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**“CZASY RARYTNE” (“SPLENDID TIMES”):  
ON THE BEGINNING OF ROMANTICISM AS  
DESCRIBED IN “KSIĘGARZ ULICZNY” (“A STREET  
BOOKSELLER”) BY WŁADYSŁAW SYROKOMLA**

My intention in this paper is to present the beginnings of Romanticism from the perspective of Władysław Syrokomla's biography (which was connected with the end of Romanticism). However, I would like to start with describing events which happened in 1822. In this year Mickiewicz's poem “Do Joachima Lelewela” (“To Joachim Lelewel”) was written. This poem is not only about ‘history’ and its dilemmas, and not only about Lelewel's lecture on history (in Mickiewicz's reception). Mickiewicz started with another bundle of ideas—they were connected with the atmosphere of Wilno in 1822 and a few years prior to this—and the topic was connected with the event being celebrated: Lelewel for the second time received a chair of history at the University of Wilno in 1822 and he became a professor. The poem directed to Lelewel is an important commentary on the beginning of Romanticism in Poland at the time when it was happening—if we believe in the revolutionary character of this change—and was written by a man who was held responsible for this event. It is one of Mickiewicz's poems written in this breakthrough year of 1822, apart from “Romantyczność” (“Romanticism”), “Pierwiosnek” (“Primrose”) and *O poezji romantycznej* (*On Romantic Poetry*).

“To Joachim Lelewel” does not bring complex, autonomous pictures of Wilno in 1822. Instead we have some snapshots, which appeared in this poem as an indirect characteristic of its addressee. One of the snapshots is about book ‘culture’ in the university town

of Wilno, and more specifically about the book market. Lelewel is to be an author very different than the author presented in this poem:

[...] co wielkość całą gruntuje w dowcipie,  
 Rad tylko, że swe imię szeroko rozsypie  
 I że barki księgarzom swymi pismy zgarbi<sup>1</sup>.  
 [w.5-7]

The praise is embedded in the conviction—which is not the only lesson of this fragment—that the ‘protagonist’ of the poem does not publish much and that he publishes only good things. He does not publish for ‘fame’ only, he lives with a heart open to the lives to his countrymen” (line 10), which means that he listens to his readers. As a result, he has more ‘fame’ than others, which is stated in the verse: “your name is as famous as that of King Bolesław Chrobry” (line 15). Lelewel himself, in *Panowanie króla polskiego Stanisława Augusta...* (*The Reign of the Polish King Stanisła August...*), regarded the ‘citizen education’, which focused on such disciplines as history and literature,<sup>2</sup> as the greatest achievement of the reform of the Polish educational system undertaken in the period of the Enlightenment. We can, therefore, presume that living with an open heart among his fellow Poles resulted in the understanding of such patriotic expectations of his readers. However, the quoted fragments are not about readers, but about middlemen, the booksellers, on whose shoulders the ‘fame’ of authors is spread over the world. We are used to thinking about Zawadzki’s bookshop as a place and an institution—apart from a network of schools connected to the university it was immensely important for the popularization

<sup>1</sup> Adam Mickiewicz, “Do Joachima Lelewela. Z okoliczności rozpoczęcia kursu historii powszechnej w uniwersytecie Wileńskim, dnia 9 stycznia 1822 r.,” in *Dzieła*, vol. I: *Wiersze*, ed. by Czesław Zgorzelski, Warszawa 1993, 141–148. “Who builds his greatness through jesting/Happy to have his name famous (in this way/and that booksellers will be burdened by his books.”

