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### HORROR AND HARMONY

Słowacki's mystical dramas—compelling and mysterious—turn out to be too difficult both for readers and contemporary theatre, which forgets about the dramatic function of poetic language and tries to be so spectacular that it forgets about the dynamics of dialogues and capabilities of imagination. Słowacki was keen to use dramatic conventions of plot construction, which were obligatory in nineteenth century theatre and they are obligatory in contemporary cinema: melodramatic conventions of plot and scheme construction; for example, the motive of a lost thing, which becomes crucial for the development of the plot (a crown in *Balladyna*, a ring in *Sen srebrny Salomei* (*The Silver Dream of Salomea*)) and around them he built historiographical visions full of panache, yet the poetic layer of these dramas is slowly becoming an insurmountable obstacle to modern audiences. Słowacki, once the most often performed Polish playwright, now appears in theatres less and less often. And yet, he has not ceased to be an author to whom we can return and not only benefit from it, but also have pleasure in doing so.

Moreover it seems that for today's audiences the aspects that are the most difficult to perceive are those which are most specific, particularly in the most interesting dramas by Słowacki, such as *Książę Marek* (*Father Marek*) or *The Silver Dream of Salomea*. In my opinion, their specificity lies in the length of monologues built out of unusual, Baroque metaphors, relying on classical rules of rhetoric, composed of rich, parallel pictures, complex sentences and multi-layered epithets. These pictures are surprising; very often they break today's sense of standards and aesthetic appropriateness in their

mixture of pastoral with awe, sacrum with cruelty. The question should therefore be raised: what is the purpose of this breaking of standards? It seems that the accumulation of meretricious dissonances can help unravel mechanisms breaking the harmonious order of the world. One could perhaps—as Claude Backvis<sup>1</sup> started to do—trace Baroque motives in Słowacki's writings, refer to his poetry and memoirs, to *Jerusalem Delivered* and the heritage of preachers; multiply traditions and contexts. One could point to the great role of Shakespeare, to the dialectically constructed monologues and rhetorical figures in the dialogues of his dramas. One could recall rhetorical traditions of acting, going back to Shakespearean times, certainly alive also in Słowacki's days. At that time, they formed a readymade instrument designed to perform the most difficult of poetic figures; today, however, this instrument would be totally anachronistic and unintelligible. All this could invite a moment of consideration over the richness of these texts, still not described, consideration fertile and useful; it will not, however, unravel their mystery. Both these points of reference—Baroque and classical rhetoric—today are topics of a historical nature. I think that they are fascinating both as a topic and a complement, as documentation clearly widening the horizon of other questions with which we still must start. Because Słowacki did not return to the Baroque. He simply reminded us of the ways of imaging which existed then, because he tried to understand that world, because he knew how it had ended and what heritage it had left.

In today's literary studies the interest in rhetoric has returned, albeit rhetoric analysed from a slightly different angle: as a general rule ordering a literary text on all its levels and also on the level of sounds. When Yuri Lotman, in his article on rhetoric, characterized the Baroque attitude to metaphor, he wrote, referring to an Italian theoretician: "In his study of the Metaphor, Tesauro described it as a universal rule of both human and divine consciousness. It is

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<sup>1</sup> C. Backvis, *Słowacki i narodowe dziedzictwo*, in Idem, *Szkice o kulturze staropolskiej*, ed. by A. Biernacki, Warszawa 1975.

grounded in an Insight—thinking embedded in joining of what is incongruous, on the union of what cannot be united. Metaphorical consciousness was compared with creativity, and even the divine act of creation seems to Tesauro a kind of highest Insight, which with the help of metaphors, analogies and concepts creates the world. Tesauro stands against those for whom rhetorical figures are only external decoration—for Tesauro they are the very basis of the thinking mechanism of this highest Genius, which brings spirituality to man and the universe.”<sup>2</sup> To describe the tools of widely understood rhetoric as a way of seeing the world, or rather, to reveal the mechanisms in which the poet looks at the world through the poetic tools he uses, is both a problem of Słowacki’s attitude to the Baroque and a challenge we have to undertake if Słowacki is to remain an author who is still read and performed. In each of the mystical dramas mentioned there are different key issues and the perspective proposed by Lotman allows us, so it seems, to deal with them in a more thorough way than has been done before in the study on Słowacki’s works.

Both in *Father Marek* and in *The Silver Dream of Salomea* the function of monologues alludes to the basic formula of Greek tragedy—they are an account of drastic events which have happened off stage. In *The Silver Dream of Salomea* Słowacki observes this rule so strictly that at the very beginning we participate in the scene in which an exalted Gruszczyński reads Regimentarz’s forged letter, but the results of the decision affected by this letter become apparent in the third act in the account of Pafnucy. Also, the further development of the scene, which closes the third act—retelling of all atrocities which have been committed at the cemetery of the orthodox church—are introduced at the beginning of the fourth act in the account of Sawa. The direct fight between Leon and Semanka takes place in the next scene. Such a sequence of events is justified from the perspective of plot development— only then can the gentry come to the rescue and free Leon. However, it also has compositional justification—as the plot of the drama develops, it is accompanied by the growing tension

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<sup>2</sup> Ю. М. Лотман, Риторика, in Idem, *Избранные статьи*, Таллинн 1992, т. 1, 174.

of precisely used symbolic signs, a gradual revealing of “the highest Insight”, about which Tesauro wrote.

