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Europeans and Sarmatians – Polish Baroque

After the last representative of the Jagiellonian dynasty, Zygmunt August (Sigismund Augustus), died without an heir, subsequent rulers would be successively appointed to the throne by the nobility. One of the first kings to be elected though such "free elections" was Zygmunt III Waza (Sigismund III Vasa), son of the king of Sweden and Catharine of the Jagiellonian line. Because of Zygmunt III's claim to the Swedish throne, he engendered a long-term conflict between Poland and its Baltic Sea neighbor to the north. Marked by many wars, this dispute reached its apogee with the so-called "Swedish deluge," a term used to refer to the invasion of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by the forces of King Karol Gustav, followed by a nationwide rebellion launched against the Swedes. The most famous episode of this period was the siege of the fortified monastery at Częstochowa, the religious site of the revered Black Madonna (a celebrated victory that would take on proverbial significance for Poles, universally viewed as a miraculous turn in this otherwise badly lost war).

Expansive Polish policy in the eastern borderlands led to draining clashes with Moscow. During the first stage of these wars, Polish regiments occupied the Kremlin, and the Commonwealth was close to taking over the Russian throne. Later, Polish policy was limited more to defensive action in the east, as a result of the Commonwealth's ceaseless clashes with powerful Turkey, then posing a real threat to Chris-

tian Europe (at the battles of Cecora and Chocim – 1620 and 1621), due to the spread of political anarchy (the so-called «rokosz» *revolts staged by certain nobles against the ruling authorities, i.e. the so-called Zebrzydowski Rebellion and Lubomirski Rebellion – 1608 and 1621), and because of domestic strife (a Cossack uprising in Ukraine led by Bohdan Chmielnicki – 1648/1654).*

The gradual breakdown of the extant state system (so-called "noble democracy"), which was manifest in constant legislative deadlock at the Sejm (the old right of liberum veto*, which made it possible for a single nobleman to block the passage of any resolution, was exercised to abort a session of the Sejm, for the first of many times, during the reign of Jan Kazimierz Waza in 1652), and subsequently in absolutely lawless behavior on the part of the gentry, caused the Commonwealth's stature in the international arena to wane. This political crisis coincided with the collapse of the religious tolerance that had been a Polish tradition (representatives of the most radical group of the European reformation, the Polish Bretheren, also called "Arians," were driven out of the country in 1658).*

The situation was improved for a short time by one of the most outstanding strategists and commanders of the 17th century, King Jan III Sobieski, who switched the orientation of the Commonwealth's European policy from pro-French to pro-Habsburg. This ruler scored his greatest successes with spectacular victories over the Turkish power at Chocim (1673) and at the great European battle of Vienna (1683).

After Sobieski's death, the Commonwealth gradually became a weak-willed object of the policy pursued by the surrounding countries. These were the times of the Saxon dynasty (August II the Strong, and August III), which embroiled the Commonwealth in a catastrophic northern war (1700-1721) and exacerbated the political anarchy within the noble state (as a proverbial turn of phrase then held: "Under the Saxon king, eat, drink, and loosen your belt!").

Overall, the final historical outcome of the Baroque age was tragic for Poland: the country lost one-quarter of its territory, and its population shrank by close to 40%. What was once a European power had become God's playground.

I. Europeans

1. Poles in Europe, Europeans in Poland

The early appearance of Baroque trends in Polish literature (in the 1570s) stemmed chiefly from renewed cultural ties between the Polish-Lithuanian Republic and Europe. "Since Poles began to voyage to Italy, our Republic has taken on a different mold," noted Łukasz Górnicki, a writer of the mature Renaissance. Indeed, from the second half of the 16th century onwards, those who had the means to do so began to seek knowledge and refinement abroad. Voyages southwards and westwards were taken both by wealthy magnates (such as the Radziwiłł, Lubomirski and Leszczyński families) and by members of the poor nobility (such as Daniel Naborowski). The most favored destination for such trips was Italy, although Poles were also present in Leipzig, Wittenberg, Strasbourg, Basel, and Leide. During this period, a special role was played by Padua University, which educated thousands of young Poles over the years 1592-1745.