<sup>2</sup> Joachim Lelewel, *Panowanie króla polskiego Stanisława Augusta Poniatowskiego obejmujące trzydziestolecie usilności narodu podźwignienia się, ocalenia bytu i niepodległości*, in *Dzieła*, vol. VIII, ed. by Józef Dutkiewicz, Marian H. Serejski, Helena Więckowska, Warszawa 1961, . 351, 353.

of periodicals, new ideas, and social organizations, which radiated from the University of Wilno. And rightly so, this bookshop, both during Lelewel's and Mickiewicz's student times, was a place where many initiatives originated,<sup>3</sup> where contacts took place between authors and their readers. But it was not the only such place because—as we learn from Mickiewicz's poem—there existed booksellers of a different type. Their role and importance was shown by a man from Wilno, one generation younger than Lelewel and Mickiewicz—Władysław Syrokomla (his real name was Ludwik Kondratowicz), in the lay in verse entitled "Księgarz uliczny" ("A Street Bookseller"), in which he returns to the times of "Mr. Lelewel" and "Mr. Mickiewicz".

Syrokomla uses the phrase "doyen of booksellers" to refer to a Jewish street door-to-door bookseller, thanks to whom an important educational change took place: the change from a 'Wilno calendar' and an inn to a bookshop. "Today the whole of Lithuania reads, today everything is known."<sup>4</sup> This poem is interesting from the perspective of the Jewish theme in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> However, I am interested in it from the perspective of a regional story—the portrayal of the culture of Wilno on the threshold between the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Syrokomla, a man of democratic convictions, therefore close to Lelewel and Mickiewicz, in "A Street Bookseller" shows the logic of the watershed between these two ages using the example of a book market.

According to Mieczysław Inglot:

The narrator's intention is to make the point that Jewish street sellers were the ones who taught Polish gentry—who before this were happy

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<sup>3</sup> Zawadzki also published periodicals, for example *Tygodnik Wileński* (*Wilno Weekly*), which was the idea of Lelewel, and in which Mickiewicz had his debut. See Wiktor Czernianin, *Halina Czernianin, Wokół «Tygodnika Wileńskiego» 1815-1822. Studia i szkice*, Wrocław 2011, 4-29.

<sup>4</sup> Władysław Syrokomla, *Księgarz uliczny. Gawęda*, in Idem, *Wybór poezji*, ed. by Franciszek Bielak, Wrocław 1970, s. 389-395, l. 11. All the other quotations from this text are from this edition and are given in parentheses with line numbers.

<sup>5</sup> See Mieczysław Inglot, *Postać Żyda w literaturze polskiej lat 1822-1864*, Wrocław 1999, 139-145.

with ‘calendars’—to read serious literature.[...] Syrokomla’s bookseller is not an educator, he is a wise man, very well versed in the value of the books he sells.<sup>6</sup>

The first opinion is indisputable, yes—Syrokomla wants to show that Jews were the people who made books popular with the nobility. But firstly, in Syrokomla’s poem there are customers of the booksellers who are not members of the gentry—Syrokomla shows that the circulation of books is far more complex and also related with the university circles, which is a fact of major interest to me here. And secondly, the Jewish bookseller is ‘wise’ with the wisdom of life, not with the wisdom of books; threatened by hunger himself (and therefore understanding the hungry ones), he sets the ‘value’ of books primarily according to the law of supply and demand, although with one important reservation. He states, admittedly, that he can recognize precious documents and can make his own proofreading of them, but these are abilities which allow him to assess the material aspect of books (date of publication, etc.) and their value for bibliophiles, not for scholars or literary critics. The lack of education of the wise Jew becomes the source of the distance—good natured irony—of the narrator to the main character, and allows us to treat with a pinch of salt the influence of the educational ‘revolution’ in (Polish) Lithuania exclusively to the actions of Jewish booksellers.

Let us start with the last issue: The Jewish *bouquiniste* at the beginning is called the “doyen of booksellers”; at the end of the poem is spattered by mud thrown by the carriage of the owner of the posh bookshop, and then he says grandiloquently: “Oh! Why have I created this literature?!”(line 128). We must also be smiling while reading the comments with which he sums up, for example, the big spending attitude of such “professorial figures as Grodeck, who are willing to pay a lot of money for incunables. And I just shrug my shoulders and wonder why they need books if they can write them themselves” (lines 47-48). The vision of the Enlightenment-Romanticism turn is presented in the same tone as when the poet