The function of monologues in these two dramas is, however, completely different—while in *The Silver Dream of Salomea* they relate events past and allude to the Ancient Greek role of a Messenger, in *Father Marek* they interpret things which are happening at a given moment, or they foretell the future. Therefore, they are closer to the role of the chorus in Ancient Greek drama. The vision of history in *Father Marek* is clearer and subjected to a strong ideological explanation. It seems to be more allegorical than dramatic. The rules of Greek tragedy have been incorporated into mystical dramas also because they are in concord with Słowacki’s own vision of the world. Horror—which protagonists of the drama have experienced and retell it, and while retelling it, they try to order it in some way—for Słowacki was not a performance, but a task in poetic construction. Therefore, we have a split here between the value of the performance from the very idea of a drama, which is even more foregrounded by numerous metaphors comparing the world to a stage (I will return to this subject later). The dramatic nature of the world is the result of its being dialogic and dynamic, of the conflict of opposites; it has little in common with how spectacular the performance is, which is just one of its aspects.

Lack of appreciation of this fundamental rule has led to many misunderstandings with which these dramas have been received and still are received, particularly *The Silver Dream of Salomea*. Therefore, I will limit my considerations to this drama only, also because, in this text, the word ‘horror’ appears more times (four) than in any other text by Słowacki. In *Father Marek* the word ‘horror’ does not appear at all, neither does ‘terror’, a term related to ‘horror’.

We could relate many accounts rejecting sick—according to readers—features of Słowacki’s imagination. According to them, *The Silver Dream of Salomea* is, offensive, foul and repulsive. Even these days, when literary and film horrors are so popular, I have come across girls/students who read parts of this drama with clear disgust and under constraint. They were reading and watching the plot development. Concentrating on events and cruel details they were

not able—and they were not the only ones in this respect; this is also true most of Słowacki's researchers—to see the value of the words and rhetorical figures with which these events were described; they were not able to move onto a level of poetic generalizations, which are central here.

A poetic generalization is to help cope with the heritage of a past full of terror and violence. Słowacki tried to understand and redefine the world order being destroyed by history—destroyed a long time before events which the generation of Romantics experienced. It was not only the present which had to be understood and cleansed, but also memory, in this case the memory of the so called Cossack wars. The horror which related to this memory posed a constant challenge. It had to be coped with, so that the world would not become a space reigned over by the absurd, and so that horror would not return with more strength. The point was not to surrender to the mood of a resentful Cossack Semenکو:

Hej świat smutku trumnica!  
Pod czerwonym pożarem,  
Serca nasze pod strachem,  
Duchy nasze pod czarem. (III, 591-595)<sup>3</sup>

Słowacki knew very well that in order not to surrender to horror you must free yourself from fear and from captivating charm. He embellished the horror of gory events with an elevated and exquisite poetic form, which helped to liberate from the fascination with the past, show mechanisms of reactions of the protagonists of those events thoroughly and without sentiments, and also to reveal general laws governing people and nations. He employed a plethora of poetic means at all levels of *The Silver Dream of Salomea*. The plot of the drama

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<sup>3</sup> All quotations from *The Silver Dream of Salomea* come from: J. Słowacki, *Dzieła wszystkie*, ed. by J. Kleiner, vol. VI, Wrocław 1955, "numbers in parenthesis refer to the numbers of acts and of lines. Lo the world of funeral sadness!/Under the red fire/Our hearts filled with fear/Our souls charmed."

is constructed of parallel events, reactions of protagonists, metaphors, colours, natural phenomena, singing and birds' behaviour.

Colours are of particular importance in this drama: they define the protagonists and are at the same time expressive and dramatic. Their function deserves a separate study. One of the most outstanding examples is the gradation of shades of Gruszczyński's paleness, unbecoming to a member of a gentry. Gruszczyński, with his unit, has been ambushed by his own peasants. The gradation of oxymorons shows the fact that this paleness is unnatural—it is more and more intense, and therefore darker and darker. Its terror is shown by epithets which become ever stronger—first Gruszczyński succumbs to an ordinary “paleness of fear”. When it grows, it becomes “horrible, green (I, 267), “repulsive”/. “Paleness which can be seen at night/paleness of fear on a thief, /Green and leaden”. (I, 269-272). At last it creates horror:

Bośmy się złąkli błądoci  
 Takiej czarnej, ołowianej,  
 Na twarzy wodza widzianej,<sup>4</sup>  
 (I, 276-279)

The growing paleness of Gruszczyński covers the whole spectrum—from white, through green and leaden to black, because it was not caused by the threat of death, but by the spectacle, which has been prepared by Cossacks out of the bodies of his murdered sons. In this part of the drama the changing colours might also have a dynamic function. The suffering of Gruszczyński calls for an avenger. When the avenger appears, the rusting sword of the old nobleman will come to life again, the rust will turn to a ruby:

I niech te umierające -  
 Stare tureckie turkusy,  
 Gdy je polskie ręce chwycą,  
 Znów swe oczy rozblękić:

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<sup>4</sup> “We are scared by paleness/So black and leaden/Seen on the face of our commander.”

