

BERNADETTA KUCZERA-CHACHULSKA

**BETWEEN REALISM OF OBSERVATION
AND A VISION: THE CREATIVE PROCESS
AND THE VALUE OF ITS RESULT USING
THE EXAMPLE OF THE FIRST PART
OF ZYGMUNT KRASIŃSKI'S
*UN-DIVINE COMEDY***

Krasiński as a visionary, Krasiński as a historiosophical thinker—or Krasiński as a political thinker, and as a social thinker—this is undoubtedly a major research problem. But another question might also be asked: to what extent would Krasiński have fulfilled all these roles, if he by himself, even complaining about the lack of the “angelic dimension” so necessary for a poet, had not become one of the greatest artists of Polish Romanticism? To what extent would his reflections be perceived if he had not crossed the border, beyond which it is not proper to talk solely of a thin path of discourse and abstract thought? These are uniquely merged with the metaphorical and pictorial excess of organization: the key things which decide about the status of a work of art. It should be admitted at the beginning, as the history of the scholarly reception of Krasiński’s work tells us that he is, perhaps, of all Romantic poets, the most predestined to such a reception, perhaps even more than Norwid—we know so much from Krasiński’s biography about his extraordinary intensive ‘burning’, his intensive brain work, about intensive thinking, which he was accustomed to since early boyhood; to such a considerable extent that the specific features of his works are achieved through ordered, rational, logical thinking. Even in instances when we tend to see prophetic visions and the most livid of Romantic amorphousness,

we can find consideration, calculation, cool, rational order. One of Krasiński's commentators wrote in this way:

Is *Un-divine Comedy* really a sister of *Forefathers' Eve* and *Kordian*? That they are cousins is obvious. But it is equally obvious that it has predilections alien to the other two texts. There is not a trace in it of compositional unrest and explosive vehemence, showing themselves in the lack of order, lack of proportions, in the general lack of harmonious structure of the text. On the contrary, it is order and clarity—almost classicist—that in *Un-divine Comedy* become signs of *intellectualism* in which the whole text is soaked. Calm, restraint, strict rigour of proportions, intertexts, compositional analogies, unblemished and clear symmetry of the whole text—make the unsteadiness of Romantic constructions disappear almost completely. (emphasis—B.K.-Ch.)¹

It is indisputable that this “intellectual line” is connected with other dimensions, constitutive for a work of art, and that it is an individual and unique feature of Krasiński's *oeuvre*. The specificity of this text's artistry, determined by the creative attitude characteristic of Krasiński, seems to be distinguishable even from a long distance. However, the question remains whether things which have been preserved while reading, in reality somewhat putative, will be confirmed by more detailed observations. Almost all readers of Krasiński, while experiencing the charm and power of his prophetic forecasts, are at the same time aware that these visions have their roots, the presence of which has a character either beyond the intellectual, or not predominantly intellectual, that the element of experience and observation is important here, although this last phenomenon seems often to be the result not of the texts themselves or the readings of poets' texts which is modelled by tradition.

The creative process which is at the centre of my attention—obviously permanently in the relationship with its result—that is

¹ Czesław Zgorzelski, *Nad Nie-Boską komedią*, in *Idem Od Oświecenia ku Romantyzmowi i współczesności*, Kraków 1978, 267.

with the artistic shape of Krasiński's poetry—is understood here not psychologically, but—to use the expression of Janusz Sławiński—more operationally² (an attempt to re-create the fragment of one chain of action which “has led to the formation of the text out of specific material”), will be profiled more strictly by the phenomenological (Ingarden) perception of the text, and therefore each assessment will be based on what is available and possible to see (read) in the text itself.

To illustrate the problem more clearly I will use the context removed quite a lot from Krasiński's works, of course, not at all for intertextual or genetic goals; my intention is only to strengthen and accentuate the observation.

The picture of Stanisław Wyspiański intensely watching all night long the colourful wedding of Lucjan Rydel and Jadwiga Mikołajczykówna is commonly known from historical records. Against, or maybe in line with, the intentions of chroniclers of this period, the legend of Wyspiański was born, who revealed then an act of unusual creative energy, which accumulated in the very attitude of an *observer*, seemingly passive, subordinated to the borders of creative powers to the visible world. And it was this world which dictated rules for the construction and growth of this text. So, realism and observation were at the beginning of scenes like this one:

BRIDE

All you do is talk and talk,
What kind of lover are you.