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 141.

describes the guileless, mercantile way of thinking of the bookseller. For him the change is limited to the change in the size of books, from big books to small ones:

No!... pana Mickiewicza zabłysnęła chwała;  
Ale już postarzałem. broda posiwiła,  
Ręce znużone dziełmi Tacyta, Plutarcha,  
Wsparłem, ot, na tymi kij, stary patriarcha;  
I nieraz, gdy książeczkę roznosiłem małą,  
Samemu na ten towar patrzeć się nie chciało,  
Bo do czego to warto? tom taki niespory!  
*Jam przywykł do in folio lub quarto maiori.*<sup>7</sup>  
[lines 91-98]

The Jew changes his mind as to the value of Mickiewicz's works, and admits that he "must be greater than Horace" (line 104.), when he manages to sell ten of these "booklets" of Mickiewicz in an hour.

Now we understand that when Mickiewicz writes in the poem "To Joachim Lelewel" about not putting himself on the shoulders of booksellers, he means not only the restraint of a historian, but also the external meagreness of his books. Indeed, if we looked at Lelewel's publications from the period preceding the publication of the poem, we would see that, apart from two works on ancient history, which have the form of thick volumes with folded maps,<sup>8</sup> we have mostly 'minor works':<sup>9</sup> reviews, parses, press articles, treatises. Their graphic layout as well—from the quality of the paper, typesetters' diligence, to cheap illustrations—is far from the "quality editions" of which

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<sup>7</sup> "Yes, Mr. Mickiewicz became famous/ But I became old, my beard grey/My hands tired with the works of Tacitus and Plutarch/I rested on this stick, old patriarch/And many a time when I carried small books/I didn't even look at them./Because such small volumes couldn't be valuable/I am used to books *in folio* or *quarto maiori*."

<sup>8</sup> Joachim Lelewel, *Badania starożytności we względzie geografii*, Wilno 1818 and Joachim Lelewel, *Dzieje starożytne. Od początku czasów historycznych do drugiego połowy wieku szóstego, ery chrześcijańskiej*, Wilno 1818.

<sup>9</sup> See *Joachima Lelewela pisma pomniejsze geograficzno-historyczne*, Warszawa 1814.

Syrokomla's "A Street Bookseller" speaks in relation to texts from the period before Poland's partitions, for example about Strykowski's chronicle. Our *bouquiniste* adds that "Groddeck, Czacki, Śniadecki wrote volumes" (line 50), which, although "they sold well" (line 51), were nevertheless put by Syrokomla into the age of folios, because they were not "small" (line 51),

All these processes, which might be called democratization of book size, did not start in Wilno (or anywhere else) in the times of Lelewel and Mickiewicz. They were the result of the changes that started in the Enlightenment period, and were made stronger by the predilections of both our writers to 'narrative trifles'. Therefore, the changed format of books, their more modest external form, must have been treated in Wilno as a stamp of novelty, as they drew the attention of two people who knew the culture of this city so well over two different generations: Mickiewicz and Syrokomla. The novelty, after all, was not limited to the external form, because if we were to follow the history of books as proposed by Roger Chartier, we would have to admit that the publisher is a co-author, while the material aspect of a book is one of the ways to help define the meanings enclosed in it and that it influences its reading.<sup>10</sup>

"A Street Bookseller" is most interesting, however, as a testimony of the evolution of tastes as far as fashions for reading are concerned. Mieczysław Inglot believes that according to Syrokomla these tastes were strictly dependent on the chronology of the writing of these books and that new books kept replacing old books.

In the same way as we can learn about the history of Poland from Jankiel's concert, we can trace literary changes from the tale of the bookseller. The memory of the bookseller goes back to pre-Enlightenment days. And in this context we encounter such names as Rej, Wujek, Paprocki, Strykowski, but also Benedykt Chmielowski with his *Nowe Ateny* (*New Athens*). The Enlightenment in Wilno is remembered warmly (Groddeck, Czacki, Śniadecki), and obviously

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<sup>10</sup> Paweł Rodak, *Pismo, książka, lektura. Rozmowy: Le Goff, Chartier, Hebrard, Fabre, Lajeune*, intro. Krzysztof Pomian, Warszawa 2009, 79.