Upon returning to the country, these travelers brought back a passion for Italian culture and for various artistic and literary novelties (there was no dearth of Italophiles in Poland, such as Grand Marshal of the Crown Zygmunt Myszkowski, one of the last in a famous lordly line, who was adopted by the Italian Duke Gonzaga). Numerous Italian artists, such as the painters Tommaso Dalabella and Michelangelo Palloni, the sculptors Sebastian Sala, Francesco Rossi, and Baltazar Fontana, and the architects Giovanni Battista Gisleni, Andrea dell'Aqua, and Lorenzo Muretto de Sant (known in Polish as Wawrzyniec Senes) found employment in Poland. King Władysław IV (Ladislaus IV), an impassioned opera aficionado, attracted Italian musicians (such as Marco Scacchi), authors (Virgilio Puccitelli), interior designers and performers to Poland. He even engaged in correspondence with Claudio Monteverdi, urging him to come work at the Polish royal court. Warsaw boasted the first continuously operational opera stage in Europe (1635-1648). Extravagantly staged performances, couched in Baroque poetics, influenced domestic literature and inspired local artists (such as Samuel Twardowski).

Dutch cultural influence was also evident in the north (Gdańsk) and east (Lwów), becoming increasingly more visible throughout the Republic during the second half of the 17th century.

An important role in promoting the new art was played by the Jesuit order. The first Jesuit college was founded in Poland in 1594. This came soon after the end of the Ecumenical Council of Trent, where no small role had been played by the Polish Church (Stanisław Hosius). In the 17th century, schools run by friars of the *Societatis Jesu* dominated the education of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic.

2. Europeans: metaphysical poetry

It is probably to the Jesuits that we owe the appearance of metaphysical poetry in Poland. It was based on the Jesuit art of meditation, a concentration of all the human capacities onto a kind of pious pondering. Metaphysical poetry addressed difficult philosophical problems, expressing them in a learned fashion that abounded in numerous conceits. Just like the art of meditation recognized no non-meditative subjects (for Jesuit teachers, every object could be related to events from Christ's life), metaphysical poetry recognized no non-poetic topics. Verses began to address complex philosophical, theological, and scientific issues, and poets boldly drew upon new idioms (such as the language of science, philosophy, theology). The sacred intermingled with the profane, the lofty with the laughable.

a. Mikołaj Sęp-Szarzyński (ca. 1550-1581)

This provincial writer who worked in the southeastern borderlands of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic was among the European avant-garde of the Baroque epoch. A Protestant in his youth, he studied at Wittenberg and Leipzig. He knew Italian and presumably traveled to Italy. After converting to Catholicism (probably in the late 1560s) he came under the influence of Jesuits, who probably guided his work.

Sęp-Szarzyński is a poet of paroxysmal faith. His single poetic volume, the posthumous *Rhymes, or Polish Verses* (*Rytmy abo wiersze polskie*

– 1601), is filled almost entirely with religious poetry. Set in a cosmic landscape (some inconceivable, madly-spinning heavenly expanses), a dramatic race between man and implacable death plays out. The knight of Christ (the poet employs Jesuit symbolism) is doomed to lose the race unless he receives God's grace. Sęp-Szarzyński's God is *strange*, implacable and terrible. He demands praise and love from man, gifts that only he himself can endow. In a ceaseless struggle against Satan, the world, and his own body, the hero of Sęp-Szarzyński's verses begins to long for death, appeals for it, like the brave knights Fridrusz and Struś, to whom the author dedicated heroic songs.

Both Jesuit heroism and a Protestant disbelief in man can be discerned in Sęp-Szarzyński verses. His *Rhymes* anticipate the most important topics of Polish Baroque poetry. This is above all a conflict between sensuality and spirituality, expressed in a convention of two sorts of love: a good love (for God) and a bad one (for material things). An elaboration of this opposition can also be found in a set of Petrarchan erotic poems preserved in the "Zamoyski Manuscript," whose authorship has also been ascribed to Sęp-Szarzyński.

The author's poetry bears distinctive testimony to his search for a new model of creativity and a new aesthetics (perhaps under the influence of the Italian *Cinquecento*). He prefers difficult forms, and is a master of the meditative sonnet with an unparalleled logical structure (his verses are reminiscent of syllogisms). Sęp-Szarzyński's language – abstract, complicated, and bestrewn with philosophical and theological phrases (St. Tomas, Boethius, Louis of Grenada, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite) – poses a true challenge to the reader. The poet's style is sententious, uneasy, elliptical; it is highly saturated with rhetorical figures. Sęp-Szarzyński seems to be pursing, in model fashion, the principles of Jesuit poetry, according to which "the more difficult the truth, the more beautiful it is" (Baltasar Gracián).

b. Sebastian Grabowiecki (1543-1607)

Sebastian Grabowiecki, a royal secretary, politician, and later a clergyman, a Catholic polemicist and religious poet, was also under the influence of Italian culture. His *Spiritual Rhymes* (*Rymy*

duchowne), published in 1590, were composed within the inspirational domain of religious Petrarchism. The title of the work itself was borrowed from Gabriel Fiamma's *Rime spirituali*, and among the recognizable models we also find Bernardo Tasso.