GROOM

Would you rather have me kiss you—?
Will you always love me, say it.

BRIDE

But I am all talked out already,
Nobody's gonna take me from you.

² “Proces twórczy”, entry in *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. by Sławiński, Wrocław 1998. See also Stanisław Jaworski, „Piszę więc jestem”. O procesie twórczym w literaturze, Łódź 1993.

COLLOQUIA LITTERARIA

GROOM

My heart is too full to keep silent,
you are mine, o happiness, Joy!
I never thought it could be so great.³

after a few more similar exchanges between the newlyweds, the scene is ended in this way, with these two present only:

GROOM

Now I will have no one but you,
How I long for grain and sun.

BRIDE

You are at a wedding! Go and dance.⁴ (37)

And now, let us have a look at a similar scene from *Un-Divine Comedy*:

*A room full of people—A ball—Music—Lighted candles—Flowers—
The bride is waltzing, and after a few turns she stands still, she comes
upon her husband by chance in the crowd and leans her head upon
his shoulder.*

THE BRIDEGROOM

How beautiful you are in your weakness, in the disorder of flowers
and pearls upon your hair—You are flashed with modesty and with
weariness—Oh endlessly, endlessly shall you be my song!

THE BRIDE

I will be a faithful love to you, as my mother bade me as my heart
bids me be—But so many folk here—It is so hot and clamorous.

THE BRIDEGROOM

Go, dance once more and I will look at you as once, in thoughts,
I looked at gliding angels.

³ All quotations from *The Wedding* come from the translation by Gerald T. Kapolka, Ann Arbor, Ardis, 1990. 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

THE GROOM

I shall go, if you will it—but almost my strength fails me.

THE BRIDEGROOM

I pray you go, my beloved.⁵

When we manage to free ourselves—as readers—from the somewhat stupendous impression caused by contrasting these two fragments (the factors of this contrast seem to be quite obvious) we may wonder, or even may be flabbergasted by the strong, equivocal field of identity of the whole space of meanings released by the dialogues of these two dramas. They are as follows: a conversation of newlyweds about love, verbal confirmation of feelings (assuring of its lifelong nature, enjoying and tasting the feeling of mutual belonging, contemplation of the wife's beauty and her presence; authenticity and intensity of feelings expressed in various ways, declared and "enacted" obedience in the name of love—both scenes end when the pair goes dancing), the realism of the scene (other people, heat, noise).

Kraśiński concentrated on what he was observing almost as much as Wyspiański, half a century later; he noticed the internal states of characters with great sensitivity, as well as complex social stereotypes, and he used them as a basic material for his dramatic construction.

While writing about married love in many fragments he applied the stylization from the biblical "Song of Songs": "How beautiful you are in your weakness".⁶ "Tell me, my dear, what ails you for your voice is changed and your cheeks are flushed with fever...".⁷ The spirit of this biblical book hovers over the whole first part to certain extent as a counterpoint in relation to the challenges which are brought to it by the maiden-temptress. What is characteristic is that the biblical

⁵ Zygmunt Kraśiński, *Un-divine Comedy*, translated by Harriette E. Kennedy and Zofia Umińska, Greenwood, Westport, 1976, 5-6. All quotations from *Un-divine Comedy* are from this edition.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

references in *Un-divine Comedy* (at least in the first part of the drama, but probably elsewhere as well) are used to strengthen the impression of realism. Irena Sławińska, in her paper about conversations in *Forefathers' Eve Part III*⁸, wrote that Mickiewicz's biblical phrases are subordinated not to the law of realism, but the law of generalization. Her statement could be supplemented with the following one: Mickiewicz used the biblical text for the pathos of particular elements, for the sacralisation of events; with Krasiński the biblical function is almost the opposite. The Bible explains and supplements realism, it exposes realism, it is introduced more for the sake of individual (not concerned with bigger units) metaphors and information; not for generalization, and often— to complement an area of facts and information.