Romanticism (the apotheosis of Mickiewicz and Lelewel). And also romances by Walter Scott—still popular, and moreover, replacing the great dead.<sup>11</sup>

It seems, however, that although Syrokomla introduces two separate reading circles and circulations—let us call them those of the university and the gentry (Inglot is concerned mostly with the latter)—within which the changes appear at different speeds and at different times, both are concerned primarily with the generation of Mickiewicz. The setting of "A Street Bookseller" can, after all, be timed quite precisely: it must be set between the times of the deaths of Mickiewicz and Lelewel ("Mr. Joachim departed, Mr. Mickiewicz in grave") (line 116), that is between 1855 and 1861, and cover "almost sixty years", because the Jewish bookseller has been doing his job for this period of time. The names of the authors from the sixteenth century mentioned by him cannot be used to gauge the size of his memory (as we read in Inglot's texts)—they are simply authors of the books which are being sold; its presence signals the popularity of Polish texts from this century in the beginnings of the nineteenth century, or its lack, and this seems to be particularly interesting.

It could be claimed that "A Street Bookseller" shows the long term effects of this phenomenon, the reasons for which were described in Mickiewicz's poem "To Joachim Lelewel". If we look at this problem from a different angle, we will understand how it happened that Mickiewicz's works became so popular with the simple folk.

This poem has a frame structure, the narrator in the first two fragments presents a history of readers' tastes from the age of 'Wilno calendars' to the period of Scott and Kraszewski, and introduces the character who stands behind this change, while in the last fragment he shows the defeat of a door-to-door bookseller in the confrontation with the modern bookshop. The middle of the poem is filled by the reminiscences of the eponymous character, and it is from them that we can learn which mechanisms had been in operation to make all people in Lithuania read books. In the external frame such changes

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<sup>11</sup> Mieczysław Inglot, *Postać Żyda w literaturze polskiej lat 1822-1864*, op. cit., 141.

are discussed which concerned mostly the countryside of Lithuania—“aristocratic palaces”, “cottages of the gentry”—in the bookseller’s monologue. On the other hand, the focus is only on Wilno, with the university as its centre, with “figures of professors” and the crowd of “academics” (students).

The Jewish bookseller started his business at a time when in the “cottages of the gentry” the only books were “calendars from Wilno”, while in the city itself, where he set out his stall, they read ancient classics. So, in Wilno we have a period the atmosphere of which is depicted by Mickiewicz in “To Joachim Lelewel”, when he writes about Lelewel’s “moving from the graves [...] of Greek and Roman shadows”. Earlier, Mickiewicz mentioned the fascination with Greek and Roman poetry in “Pieśń filaretów” (“Song of Filarets”), and he returned to it later in *Forefathers’ Eve, Part IV and III*, where it is Lelewel again who serves as a patron of “madness” started up by “ancient history”. Syrokomla presents those years of a “magic” re-birth of Ancient literature in the way which is closest to “Song of Filarets”, in which—as we remember—the poet speaks about having fun “as the Greeks did” and fighting “as the Romans did”.<sup>12</sup> In “A Street Bookseller” we also have a patriotic lecture about the ancients:

Gdy wielka pieśń i mądrość Hellady i Romy  
Górowała nad naszej mądrości atomy,  
Kiedy w słowie Platona, w Horacego nucie  
Znajdowano Wielkości i Piękną poczucie –  
On [księgarz] sprzedawał łacińską książeczkę *in quarto*,  
Zabrudzoną z początku, a z końca odartą.  
Sprzedał za kilka groszy i w dodatku powie:  
„Niech pan czyta szczęśliwie, niech służy na zdrowie”.  
Zdrowieź było w tych książkach! słowo wrzące czynem  
Naczytawszy się Rzymian, byłeś Rzymianinem,

<sup>12</sup> Adam Mickiewicz, *Pieśń filaretów*, in *Dzieła*, vol. I: *Wiersze*, ed. by Czesław Zgorzelski, Warszawa 1993, 45.