Niech tej klingi kolor rusy,  
Gdy nią człowiek krzyż uczyni,  
Znów swoją twarz rozrubini,  
Jak piorun polskich pałaszy,  
I świat krzyżem czerwonym przestraszy.<sup>5</sup>  
(III, 299-307)

First of all, however, Słowacki uses all possible means to shatter the harmony of the world he describes. The reddening sword makes the sign of the cross in the air. The focus moves to the cross; it in turn becomes a weapon, it brings fear. The lack of cohesion of the world described in the drama starts at the most elementary level—the level of linguistic trivialities and incongruities. At the very beginning Regimentarz speaks about Gruszczyński using a somewhat vibrant simile:

Biały starzec—biały—jak kot w marcu,  
A tak jeszcze ognisty!<sup>6</sup>  
(I. 26-27)

This simile seems to be misconceived, a cat in March is not white, it's heated by lust, but such a reversal of the parts of the simile reveals the fervour with which the old nobleman fights. And when the Princess wants to get rid of the St. Francis ring which was forced on her, she tells Anusia:

Może ten kamień krwawnikowy nudzi,  
Może na palcu krwi kolorem straszy.  
Ach zgub ten sygnet, albo zjedz go w kaszy.<sup>7</sup>  
(II, 22-24)

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<sup>5</sup> "And let the dying/Old Turkish turquoises/When they are held in Polish hands/  
Turn their eyes blue again/Let the red blade/When a man makes the sign of the cross  
with it/Become the colour of a ruby/As lightening made of Polish swords/And startle  
the world with the red cross."

<sup>6</sup> "White old man—white—as a cat in March/And still so fiery!"

<sup>7</sup> "Maybe this cornelian stone is boring/Maybe on the finger it scares with  
the colour of blood/Oh, lose this ring or eat it with kasha."

Dissonances of this world are brought even by the scheme of rhymes, as is the case in the example quoted above, or in the first conversation of Sawa with Regimentarz, when it is rhymes which show how difficult it is to understand each other:

SAWA

W sercu mi teraz tak głucho  
I tak ciemno, żem nie do kieliszka...

REGIMENTARZ

Na świętego przysięgam Franciszka,  
Że ci serce to, wnet rozweselę.

SAWA

Krwi dziś widziałem tak wiele!<sup>8</sup>  
(II, 118-122)

The reaction of the two partners in this dialogue shows the whole, multi-layered ambiguity of the situation they are in. When Regimentarz learns about the imprisonment of Leon, he decides at last to join the fight. Pafnucy, who has just been calling for revenge, despairs over the defeat of Ukraine, because he does not identify this country with any warring sides. No matter who wins, Ukraine will be the victim of this war:

Ach! Ukrainy nie będzie!  
Bo ją ludzie ci na mieczach rozniosą.<sup>9</sup>  
(III, 583-584)

It is not the people he and the poet are sorry for—it will be roses and songs which will disappear, old profaned mounds. It is the people themselves, who destroy the identity of their homeland in the civil war. Moreover, it seems, that the incongruity is grounded in the very

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<sup>8</sup> “S: My heart is so hollow now/And so dark that I am not keen on drinking.  
R: I swear by St. Francis that/I will make your heart merrier. S: I have seen so much blood today!”

<sup>9</sup> “Oh! Ukraine will be no more!/Because these people will destroy it with swords.”

picture of these cruel events—for example in Pafnucy's account about how Cossacks stopped Gruszczyński's unit with the heads of his sons mounted on pikes. The teller sees in the horrible sight an association contradictory to its very nature:

Dwie główki ścięte po szyje,  
Szły prosto, prosto na ojca;  
Jakby wiosenne lilije  
Na krwawym zabójcy grobie; -  
Zda się ucieszone obie  
Tem wielkiem egzaltowaniem,  
Tym powietrznym mogiłnikiem,  
Tą wolnością i lataniem,<sup>10</sup>

(III, 339-345)

The key split of the world presented in the drama is not only the result of the degenerated nature of the cruel methods of fighting, but also of the lack of relevant ties between protagonists—they are not even united by the common cause, they understand its motives and goals differently. Concentrating on their plans, they do not allow themselves the consciousness which could alter these plans. Therefore, their actions are the results of false premises, of attempts to order reality according to their own illusions at all levels on which the drama unfolds—of family, of romance, of history. Gruszczyński is deluding himself when he thinks with confidence about the safety of his daughter delivered to Regimentarz, Regimentarz is deluding himself when he is convinced that he will subdue the will of the Princess and marry her to his son. Semenko is deluding himself when he wants to bathe the world in blood to win Salomea's love. Hidden relationships and emotions become the cause of tragedy. Recklessly spoken perverse words lead to unpredictable results. The drama

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<sup>10</sup> "Two little heads cut at necks/Went straight for their father/As spring lilies/On the bloody tomb of the murderer/Looking as if happy about this/Great exaltation./ This airy cemetery/This freedom and flying."

reveals the importance of words, which, once spoken, gain their own power, denouncing the hypocrisy of speakers.

