicz, whose experience of leaving the Vilnius Region was painful, and whose stay in France can hardly be described as “a successful journey” with “gently tangy” aftertaste. This would be a euphemism. For the purposes of marketing, Mickiewicz, deeply suffering due to his tragic fate of a pilgrim, was made into a contemporary tourist, excited in his desire to permanently meet and consume that which is (presented as) exotic. The Romantic martyrology of political exile, which is unattractive to the market if significant to the poet’s identity, was translated into the hedonism of contemporary travelers, seeking entertainment and deceptively authentic.

### **The Pan Tadeusz Vodka**

The vodka is contained in a bottle similarly slender to Adam Mickiewicz, but it comes from a different producer. The front label contains a name written in a modern font in the color of deep noble blue, but alluding to a title put in the cover or title page of a book. Underneath the name of the beverage, there is a golden signature imitating handwriting: “Symbol of Hospitality”. On the neck, there is a sticker depicting a young lord (or a townsman) in a 19th century clothing, probably intending to be the protagonist of the eponymous poem by Mickiewicz. In the background of the silhouette, there is barely legible text (another imitation of handwriting), which goes as follows:

In the name of Polish hospitality, the Pan Tadeusz vodka fills (complements?) the meetings of those close to each other. Let it be drunk by all for whom time and distance are no barrier to visits, especially when an opportunity to celebrate occurs.

In the back label, before the information on how the vodka is produced, we can see a sentence in bold: “An ideal vodka for moments of communal celebration”. The textual layer of this artifact is complemented by the bottle itself, and an interesting concept. Above the labels there are embossed names of the characters from the literary text. There are, thus, Tadeusz, Zosia, Telimena, the Judge, Wojski, Jacek, Protazy, Gerwazy, and below the labels – popular Polish names: Krzysztof, Oliwia, Anna, Zuzanna, Czesław, Karina, Grzegorz, Marta etc.

### **The Juliusz Słowacki Vodka**

An alcohol from the same producer as the Adam Mickiewicz vodka. A slender bottle playing with the black and white aesthetic (the box adds a golden tone). There is no textual information other than the level of distillation and the quality of the beverage. The only significant accent, next to the vodka name, is Słowacki’s portrait, which is probably a rendition of Władysław Barwicki’s lithograph (or a compilation of several portraits of the poet). At the bottom of the image, in the ring going around it, there are dates of birth and death, as well as a repetition of the first and last names.

### **The Soplica Vodka**

This fairly popular beverage is produced by a still different distillery than the abovementioned drinks. Soplica is one of popular vodkas – this is shown by the multiplication of “tastes” and “forms” in the form of the so-called *małpki* (literally: monkeys, small bottles of alcohol), stimulating the state of pathological alcoholism in Poland. Going back to the artifact – it does not refer to Mickiewicz’s work by any signature; however, the image of a noble manor, placed in the top of the label, clearly refers to the poem. The gentry code is complemented by the image at the bottom – these are arable fields behind a bundle of hay, a pitchfork and a rake.

The year 1891 was when the first pure Soplica vodka was produced. It was made in Gniezno by Bolesław Kasprowicz, a person engaged into struggle for independence, for a moment after regaining independence, a president of Gniezno. As one can surmise, the name was, above all, a reference to Mickiewicz's text, guaranteeing the drink recognition and common association with Polishness. The inscription on the label: [vodka] "Inspired by years of tradition" refers both to the date when the alcohol was made and to Mickiewicz's poem. As we know from the earlier analysis of the works and biographies of the two bards, they cannot be the foundation for developing a seductive tale about the advantages of vodka. For Mickiewicz, heavy drinking is characteristic for the *declassé* nobility, whose troublemaking is softened by the warm, reminiscent tone of *Pan Tadeusz*, but it is still a song of the past. In Soplicowo as such, drinking is civilized, moderate, courteous, and still more attention and affect is given to coffee. In *The Books*, abusing alcohol meets with condemnation. In Słowacki's writing – vodka is the drink of primitive peasants and soldiery. However, the producers reach for the Romantics, either ignoring the messages found in their work, or manipulating their biographies. Why?