D. ZAWADZKA, "CZASY RARYTNE..."

Duch olbrzymiał w potęgę, opływał w rozkoszy  
Za ubogą zapłatę kilkunastu groszy.<sup>13</sup>  
[lines 21-32]

This fragment comes from the part of the narrator, not from the poem's main character; however, the latter will return soon to the issue of the fascination with ancient Rome and Greece of Wilno 'academics', the fascination seen from his own, mercantile perspective. It is worth noting one element here, which could not appear in Mickiewicz's poems from his university years. Syrokomla writes about times "when the great songs and wisdom of Greece and Rome were superior to our wisdom" and therefore he adopts a comparative approach, aware that the age of Greece and Rome being "superior" will turn out to be an episode in the history of Wilno University, a stage on the way to the birth of "our" poems. And the bookseller speaks in this fashion; he looks at this episode from the perspective of the demand for ancient works, and later of the works which were the results "of reading Romans" and were created on home soil:

Rarytne były czasy! a książek ogromy,  
Groddeck, Czacki, Śniadeccy popisali tomy.  
Dzieła, choć naukowe, szły jak asygnata,  
Dużo ich sprzedawałem w staroświeckie lata.<sup>14</sup>  
[lines 49-52]

Groddeck was a neo-Hellenist, while Czacki and Śniadecki were men of the Enlightenment (much more than of neo-Classicism) who

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<sup>13</sup> "When the great songs and wisdom of Greece and Rome/Were superior to our own/When in the words of Plato and the tune of Horace/Greatness and Beauty was found/He [the bookseller] sold a Latin book *in quarto*/Stained at the beginning, torn at the end/Sold for few groshes and said/Good reading! May it bring you health/Yes, these books contained health! Words like action/You read about the Romans and you became a Roman/Your spirit grew in strength, delighted for a mere few groshes."

<sup>14</sup> "Splendid were the times! And so many books/ Groddeck, Czacki, Śniadeccy wrote whole volumes/The works, although scholarly, sold like water/I sold a lot of them in those long gone years."

tried to use their knowledge of Greek and Roman classics to build the foundations of Polish geography, astronomy, journalism, and legal and history studies. The times were “splendid”, as the bookseller testifies, but the demand for such works was limited by the limits of the finances of ‘academics’, and this time it is students who are referred to in this context (while Groddeck could afford to pay “as much as four thalers” for a book he needed):

A był to lud ubogi, obciążony pracą,  
 Niejeden chciałby kupić... a tu nie ma za co!  
 Targuje, zwraca książkę, a łza mu się kręci.  
 To jak tak myślę sobie: No szkoda mi dzieci,  
 Dam na kredyt lub w zamian literackie śmieci:  
 Od Baki do Newtona wszystko mi się przyda.  
 A poczciwi panicze pokochali Żyda.<sup>15</sup>  
 [lines 61-68]

The idea of the bookseller (we do not know to what extent it was historical) to introduce deals “in exchange” turned out to be fruitful, not only in the financial dimension—he referred to what, according to Syrokomla, counted at that time as ‘literary trash’. In this fragment the names of Reverend Baka and Newton appear together, which could be surprising, as these two figures belong to the antipodes of the world of young Mickiewicz, and the bookseller mentions the only thing which unites them. Syrokomla, however, remembered very well the likes and dislikes of “Mickiewicz’s pears”, who did not recognize the values of Rev. Baka’s text, while they advised “His Newtonian Highness” to take into consideration one more force—the force of brotherhood.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> “These were poor, working people/Many of them wanted to buy books but had no Money/They haggle, give the book back with tears in their eyes/So I take pity on these kids/I will sell on credit or exchange for literary trash/I would do with anything from Baka to Newton/And these decent lads fell in love with me.”