These *Rhymes*, consisting of two segments of 100 verses each, are Petrarchizing religious lyrics, distinguished by their meditative inquisitiveness, logical construction, and virtuosic form. Grabowiecki divulges the paradoxes of human existence (yearning for God yet fearing him, loving God yet loving the world), seeking comfort in divine mercy. Particularly noteworthy are the sonnets in this collection, based chiefly upon the works of Gabriel Fiamma.

3. Europeans: Marinists

The fame of Giovan Battista Marino reached Poland quite rapidly, and prevailed without interruption throughout the entire 17th century. In the 1680s, Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski gave *Marinus* pride of place amongst those who wrote *in vulgari*. The first Polish attempts at adapting the Neapolitan master's works date to the 1620s and 1630s, and were penned by amateurs (Piotr Kostka, 1622; Mikołaj Grodziński, 1630). An exceptionally important moment in the development of Polish Marinism came with an anonymous attempt at translating the whole of Marino's masterpiece, *L'Adone*. This was its first translation in Europe, and the only one of such length (16,000 lines of the original's 41,000). It was probably composed in the years 1625-1647. The Polish *Adona* is distinguished by incredibly faithful translation, on both the level of meanings and that of style. The anonymous translator is wonderfully able to carry across the most refined fragments of the original poem, although shortcomings in his poetic craft do prevent him from reproducing Marino's refined octave.

a. Daniel Naborowski (1573-1640)

Naborowski did not translate Marino, but certain phenomena analogous to Marinism can indeed be perceived in his poetry. The poet spent most of his life traveling throughout Europe. A physician

by education (in Basel), he also studied in Wittenberg, Orleans, and Strasbourg. In Padua he took private lessons from Galileo. He was a diplomatic agent for the Radziwiłł princes for almost 30 years. Naborowski's extensive correspondence gives us a sense of what the atmosphere in Europe was like during the Thirty Years' War. His letters also address cultural issues (such as the first evidence in Polish literature of the reception of François Rabelais). Naborowski translated from French (Laugier de Porchères, Du Bartas), Italian (Petrarch), German (Lobwasser), and Latin (Sarbiewski). He did not publish his poems, partially as a result of Catholic censorship (he was a Calvinist), partially as a result of his lack of a sponsor (the Radiwiłłs viewed him as more of a courtly official than a poet).

Naborowski is a poet of refinement. His verses (panegyrics are predominant) are impressive in their refined concettism and perfection of form. Naborowski's subject of interest is language. He studies the anatomy of the word, traces the richness and fleetingness of its meanings. The poet writes pervasive, ambiguous monographs on words. He is not interested in the world, in material reality. Naborowski, like Marino, is a fisherman plying the sea of literature and culture. His profoundly allusive verses, rich in recherché erudition, capriciously combine politics, science, mythology, and poetry with commonplace jokes. At times the poet is close to authors of the metaphysical current, but he is chiefly distinguished by his formal virtuosity. Like the Marinists, Naborowski is able to play with language and composes complicated poetic figures. He is a master of acoustic instrumentation, which frequently takes on an almost geometric form in his verses (with the same order of sounds appearing before and after the caesura). Certain of his verses appear to be Marinist paraphrases – for example, Naborowski's *The Rose* (*Róża*) vs. Marino's famous laudation of the rose from the third song in *L'Adone*.

b. Jan Andrzej Morsztyn (1621-1693)

The most outstanding Polish Marinist, Jan Andrzej Morsztyn, also enjoyed a courtly career. A favorite courtier of Marie-Louise Gon-

zaga, the wife of two Polish kings (Władysław IV and Jan Kazimierz), he rose to the highest state positions, becoming grand under-treasurer of the crown, i.e. the treasury minister of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic. Morsztyn was politically tied to France. When King Jan III Sobieski changed orientation and joined the Hapsburg camp, the poet ended up in opposition. He spent his latter years in France.

Morsztyn can be called Poland's very own Marino. In an early collection of verses, entitled *Dog-Days* (*Kanikuła* – 1647), he clearly showed a fascination with the Neapolitan master's work. However, Morsztyn did not translate Marino. Rather, the Polish poet simply emulated the unattainable model set by the European man of letters, thereby demonstrating that the stylistic miracles Marino was famed for were also possible in the Polish language. Morsztyn's poetic program calls to mind the Marianist strategy of literary plunder. He composes his poems by drawing upon texts by various authors (chiefly Marino). Such a composition is evident, for example, in his reworking of the song IV of *L'Adone*, entitled *Psyche*, reminiscent of a complicated literary palimpsest (with references to Apuleius, Marino, and Ercole Udine). Morsztyn's works, always masterful in terms of form, attempt at the same time to adapt the Marinist poetics of fabulousness to the literary tastes of the Polish audience. They are more literal and coarse, less artistic and adroit than their prototypes.