### **Vodka and Romantic Sarmatism. In Summation**

The vodkas that have become the impulse for reflection and the subject of the present description can be divided into those that refer directly to historical authors and into beverages referring to literary texts. As the analysis has shown, the former refer to the "greatness" and popularity of Romantic poets (the *Adam Mickiewicz* vodka is an homage), while ignoring both bards' actual attitude towards alcohol, whether manifested in life or revealed in their writing. In the case of Mickiewicz, what occurs is also a rather free and symptomatic manipulation of his biography. The martyrology of a pilgrim or an exile disappears to be supplanted by the exoticity of distant lands, consumed peacefully and joyfully in the native land. Cosmopolitanism meets with Sarmatism<sup>9</sup>.

A similar reduction of Romantic context takes place in the case of purely "literary" vodkas. The producers of high-proof alcohol bet on one text, *Pan Tadeusz*, as a symbol of Romantic Sarmatism<sup>10</sup>. The tradition of heroism, self-sacrifice in the nation liberating struggle of Polish Romanticism was omitted, similarly to purely artistic practices of stimulating Romantic imagination with alcohol or the reality of salon parties (described in the 19th century epistolography or memoirs). What the *Pan Tadeusz* vodka and the *Soplica* vodka draw

9 An obvious allusion to the title of the volume *Kosmopolityzm i sarmatyzm. Antologia powojennego eseju polskiego* [*Cosmopolitanism and Sarmatism. An Anthology of Post-War Polish Essay*] (Heck 2003), setting these two notions as the poles of Polish thinking.

10 "*Pan Tadeusz* does not re-create Sarmatism as much as it creates it, makes it up. [...] The image of noble Poland is a pure myth. Additionally, an exceptionally efficient myth, with such a strong presence in collective consciousness that it makes impossible any contact with any preceding reality. [...] [one could] state, Baudrillard-like, that Sarmatism does not exist, as there is only its simulation, indistinguishable from reality, in Mickiewicz's text" (Plata 2017: 128).

from the poem are three values: hospitality, community (mostly neighborly) and lordliness (or lordly aspirations), expressed by the ideal of the old noble manor.

This selective and banalizing version of Polish Romanticism, which reduces it to idyllically seen Sarmatism (in Romantic spirit) needs not be conscious of the notions used herein (Sarmatism, Romanticism, Romantic Sarmatism, Neo-Sarmatism). We do not have to expect the vodka producers or consumers to be familiar with these issues (although research in the form of interviews and surveys could be a valuable extension of these analyses, exceeding the scope of the present text). In Poland, experiencing and renewing Romanticism is intuitive in nature. In the context of more serious issues (that is, the contemporary political discourse), this was proven by Tomasz Plata in a book published in 2017:

the return to Romanticism in the last three decades was rarely intentional or conscious. It was also rarely connected with authentic knowledge of the Romantic tradition. [...] What was taken out of Romanticism were selected notions as justification for present choices. In each of the languages we describe Romanticism functioned in a vestigial manner: some remembered Tyrtæan Romanticism, some – Romantic idylls. Nobody connected it into a whole (Plata 2017: 136).

What can be the function of Romanticism thus reduced to *Pan Tadeusz*, and the poem as such – to idealized Sarmatism (regardless the work's rich subject matter)? It can be said that Mickiewicz's arch-poem shows Sarmatism in its gentry and idyllic guise (Żbikowski 1999: 253). The *Pan Tadeusz* vodka refers to gentry hospitality, every version of Soplica's label woos with a noble manor with columns and trees. It is a perfect "little world", "closed organism", filled with the atmosphere of "patriarchal life" (Cynarski 1969: 235). In the noble Commonwealth, these micro-worlds created an "actual federation of neighborhoods" (Zajączkowski 1993: 36), wherein hosting and being hosted in a noble manor or a magnate's court, with inseparable alcohol (as we have shown, differentiating classes) was one of the basic communal rituals. This "being hosted" is to re-create the old lordly gesture, connect itself with contemporary elegance and sociability.