<sup>16</sup> Newton, as we know, is one of the main characters “Pieśń filaretów” (“Song of Filarets”). See also Maria Cieśla-Korytowska, *O romantycznym poznaniu*, Kraków 1997, and Aleksander Nawarecki, *Czarny karnawał. «uwagi śmierci niechybnej» księdza Baki – poetyka tekstu i paradoksy recepcji*, Wrocław 1991, 176-206.

But when we realize that a student from Wilno sold (exchanged?) Newton and Baka to buy Groddeck, Śniadecki and Czacki, it becomes clear that it was the choice between books "which could educate a truly public and patriotic citizens."<sup>17</sup> (for which in *The Reign of the Polish King Stanisła August...* Lelewel praised reformed schools, therefore he was praising Wilno schools as well), and all other types of more or less pragmatic knowledge. Therefore, Syrokomla, in his story of Wilno from the times of young Mickiewicz, confirms the opinions of the witness of the period and its historian embedded in the poem "To Joachim Lelewel". This is not the end of the advantages of the bookseller's idea to use exchange to satisfy poor students' appetite for reading:

W zamianę dostawałem grube folijały:  
Rejów, Wujków, Paprockich, Strykowski zbior cały,  
Łazarzów, Piotrkowczyków wydania bogate,  
I pamiętam tytuły, pamiętam ich datę.  
Niepopłatny był towar, mało znany komu,  
To ja... z piętra na piętro... od domu do domu  
Obnoszę, pokazuję, rarytność dowodzę,  
Wypchną mię przez drzwi jedne, ja drugimi wchodzę;  
Bo z biedy cóż mam począć? dla kawałka chleba  
Jasnym panom oświatę narzucać potrzeba.  
I trochę rozbudziłem do książek ochotę.<sup>18</sup>  
[w.71-74, 77-83]

The motif that was cut at the end of this fragment moves in the direction of the earlier quoted fragment about the fame of Mickiewicz. In order not to draw too strong conclusions from this

<sup>17</sup> Joachim Lelewel, *Panowanie króla polskiego Stanisława Augusta.*, op. cit., 351

<sup>18</sup> "I received thick books in return/The whole collection of Rejs, Wujeks, Paprackis, Strykowski/Exquisite edition of Łazarzs and Piotrowczyks/I remember titles and dates/These books didn't sell well, few people knew about them/So I, from floor to floor, from house to house/Carry them, show them, tell how splendid they are/They push me away through one door, I enter through another/What can I do? Being so poor/Their majesties need to have some education forced on them/And so I awakened a bit s their will to read."

text, which is, after all a literary text, not a scholarly one, which would present in detail the conditions of the reception of literature, let us focus solely on the fragments with the remarks formulated literally.

The fame of Mickiewicz, from whom the phenomenon referred to in the poem with the formula: “today the whole of Lithuania reads” starts, and which at the same time ends the period of ‘Wilno calendars’ in the provincial regions, was preceded by the popularization of “Rejs”, “Wujeks” and “Strykowski”, that is of the literature from the period before Poland’s partitions. Reading becomes popular in Lithuania thanks to Jewish booksellers, who are trying to sell books, which they buy from ‘academics’ who want in turn, in exchange for them, to buy Groddeck, Czacki or even Homer—that is Greek and Roman classics and their Enlightenment popularisers and the first researches of Slavonic pre-history. The literature of pre-partitioned Poland, which enabled Mickiewicz to become so popular with the common people, was called by Syrokomla’s bookseller “useless merchandise”, “little known” in Lithuania. It is not certain if this last remark refers to the so-called ordinary buyer to whom the bookseller offers the books received from students, or if it also refers to students themselves. Either way it would be useful information showing the stratification of literary tastes in Lithuania in the pre-Mickiewicz period, while the gentry in the country still lived in the period of ‘Wilno calendars’ and waited for Mickiewicz and Scott. Wilno, the capital, was making up for lost time, and read Ancient classics as well as Polish supporters of modernity and scholars of Polish-Lithuanian ancient history. As befitted the period of the great shift of conventions, the changes happened dynamically—in Wilno Baka and Newton were considered ‘literary trash’, and the authors of the Polish golden age were known only to very few.