Even at the beginning of *The Silver Dream of Salomea* we have solid self-characteristics of Regimentarz, who swears:

Jak mi drogi ten święty Franciszek

(*Całuje sygnet.*)

Na pierścieniu dziadowskim z krwawnikiem,

Tak mi drogie serduszko w tym starcu!<sup>11</sup>

(I, 23-25)

Soon, however, he will force the Princess to accept the ancestral ring, and order his son to write a letter to Gruszczyński, who in turn will order Semenko to do it. He himself will set a trap for the old man so dear to him. The provocative statements of the drama's protagonists are fulfilled awry, but with profound literalness. I will confine myself to the examples which are most terse. The Princess immediately gets rid of the ring. When asked what has happened to it she answers defiantly, unaware of the cruel truth of her words:

Sygnet rzuciłam do piekła.

Kto mi go wyrwie z płomieni

I odda, ten się ożeni.<sup>12</sup>

(II, 108-110)

Her next dispute with Regimentarz over the wedding with Leon is equally perverse and prophetic. When Regimentarz says:

Ślubny wam dzień przyozdobię,

I wyjaśnię wam świetlicę

Łbami Kozaków na tyce.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "As St. Francis is dear to me (He kisses the ring)/On my grandfather's cornelian ring/So is the heart of this old man dear to me."

<sup>12</sup> "I have thrown this ring to hell/Who will get it from the flames/And give it back, will marry me."

<sup>13</sup> "I will bedeck your wedding day/And will light the room/With the heads of Cossacks on pikes."

The Princess reacts immediately:

Tateczku—a czy Pan Sawa  
Będzie pochodnią w lichtarzu?<sup>14</sup>  
(III, 40-44)

These things will happen: the wedding, the man burning like a torch, although in their banter they did not expect how things would turn out. When we are getting deluded by the happy ending of the drama, with the weddings of two couples, it is worth remembering which events have preceded this ending and how they have been heralded by the author more than once. Heads displayed on pikes—a barbarian habit often encountered during Cossack wars, and at the same time reminiscent of figures from a puppet show—is a picture which constantly returns in the text of the drama. It has an active function in it: it often happens that these heads, which the enemy uses as weapons in the theatre of war, propel the plot.

History here is not a reality external to the protagonists, neither is it inconceivable. It is melded into their psychology. All events are connected by paradoxical, hidden bonds, and therefore historical responsibility for personal faults becomes even more obvious. The Salomea's dream about the carnage that her mother is threatened with is part of her remorse. The girl rejects the real, after all, concern for her mother, because she is afraid of the truth. This fear reveals her deeper, internal split, the conflict of two worlds which runs inside her; of the world of Polish and the peasants' language. Out of prayers to the Mother of God a picture full of terror is born; of her own mother in a leaden dress, akin to icons in metal dresses. With this difference: that the icon of the mother seen in a dream is overwhelmed under the weight of the lead. Out of the accumulation of greyness—lead, mother of pearl, pearls, the face the colour of a pencil—a new association is created. A greyish face is "already like a skull/drawn on the cross" (I, 780-781) and introduces the whole imagery connected with a skull (usually black) which used to be placed at

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<sup>14</sup> "Dear Father, will Mr. Sawa/be a torch in a candle holder?"

the feet of the cross; the imagery of cemeteries and eschatology. This growing greyness on the face of the mother precedes and prepares the horrible black paleness of the father, which has already been mentioned. Salomea contrasts this picture with the fear of a child. This picture is dangerous, but static, even though the dead mother is in motion, she approaches, advances; it is the fear, however, which is very dynamic, although the girl hides in rose bushes, barely exposing her head through the leaves, like a nightingale at night.

Gdy w klateczce spadnie z druta,  
Chce latać i nie ma mocy, tylko się trzepoce w klatce...<sup>15</sup>  
(1,792-795)

This dynamic event is suddenly cut short, stopped by a picture—unusual in its common simplicity—of a girl red with shame and paralyzed by fear: “As red yarn/Wound into a hank.” (I, 800-801). This event is stopped and made banal by the dismissive interpretation of Leon: “Silver dream prophecies wealth” (I, 803). Soon, however, the beginning of the next act will bring the fulfilment of the silver dream and the Sawa’s tale about atrocities in Gruszczyńce.

The protagonists of the drama, while relating the cruel events which they have witnessed, make comparisons with theatre as a reality of particular intensity. When Sawa returns with the tale of the fate of Gruszczyński’s family, he starts with this sentence:

Z obrzydzeniem na jadło popatrzę;  
Pomnąc na te sine chłopczyki,  
Na jakim one teatrze  
Zakrwawionym czyniły horory...<sup>16</sup>  
(II, 126-129)

<sup>15</sup> “When it falls of the wire in the cage/It wants to fly but has/No power, it just flaps its wings in the cage.”