The drama of the Man would not have the same force of real mental and spiritual experience if it was not for the consciousness of the protagonist, at the bottom of which there existed the knowledge of the Bible:

THE MAN

He walks up and down and wrings his hands.

O God! Did Thou thyself sanctify the union of two bodies? Didst thou pronounce their inseparability, though the souls which inherit them repulse each other, go their own ways and leave the bodies like two corpses each by each?⁹

Krasiński thought in biblical terms. The presence of the biblical text is important and totally coherent with the first part of the drama—particularly on the level of realism—it forms a hidden motivation or an aesthetic justification (according to the notion of hidden symmetry), for example of the final scene of the drama with the crucified Christ, who appeared on the visionary level of the drama. It is worth noting at this point, that the first part—despite the presence of maiden-illusion—has a character dominated by reality experienced universally

⁸ Irena Sławińska, *O rozmowach w III części „Dziadów”*, Lublin 1957, 18-22.

⁹ Krasiński, *Un-divine...*, op. cit., 8.

and realistically—while the other part— much more general and brief because of the vastness of the problems touched on—is subjected to a much bigger degree to the visionary mode.

Let us return, however, to the detailed issues connected with the first part of *Un-Divine Comedy*.

The drama of the Man and the Wife was built on a psychologically deep and realistic study of marriage. The tragedy of the family can be explained by the desire of devotion and sacrifice of the Woman, which is obvious in psychological terms. The maiden-temptress and her power of action would not have had such a destructive influence on this situation if it had not been for the Wife's affection, so extreme, and at the same time so human and justified by reality. The dilemmas of the Man and the Virgin-illusion treated symbolically hide—as an element of an external picture—the way in which the Man acts, and we have a clear description of the way in which temptation operates. Krasiński—the author of the first part of *Un-divine Comedy*, is seen here—I repeat—as an excellent observer: *observation is the starting point*, an impulse for the more visionary constructs which are going to appear later (in the second part).

The relationship of two people, despite the final disaster, is presented by Krasiński with more 'universal realism' than couples in Mickiewicz, let alone in Słowacki's texts. Fragments, such as the one which follows, may be treated as instances of such realism, which also extends to spiritual reality:

THE WIFE

Thank God, the rite will be performed at last—our little Georgie will become completely a Christian, for though he has been baptized privately it has always seemed to me that something was lacking (*she moves towards the cradle*). Sleep my baby! Did you dream something, that you have thrown off your coverlet? Now, thus lie—that way. My Georgie is uneasy to-day, my little one, my darling. Sleep!¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

This fragment shows thinking about a child in the context of the sacrament of baptism; thinking which is almost common, repetitive, sanctioned socially and religiously. Krasinski here is not a Romantic, but an observer of the world of people living at a given time in a given place.

We also find in the first part of *Un-divine Comedy* traces of the excellent and modern psychology of moral self-destruction (a conflict between the obligation coming from the sacrament and the temptation to live as an artist).

THE HUSBAND

Listen Mary, perhaps you are pretending, perhaps you are hiding somewhere to punish me? Speak, please, speak, Mary, May. No, none answers, John, Katherine. The whole household has gone deaf—has gone dumb—.

I have cast her to whom I swore fidelity into the ranks of the damned here in this world. All I have touched I have destroyed, and finally I will destroy myself—Did hell let me loose that I a little longer might be its living image here on earth?

On what pillow does she lay her head to-day? What sounds are round her in the night.¹¹

The scenery of a search for a wife and concrete and non-romantic everyday life, becomes the natural frame for the authentic inner drama of the protagonist (if we disregard the linguistic anachronisms, we might say that this is a type of drama like Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*).

The traces of Krasinski's power of observation can be seen on different levels and in different contexts;

It's sultry, it's stifling—a storm is coming—Will a thunderbolt soon fall out there and in here will my heart break?¹²

¹¹ Ibid., 23.

¹² Ibid., 10.