It seems that Syrokomla here put different tastes into some “average”. It is worth remembering that he—as Aleksander Nawarecki<sup>19</sup> described it—must have gone through a phase of fascination with Reverend Baka, far removed from juvenile mockery, and stood behind

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<sup>19</sup> Aleksander Nawarecki, *Czarny karnawał*, op. cit., 223–227.

the re-publishing of Baka's poetry. Syrokomla also knew old Polish writers well as he was a populariser of Polish history in *Dziejach literatury w Polsce od pierwiastkowych do naszych czasów* (*History of Polish Literature from the Beginnings till Our Times*). However, the things he writes about in "A Street Bookseller" on the problems with Polish books in Lithuania and problems with the popularization of old Polish writers appear, from the perspective of Lelewel and Mickiewicz, to be quite plausible.

In 1806 Lelewel, still a student and a member of Towarzystwa Nauk i Umiejętności (Society of Science) had a presentation during the society's meeting, in which under the metaphor of fatherland-Phoenix buried in ashes, he showed the political situation and... bibliographical situation as well as the goals of such societies.

The first step [that is before the Phoenix will finally arise] to achieve the enterprise so holy to Poles, I see in revealing to the public view the chronicles of Polish history, which have so long gathered dust in libraries.<sup>20</sup>

Lelewel has very concrete texts in mind: chronicles of Gall Anonim and Kadłubek (in this presentation he promised to prepare a critical edition of these chronicles). This initiative was, in fact, more general, and was designed to popularize old Polish literature as such and as such it was continued by Lelewel's disciples. Mickiewicz was, obviously, one of them (*Mieszko, książę Nowogródka*, [*Mieszko, the Prince of Nowogródek*], *Żywila* [*Żywila*], *Grażyna* [*Grażyna*]), but even forty years later Lelewel's vision was confirmed by the publication of Maciej Strykowski's chronicle: *Kroniki polskiej, litewskiej, żmudzkiej i wszytkiej Rusi* (*Chronicle of Poland, Lithuania, Samogitia and the whole of Ruthenia*). This chronicle was written in Polish, and what it needed was "only" popularization and explanations with historical and biographical context and comparisons with other sources.

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<sup>20</sup> Joachim Lelewel, *Głos miany do Towarzystwa Filomatycznego z oświadczeniem się robót*, w: *Polska. Dzieje i rzeczy jej rozpatrywane przez Joachima Lelewela*, vol. 19, Poznań 1866, 14.

This chronicle was almost ready to be reintroduced to the reading public, and Mickiewicz used fragments of it while writing *Grażyna*. The general opinion of these chronicles, however, must have been—as Syrokomla wrote—that they were useless merchandise. It took many years to prepare Strykowski's chronicle for publication, very turbulent years though. Therefore, the market for the old Polish literature in Wilno of Lelewel and Mickiewicz, the city of multi-lingual literary culture in the pre-modern period<sup>21</sup>, had to be built, but it was not created automatically, in some patriotic gesture, when Poland lost its independence in 1795. In the light of what we learn from "A Street Bookseller" in Lithuania at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was still easier to get hold of a 'calendar' (in the countryside) and a volume of Homer (in the capital), or even Enlightenment books (for example, by Czapski), than to get hold of books of old Polish literature. Yet, it was such literature that would become a part of the chain of tradition.