<sup>16</sup> “I look at food with disgust/When I remember these livid boys/ And the bloody theatre/Where they displayed horrors.”

And he embellishes his story with a sophisticated, dramatic rhythm, colliding extreme moods and emotions. Sawa, looking down from a hill onto a mansion at sunset, saw a pastoral landscape and sparrows in fruit trees "As if harps full of laughter, ripples,/Titters, voices." (I, 168-169). The mood is changing slowly, imperceptibly. The picture of the mansion which "blue air imbrues" (I, 175) introduces an element of restlessness, clashing contradictions: the blue air, with the verb "imbrue", associated with blood. Now the character of sparrows' song is changing:

jakiś paciorek  
Nad tą kalwaryjską stacją,  
Jakiś smętny Anioł Pański,  
Jakąś smętną suplikacją  
Śpiewają do Panny Marii.<sup>17</sup>

(I, 176-180)

And then fear appears. The personification of fear which makes man similar to Satan. The teller's voice becomes "like dragon's wind" (I, 198). For a while, in the description of the mansion, the pastoral mood returns to stress the horror of meekness soaked in blood. The horror grows to the climactic picture of the mother with her bosom torn apart, into which a dead puppy has been thrown instead of a foetus. The terrifying invocation to the Homeland torn apart is at the same time an expression of one's own fear and produces a blasphemous vow against his own Cossack blood, a vow made to Satan, as it is full of serpents and reptiles; born out of "dark thoughts". From this moment Sawa looks differently at the victims of this carnage—an old woman is "like a mysterious Fury" (273), bodies of murdered children come to life and irritate the old lady like "little reptiles". Therefore, the way the story is told, multiplies its terror, giving devilish attributes to the murdered, strengthens the horror of their deaths, and forces onto those who survived a vision of the world deserted by Providence,

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<sup>17</sup> "A prayer/Over Calvary's station/A sad Angelus/Through sad supplication/They sing to Our Lady."

czas stanął, wskazówki zegara sine,  
 Groźnie podniesione w górę,  
 Pokazywały godzinę,  
 Na którą Bóg przywiódł naturę,  
 Łańcuchem trwogi poimał,  
 Krwią przeraził i zatrzymał.<sup>18</sup>

(293-298)

Revenge, which Sawa wants to levy on the world, leads inevitably to an attack on the very essence of the Christian God. Sawa the avenger “A Man of triple nature/Polish, Cossack and devilish” (315-316) would not even become an Antichrist, he would be anti-God, a negation of the Holy Trinity; the ultimate incarnation of evil. Therefore, Regimentarz, aware of the dangers of such a stance, interrupts Sawa abruptly:

Hamuj się Waćpan w zapale,  
 Bo się takie słowa ważą  
 Srogo, w Bożym trybunale;  
 A te twoje – Aniołów przerażają.<sup>19</sup>

(317-320)

Salomea’s reaction to visions in her dreams was paralysing fear. Sawa, when he sees this horrible crime, reacts with blasphemies of higher and higher order. These two examples alone show us the mechanism on which this drama was constructed—the cruelty of history, born out of psychology, of internal splits of protagonists, of growing hypocrisy and the violent attempts to curb divine sentences. Because the consciousness that everybody is included in Providence’s plans is all the time with the protagonists of *The Silver Dream of Salomea*. Therefore, the question of how these plans can

<sup>18</sup> “Time has stopped, the clock’s livid hands/risen menacingly/Showed time/To which God led nature/Fettered with a chain of horror/Terrorized by blood and stopped.”

<sup>19</sup> “Sir, cease your eagerness/Because such words are treated/Severely in God’s court/And yours—will terrify angels.”

contain the terror of the events of which they are participants sounds even more dramatic. Here—unlike in *Father Marek*—blood does not regenerate; sacrifice is not a prophecy of a new life.

The actions of the protagonists which are the results of false premises are accompanied by premonitions and visions, which are treated dismissively and pushed to the margins of consciousness. Even Anusia sees apocalyptic signs when Sawa arrives:

A śród lip, z jego żupana,  
Różne lały się kolory,  
Niby od świętego Jana,  
którym Paniienka czyta Widzenie.<sup>20</sup>  
(II, 64-68)

It will soon be confirmed by Sawa's tale, heralding the beginning of cruel atrocities. Visions and prophecies are therefore fulfilled with reversed cruelty, stressing the superior role of the world of the spirit, although the spirit can also, through human fanaticism, be imbrued in blood. Here blood stains the heavens as well. Of all the prophecies, it is Wernyhora's which is most important. However, it is ignored by Gruszczyński and mocked by Regimentarz:

Że co do mnie, będę wzięty  
Przez dwie chorągiewki w stepie,  
Jak szczygieł i gil na lepie,  
W przerażeniu odrętwiały.<sup>21</sup>  
(1,96-99)

These enigmatic pennants are the heads of the nobleman's sons—and this motif of a body stuck on a pike and carried as a terrible banner will return a few times in different moments of the drama. It appears in the first tale of Sawa (II, 188-195), then in the ambush

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<sup>20</sup> "And among lime trees, out of his zhupan/Variou colours flowed/As if from St. John/Through whom you, my young lady, read your Vision."