In this fragment realistic treatment passes into a metaphoric, but not fanciful speech about one's mental condition. In the spirit of this realism, the fragment which was referred to earlier (with the phrase "I have destroyed and I will finally destroy myself") passes into a cold introspective (despite the author's note: "The voice from somewhere") statement: "Thou thus compose a drama".¹³

Almost every scene which is a metaphorical generalization, filled with the vision of the future and dynamics of the picture which is realistic no more, *grows out of fragments soaked in a thorough observation of the world and one's own (authorial) inside.*

This type of observation is also responsible for the power of contrasts between particular sub-units, which—maybe—are the foundations of Krasieński's artistry and the power of expression of his literary works.

For example, the fragment—which was quoted at the beginning and put together with Wyspiański's *The Wedding* to illustrate the power of the realistic dimension—of the dialogue of the Bridegroom and the Bride, was placed in the immediate proximity (separated by three asterisks only) of a short fragment with "An Evil Spirit in the form of the maiden flying past"

A little while ago I still ran about the earth just at this hour, now
devils urge me on and bid me to be a saint.
(She flies over a garden)
Flowers, pluck yourselves and fly into my hair!
(She flies over a cemetery)
O, freshness and charm of dead maidens, poured out into the air,
floating above the graves, fly to my cheeks.¹⁴

This contrast does not reflect the ordinary law of contrast. It reflects and shows—so it seems—Krasieński fundamental creative law: deeply rooted and multi-layered realism (verisimilitude, local colours, realism of internal life, but also realism of spirit, realism of man/woman relationships), which projects and releases an intensive

¹³ Ibid. 23.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

intellectual activity *fostering the creation and the quality of visions*. It is measured by the space between observation (by which I understand also one's own experience) and the force of an intellectual 'jump' (metaphorical) into the future.

I have pointed out earlier that the clear explication of the real spiritual-biblical experience, even on the purely aesthetic plane which is visible in the beginning of *Un-divine Comedy*, makes the final scene with the vision of Christ absolutely adequate. There is no way—in the context of an aesthetic analysis—to uphold the verdict of Julian Przyboś that this ending was a stroke of genius, but that it is *kitsch* at the same time. It seems that Przyboś got carried away by his own vision of the fantastic "path", which altered his perception in such a way that he was not able—something that the text of *Un-divine Comedy* forces onto its readers—to see the real path of observation and real experience of the world by the person of the author, the experience which was, among other things, influenced by reading of the Bible. Such a realism of the speaking 'I' in Krasiński's poetry is very visible; many arguments for it can be found in the research which has been done on his biography.

If a creative process remains symmetrical in relation to the act of perception and aesthetic experience, then, through taking into consideration the schemata of this experience, as refined and described by Roman Ingarden, we might see the initial emotion as a moment referring to authorial submersion in the real world. This statement, as obvious as it is, leads to a less obvious thesis revealing the specificity of Krasiński's works: that the subsequent phase—of the subject's activity—is parallel with the intellectual power of the poet, which enables the vision to be constructed.

The changeability of the perceptive-contemplative moment (reception of the world) and the active phase (constructing of a vision) is parallel with the changeability of aesthetic experience simplified to a scheme.¹⁵

¹⁵ See Roman Ingarden, in Idem, *Przeżycie estetyczne*, in *Wybór pism estetycznych*, intro. and ed. by A. Tyszczyk, Kraków 2005.

It is possible—through accepting the idea of the French aesthetician Michael Dufrenne, that the structure of the work of art shows similarity with the structure of a human being¹⁶ and through joining of the “real zone” of Krasieński’s works with what was preserved in contemplative memory (the past) the “vision zone” (an attempt to understand the future)—to introduce one of the key anthropological arguments of Henry Bergson:

Constant movement forward, gathering all the past and creating the future—such is the key nature of personality [...] two key aspects of human personality are: firstly, the Memory, covering all the range of unconscious past in such a way that in each moment this part of it may be made conscious which might be used. And secondly, the Will, bent all the time towards the future [...] To be the man means to be tension.¹⁷

The works of Krasieński are one more Romantic variant of the condensed exemplification of what in very basic terms makes us human.

¹⁶ Eugenia Basara-Lipiec, *Arcydzieło. Teoria i rzeczywistość*, Warszawa 1997, 57.

¹⁷ Henri Bergson, *Problem osobowości*, trans. by P. Kostyło, afterword, St. Borzym, Warszawa 2004, 204-205.