The search for the part of the chain was described by Lelewel in *Bibliograficznych ksiąg dwoje*, (*Two Bibliographical Books*), information for which had been gathered by his friends—some doing so regularly, while others sporadically—some of them wanted to become positive heroes of these books. This is a fragment of a letter by Michał Baliński, showing both Jews as middlemen in search of books of the old Polish period, and the excitement connected with this type of book collecting which Lelewel had had in mind:

Thanks to God, my bibliophile eagerness, and the help of Jewish booksellers my collection of old Polish literature has grown considerably. I also have some books on towns and cities, although probably not everything. Who knows! Maybe when the third volume of *Bibliographical Books* is published, some of the copies of my collections may be useful, as it has happened with the collections

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<sup>21</sup> The complexity of the Wilno book market in the Middle Ages and in the Early Modern Period is confirmed by the research of Jakub Niedźwiedź. See Jakub Niedźwiedź *Kultura literacka Wilna (1323-1655). Retoryczna organizacja miasta*, Kraków 2012, 58-80 and 119-222.

of Ostrowski, Osiński, Raczyński and others. I have managed to find some really interesting things.<sup>22</sup>

According to Baliński, a member of the Wilno elite, connected with Lelewel mostly through *Tygodnik Wileński (Wilno Weekly)* (he edited this periodical), *Two Bibliographical Books* should have been published serially and served as a forum for bibliophiles interested in old Polish books. Lelewel himself had a similar motivation, which he explained in the introduction, referring to his work in a library in Warsaw.

When I was temporarily employed in the years 1818-1821 I slowly accumulated a lot of bibliographical and historical information, which might be of interest to our country and, to a large extent, to our national literature and history. They were very different, not connected with one another, and I wanted more and more to share them with others.<sup>23</sup>

But we should return to Lelewel's youthful programme and to his periodical of that period. There was one more obstacle to overcome in connection with Polish chronicles, and it was the result of the fact that history is usually written by victors:

Our oldest writers wrote not for their compatriots, but for the world, and that is why they did not use the vernacular, but the language of their former Lords of this land. If we want to help our compatriots to help with the national history, let us throw away foreign robes from our writers, and let us show them to the world wearing our national dress. Maybe we will manage to inspire our compatriots with the examples of Wags, Allberthands and Naruszewiczs. Then skilful

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<sup>22</sup> A letter of Michał Baliński to Joachim Lelewel, Wilno, 15/27 lutego 1827, in Kazimierz Jasiulaniec, *Z korespondencji Joachima Lelewela z Michałem Balińskim*, odbitka z „Ateneum Wileńskiego”, XIV, 1939, i. 1, 246 (10).

<sup>23</sup> *Joachima Lelewela biblijograficznych ksiąg dwoje, w których rozebrane i pomnożone zostały dwa dzieła Jerzego Samuela Bandtke. Historja drukarni krakowskich - tudzież historia Biblioteki uniwersyteckiej w Krakowie, a przydany Katalog inkunabułów polskich*, vol. 1, Wilno 1823, 11-12.

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writers will appear, who will beautifully present national events as seen by eye-witnesses.<sup>24</sup>

Lelewel suggests here the translation of chronicles into Polish, both from the “language of the Lords”, that is Latin, for example from Gall Anonim, but also from old Ruritanian—Nestor. It is not certain what Lelewel had in mind when he wrote about the appearance of “skilful writers”, who would be inspired, it seems, by the before-mentioned translations. What is certain is that we can see here great eagerness for easy and common access to the annals of the “vernacular” past. This eagerness was characteristic of many scholars in this period, although the wish to look at the past from the perspective of “an eye-witness” rarely led to the “repetition” of events. It was an impulse alive also in other areas: that of literature and hoax.

The portrayal of the year 1822 in Wilno, presented in the literary descriptions from this period—written by Mickiewicz and Syrokomla—had no vision of revolution, which was at the very time carried out single-handedly by no-one else but Mickiewicz himself. The breakthrough was instead the result of the times, which were “splendid”, a period of intellectual ferment, when books sold extremely well, and when readers’ tastes mixed, merged and changed rapidly. Horace was being replaced by Czacki, Sniadecki by Strykowski, who in turn were replaced by “Mr. Mickiewicz”. Maybe the greatness of this period had a foundation which was prosaic but typical in this part of Europe: the fever to catch up with, which was not limited to mere copying of dominant cultures, but at a certain moment transformed into a vernacular “Romantic fever”.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 15.