<sup>21</sup> "As for me, I will be taken/By two pennants in the steppe/As a goldfinch and a snot, trapped/Paralised by terror."

prepared by Cossacks, and finally Gruszczyński himself, lifted on the pikes stuck into his sides, led in the direction of his own soldiers looked:

Jako dawne męczenniki,  
 Jak Chrystusowe sztandary <sup>22</sup>  
 (III, 459-460)

This is not the only Wernyhora's prophecy of in this drama, and this is not his only intervention. Despite the protagonists' plans, he holds the key to solving the plot and he will reappear when the right moment comes, when evil, after reaching its peak, will start to ebb. Wernyhora, moreover—standing aside the warring sides—will bring the promise of God's future judgements.

After all, the world of *The Silver Dream of Salomea* is filled with prayers and references to sacred history, although at times the protagonists of these bloody events are surprised and terrified by the inefficiency of prayers. Salomea complains that the Angelus sung in the evenings does not defend her against nightmares. Gruszczyński, who heard how Christ knocked at his home and called him to war, cries in grief:

Bar upadł! Bar upadł, Mocanie!  
 Zaufali Chrystusowi,  
 A upadli!... <sup>23</sup>  
 (I, 395-397)

Gruszczyński's fate forces the following questions: where the main current is in "the stream/in which God's affairs flow" (I, 413-413), no matter what the protagonists of the drama think about it. The model of the sacred history they want to be inscribed in, goes awry and is falsified through their actions. Reckless oaths to St Francis return like an ominous refrain in the words of Regimentarz and are fulfilled awry. Even the motif of the nativity scene, recalled by Salomea as

<sup>22</sup> "As martyrs of old days/Like Christ's banners."

<sup>23</sup> "Bar is fallen, Bar is fallen, Sir/They trusted in Christ/And failed!..."

a bright memory of a reconciled world, was used by Sawa as a means of deception. Dressed as a wandering juggler Sawa sneaks into the Cossack camp with a nativity scene, and there, unexpectedly, the Bethlehem story is associated with death and not with the birth of the Saviour.

I na ciemnych mogił głowie  
Zjawiłem w mojej latarni  
To, o czym, jak wiecie sami,  
Śni się nam pod mogiłami.  
I tak, to Betlejem złote  
Oświecone... gwiazdą było.  
Rozlewającą tęsknotę:  
Słońcem, myśli zakrwawionych:  
Bo niektórym o domach mówiło,  
O dziecięczech straconych,  
śpiewanych gdzieś kolędach,  
o tych żywota błędach,  
Co dopiero przed śmiercią są widne.<sup>24</sup>  
(IV, 187-99)

The Bethlehem nativity scene therefore creates the fear of the Doomsday, the cross has been turned here into a weapon, a tool of revenge, and the scenes of Christ's passion imposed over a skirmish between Gruszczyński's unit with the Cossacks give them the character of some horrible, unnatural liturgy. The Cossacks, sticking remnants of boys' bodies onto their pikes, changing them into "a piece of meat" (III, 396), insulted the inborn holiness of man, profaned the vision of God in him, made "out of God's image/ a rag stuck on a pike" (III 397-398). But in Pafnucy's story the martyrdom of an old man offering his and all his family's deaths to God was

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<sup>24</sup> "On the head of dark graves/I saw in my lantern/This, which as you know yourselves/We dream of near our graves/And thus golden Bethlehem /Shining... it was a star/Spilling longing/It was the sun of bloody thoughts/Because it told about home to some/Of children lost/Christmas Carols sung somewhere/Of these mistakes in life/Which can be seen only just before death."

to make up for the earlier abuses and insults Christ was forced to experience. The head of Gruszczyński among the Cossacks looked like a reflection of Christ's martyred head:

Jakoż wśród tych dzid obrusa,  
 Jak na chuście Magdaleny;  
 Słońce tej okropnej sceny,  
 Słońce jasne, jego głowa  
 Spokojna, a purpurowa  
 Od męki cierniów serdecznych;  
 Jakoby w kręgach słonecznych  
 Dziś mi przed oczyma staje.<sup>25</sup>

(III, 473-480)

Against what might be expected, Słowacki did not confuse Veronica with Magdalene. He referred here not to the legend but directly to the Easter liturgy: on Resurrection Sunday, before the Gospel, the following sequence is sung: *Victimae paschali laudes immolent Christiani*, which the old missals defined as the conversation between the Church and Mary Magdalene. When the traditions of liturgical drama were still alive in the Church, when this sequence was sung, with these words of Mary Magdalene "Sepulcrum Christi viventis et gloriam vidi resurgentis. Angelicos testes, sudarium et vestes",<sup>26</sup> the faithful were shown the shroud with the Christ picture painted on it. In this context the word "obrus" (cloth, table cloth, altar cloth) which appears in the first line is crucial, because an altar cloth with which an altar is covered symbolizes the shroud with which the dead Jesus was covered, and is sometimes even called a "shroud", or a "sindon". And despite such a multiplicity of analogies, Gruszczyński's offering

<sup>25</sup> "Among these pikes, the cloth/As on the shawl of the Magdalene/The sun of this horrible scene/The sun is bright/His head peaceful, purple/From the pain of thorns/As if from sunrays/I see today in front of my eyes."