Romanticism, as updated in the vodka labels, makes it possible to connect conservative, patriotic and Romantic Sarmatian idea with contemporary ambitions of a middle class in Polish capitalism (be it modern, post-modern, or late capitalism is not to be solved here). These aspirations, next to purely economic ones, are of a dual cultural nature. Firstly, consuming "Romantic" vodkas is a twisted way of fulfilling social norm of readership; a surface, or perhaps even grotesque proof of being familiar with the classics of literature. However, the second aspect seems more important to me.

As I have proven, in literature and lived experience of Mickiewicz and Słowacki as such, vodka is not an alcohol perceived to be of first rank. In the ritual of noble hosting, even strongly exaggerated (in the spirit of Jędrzej Ki-

towicz's *Opis obyczajów i zwyczajów za panowania Augusta III* [A Description of Customs and Habits during the August III Rule] or Henryk Rzewuski's *Pamiętki Soplisy*), wine dominates, while strong alcohol plays the role of an addition, an aperitif. It is a peasant, a soldier or a stranger – Muscovite – who abuse vodka. What is contemporarily projected over this old image of vodka is the legacy of the Polish People's Republic. In Poland of the second half of the 20th century, vodka was a common anesthetic, remedying the equally common declassification in the reality of "real socialism" (the fact how inefficiently its "popularity" was dealt with is showcased in a collection of statements corralled in 1969–1970 by the Social Anti-Alcohol Committee, entitled *Alkohol w kulturze i obyczaju* [Alcohol in Culture and Custom]; Górski, Moczarski 1972). Polish vodka enters the decades of post-1989 free market with an image baggage that distances it from the elites. When it comes to high-proof beverages, the latter turn in their choices towards the tradition of Anglo-Saxon whisky, associated with the higher spheres.

The use of "great Poles", creators and representatives of the intellectual elite of the nation would be a way to counteract the turning away from vodka by the means of a reference inscribed into the process of the Polish intelligentsia identifying themselves with noble tradition. The aim would be for vodka to regain the lost (or, in fact, never ascribed thereto) elite position. Andrzej Zajączkowski wrote about the transformation of Polish elites: "Genetically and culturally, intelligentsia is rooted in the noble stratum, and as the latter, so the former wants to remain a born elite. It remains an elite while retaining its leading function in every field of social life [...]" (Zajączkowski 1993: 66–67). These theses are confirmed by contemporary, in-depth sociological studies. In the book *Totem inteligencji. Arystokracja, szlachta i ziemiaństwo w polskiej przestrzeni społecznej* [The Totem of Intelligentsia. Aristocracy, Nobility and the Gentry in Polish Social Space] by Rafał Smoczyński and Tomasz Zarycki, we can find a detailed analysis of the mechanism of the constant influence of nobility on the attitude and mentality of the Poles. In Chapter 6, entitled *Rewolucja inteligentka i narodziny polskiego modelu obywatelskiego* [The Intelligentsia Revolution and the Birth of the Polish Citizenship Model] there is posed a thesis concerning "the programming of the Polish citizenship model by the means of numerous elements of the noble ethos" (Smoczyński, Zarycki 2017: 199).

In the light of these diagnoses, the Adam Mickiewicz, Pan Tadeusz, Sopliska and Juliusz Słowacki vodkas (three of which, let us not forget, are of premium rank), drawing upon Romantic Sarmaticism, would situate themselves as beverages characteristic for contemporary professional middle class, which supplants erstwhile intelligentsia and still more removed nobility in the function of the national elite that leads society. By touching upon a note of Polish identity, affirming private ownership and nurturing the subjectivity of hospitality, in a deeper layer, they would actualize the longing for genealogy drawn from nobility (in contrast to the plebeians abusing alcohol), making expensive vodka accepted by elites as a beverage consumed in moderation and with elegance.

Is that really so? This may be the subject for further sociological research. We do not know what social strata the consumers of “Romantic” vodkas derive from and to what degree consuming these beverages is identifying or: aspirational in nature. This, however, is of lower importance for the main conclusion. Indeed, what is significant is that in the perspective of literary and culture studies these beverages are a contemporary evidence of unchanging societal vitality of ideological and aesthetic categories of Romantic Sarmatism in our country, vitality exceeding the walls of schools, universities and libraries.

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