<sup>26</sup> The translation of this phrase could be rendered in the following way "I have seen the glory of the Resurrected. I have seen an empty Sepulchre of the Lord. And angelic witnesses and clothes and shrouds."

will turn out to be the contradiction of Christ's sacrifice; Pafnucy shows it in the following way:

I zaczęła się walka nierządna,  
Bośmy z furią szatańską mścicieli  
We łzach ślepi i na oślepiec lecieli.<sup>27</sup>  
(III, 495-497)

Everything is pointing to the fact that from the first moment the old man heard Jesus knocking at his window, he misinterpreted all supernatural signs. Therefore, even Gruszczyński's spirit had no peace after death and cried revenge, now with extra-terrestrial persistence:

Gońcie! Bo poszalejemy!  
Bo nam na błękitach krwawo!<sup>28</sup>  
(IV, 354-355)

God is being engaged by both sides of the conflict and—similarly to Ukraine—he does not take sides. But while Polish noblemen are terribly wrong as far as their devotion goes, the Cossacks are aware of the blasphemous character of the liturgy although at the same time they are convinced, as their leader Semenکو is, that only war can give them back their dignity back:

A Popi blahocześni  
Niech wystąpią z proskurą,  
Niech nakarmią jak na śmierć  
Krwia Chrysta umęczoną.  
Taj znów lysznią siekiery Na pożarach, czerwono...  
I budem ludźmi – Ojce...<sup>29</sup>  
(III, 605-611)

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<sup>27</sup> "And the immoral fight has started/Because we with satanic fury of avengers/  
Ran blinded by tears."

<sup>28</sup> "Run! Or we will go crazy!/Because we see blood in heaven."

<sup>29</sup> "And devout Orthodox priests/Should step out with the host/Should feed with  
the blood of the martyred Christ/Let the axes shine/Red in fires/And we will be  
people – Father..."

Semenko also knows that if he wants to defeat the world, he must become someone similar to Satan:

Strach to cała nasza siła.  
Szczob my mieli czortów twarze,  
A z płomieni złotych kryła,  
Hej – a głos z szatańskich krzyków,  
Rękawice jak z krwawników,  
Piersi czarne i czuhunne,  
Myśli gromkie i pioruhne:  
Tak świat nasz!<sup>30</sup>

(III, 628-635)

If it only was so, if an armed conflict took control over everything, if the sphere of the liturgy and the dimension of sacred history were to be finally degenerated and profaned, world history would be ruled by evil. The historical and philosophical horizon of *The Silver Dream of Salomea* would have to be exclusively pessimistic. The end of a story can always be like the end of a tragedy, in which the last word belongs to death and may resemble:

[...] teatrum nowe,  
Na którym śmierć jak aktorka  
Swe tragédie purpurowe  
Będzie odgrywać w ciemności;  
Krwawe sztandary powiesza,  
Ludzką kość do wilczej kości,  
Ciała ludzkie z psiemi dały  
Ohydną ręką pomięsza;  
I temu, co trupy wskrzesza  
A niebios jest gospodarzem;  
Takim okropnym cmentarzem  
Ta ohydna monarchini,

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<sup>30</sup> "Fear is the only power which we have/We should have the faces of devils/And wings from golden rays/Hey! And voice like Satan's cries/Gloves like cornelians/Breast black and made of iron/Thoughts powerful and lightning-like/Thus the world will be ours!"

Mająca świat w panowaniu,  
Litość albo strach uczyni  
I horror.<sup>31</sup>

(III, 211-227)

This tragedy would have the dimension of eschatology. God, as the last spectator, powerless in front of all the destruction that people have committed, making resurrection impossible, would be left to pity and terror. And horror—so adds the poet. Słowacki was not the only one to be plagued by such fears. He decided to curb them, giving them the ordered shape of poetry, which defends against chaos, reveals the contours of sense, defines sequences of choices.

Most certainly, the reconciliation of individuals is possible in this drama—possible if they reject revenge and for the price of the worst fall caused by the biggest, satanic pride. The recurring motives keep reminding us about it, until finally they will reveal their true sense. Pafnucy's attempts to equate the atrocities of war with Christ's sufferings and reveal their Messianic interpretation was futile as long as Pafnucy himself had an eye for revenge. He became trustworthy only when Gruszczyński's sabre failed and he, captured by peasants, accepted his tortures with humility, as becomes a priest, God's servant, and he became a faithful imitator of St Francis, who had been mentioned so many times, the founder of the order to which Pafnucy belonged. The saint who, during the Crusades, went on to talk with the sultan to stop the reciprocal carnage. Only Pafnucy, thanks to the sacrifice to which he mustered up his courage, managed to persuade Semenکو, still stubborn, but tortured and already dying, to accept reconciliation with God. And it was only then that Popadiankas, Semenکو's sisters, managed to solve the knot of conflicts which resulted from Leon's behaviour. They—giving up

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<sup>31</sup> "A new spectacle/In which death/Like an actress/ Its purple tragedies/Will perform in darkness,/Will hang down Bloody banners/Man's bones with wolf's bones/Men's bodies with dogs' bodies/Will be mixed by a cruel hand/And to the one who resurrects carcasses/And is the host in heaven/With such a horrible cemetery/ This horrible Monarch/Ruling over the world/Will create pity or fear/and horror."

their revenge—gave away the unconscious Salomea in exchange for their brother’s dead body.

What remains is the dramatic question about history. The possible harmony could be detected from the past and from Wernyhora’s prophecies. The past of both nations—the point of reference for the cruel events of the drama—was not determined by mutual enmity and did not have to be drowned in blood. The poet reminds us about mutual fascination and respect for otherness. But, very soon, he contrasts them with the degradation of human conflicts. Salomea, in order to convince Semenko of her positive attitude, recalls the magnificent picture of the festival of Jordan, celebrated in the Orthodox church to commemorate the baptism of Jesus. In the recollections of the protagonists of *The Silver Dream of Salomea* memories of order and harmony return. For example, in the lament of Wernyhora, the last “king of the lyre”, where all songs which were sung in Ukraine were tuned to the tone of God’s song, which creates and saves the world:

W krąg siadały, pieśni tłumy;  
 Posążnice – stare dumy,  
 Piorunnice – stare krzyki,  
 Szumki lotu – konie karę,  
 Szumki płaczu – dum słowiki,  
 Błyskawice – myśli stare,  
 Rusańczanki – dzwony szklarnie;  
 Smętne dumy podkurhanne  
 Kędyś aż do Zaporozża.  
 Taj dla wszystkich dom uprzejmy –  
 Siądą w lirze, jak na sejmy;  
 A pośrodku Duma Boża,  
 Krwią Chrystusa purpurowa,

Siedzi jakby dum królowa,  
I radzi świat podbić cały...<sup>32</sup>

(V, 330-344)

The world is God's song, and in a lyre, like in God's kingdom, there are many rooms, and there is room for different tones and tunes. Regimentarz does not hear and does not understand Wernyhora's wistful song—and this is one more proof the poet gives us that representatives of both worlds not only have become deaf to each other, but they have also stifled "God's Duma", which keeps the world in order. Such deafness also leads to war.

When Słowacki was writing his drama, both Ukraine and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were no more. What was left was a fierce need to regain hope, to touch the mystery of the past, and from it to read signs predicting the future. The fate of Gruszczyński's family, predicted in the enigmatic words of Wernyhora, were fulfilled with horrible cruelty, but thanks to it they became a guarantee of the trustworthiness of Wernyhora's final prophecy:

Taj słuchajcie – gdy z was Panów  
Budut' trupy – budut' głowy;  
Taj gdy się wasz trup trzy razy  
Pod mogiłą, rwąc do sławy,  
Znów przewróci na bok krwawy;  
I pomyśli, nędzarz Boży,  
Że i piorun nie otworzy  
I nie zdejmie wieka z truny;  
Taj świat przeklnie i pioruny: -  
To jak stanę ja dziad rzewny,  
Jak mu ręce łą uroszę,

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<sup>32</sup> "Many different songs sat in the circle/Those like statues—old dumkas/Those like thunders—old shouts/Songs of flying—black horses/Songs of crying—nightingales' dumkas/Lightning—old thoughts/Nymphlets—glass bells/Sad dumas sung at the mounds/Once, as far as Zaporozhye all the land was a friendly house for them/They will sit with lyres as if for council/And in the middle God's duma/Purple with Christ's blood/Will Sit as if she was the Queen of songs/And will tell to conquer the whole world."

COLLOQUIA LITTERARIA

Po żebracku jak poproszę;  
Jak ja lirę upokorzę  
I na sercu mu położę,  
I do czoła mu przycisnę;  
I przeszłością w oczy błysnę,  
Starych dum nasypię w uszy:  
Klnę się, na duch! Że się ruszy  
Taj swą twarzą księżycową  
Spojrzy na was jak upiory...<sup>33</sup>

(V, 495-514)

When Poles lose even hope for resurrection, the rotten body of Poland will move only to Wernyhora's lyre, who, looking at another defeat of his people, did not curse, although he himself did not understand why. Prophesying the final defeat of masters—Poles—he found for them words of incomprehensible consolation; he joined them with the fate of the song, which would be able to bring back harmony for all melodies, which have ever sounded in these lands.

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<sup>33</sup> "Listen, when you/The Masters, will be dead, will be stones/When your bodies will turn/Three times onto the bloody sides/In the grave, scraping for Fame/And God's pauper will think/That even thunder will not/Open the coffin/He shall curse the world and thunder/Then I will stand up, I, a sad beggar/I will wet his hands with tear/I will ask as a beggar/I will humble my lyre/And put it on his heart/And will press it to his forehead/And will flash past into his eyes/Will pour old dumas into his ears/I swear on the Soul! He will move!/And with his lunar face will look at you as on ghosts."