Both *Dog-Days* and the later *Lute* (*Lutnia* – 1661) are monothematic collections. Morsztyn, like his literary master, is a poet of sensual love. In his verses one can observe the crisis of values that had seized the intellectual elite of Europe in the 17th century. Nothing is certain in Morsztyn's world; moral categories like good and evil do not exist. Ethics are supplanted by aesthetics. Beauty is worthy of desire, ugliness is deserving only of revulsion and disdain. The protagonist of Morsztyn's verses knows, however, that man's senses deceive him, and that beauty may be but a mask for monstrosity. Love, therefore, becomes an escape from the problems of reality, a realm of absolute human freedom.

"Nature engenders none but a single rule: / whatev'r thou desirest, that shall rightly do" (*Jedno natura prawo w sobie rodzi:/ czegoć*

pragniesz, toć się godzi), Morsztyn repeats after Tasso in his reworking of the famous idyll *Amintas*. But for Morsztyn, like for Marino, love is linked to an obsessive thought of death – a fear of passing on, always present for this freethinking poet.

Morsztyn's libertine leanings are demonstrated by his attitude towards religion, evident both in his life (in pursuit of his career, the poet converted his faith twice) and in his works (Morsztyn's pseudo-religious verses are no more than a Marinist game of conceits, or a mercantile bargaining with God, whereby sin is the greatest commodity).

Aside from numerous verses preserved chiefly in manuscript, Jan Andrzej Morsztyn is also the author of a superb translation of Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid* (see also the heading "Classicism" below).

3. Europeans: Arians

The term "Arians" was used scornfully to refer to a radical faction of the Polish Reformation that derived from Calvinism under the influence of Italian theologians (Blandrata, Ochino, Sozzini). They adopted the name "Polish Brethren." Their doctrine was characterized by great rationalism; the Polish Brethren rejected anything that could not be reconciled with reason. They criticized in particular the dogma of the Holy Trinity (hence their superficial tie to the adherents of the ancient heresy of Arius). In Arian schools, the most famous of which was located in Pińczów, the natural sciences were prominently highlighted. The Polish Brethren also imported philosophical novelties to Poland (for example, the Austrian Johann Ludwig Wolzogen, an Arian teacher, polemicized with Descartes in 1656). Rejected by all other denominations due to their doctrinal and social radicalism, the Arians nevertheless enjoyed the freedom to profess their faith in Poland for close to 100 years. In the wake of the Swedish invasion (1655), they were accused of treason and subsequently banished from the country. The works of the Polish Brethren began to appear in emigration in the Netherlands (as *Bibliotheca fratrum polonorum*), and in the view of some researchers they had an impact upon the early stage of European Enlightenment.

a. Samuel Przypkowski (ca.1592-1670)

Called by 17th-century writers "the beacon of Poland and the world," Przypkowski was impressive in terms of both his education (in Altdorf, Leide, London, and Paris) and his literary refinement. He gained prominence with his treatise *De pace et concordia Ecclesiae*, which championed the idea of religious tolerance at a time when Europe was in the throes of religious wars. This work came out in several editions (Amsterdam 1628 and 1630, London 1653 and 1708), and may perhaps have been read by John Locke, the author of the famous letter about tolerance.

Przypkowski was also a poet, writing in Polish and Latin. His verses are characterized by intellectual reserve and abstract language. The Arian writer also knew how to compose startling *concetto* comparisons, which are astonishing in terms of the Baroque boldness of their associations and their almost scientific precision.

b. Zbigniew Morsztyn (ca.1627/9-1689)

The poet Zbigniew Morsztyn, a relative of the aforementioned Jan Andrzej Morsztyn and a soldier who had taken part in many wars that played out in the arena of 17th-century Poland, is remarkable on the one hand for his intellectual precision (which at times brings him closer to the metaphysical poets), and on the other for a kind of sensual sensitivity typical of the Baroque.

Like no other Polish writer, Zbigniew Morsztyn was able to capture the experiences of the "fire and sword" era in his verses – chiefly collected in the manuscript volume *Domestic Muse* (*Muza domowa*). His soldierly poetry strikingly evinces the coolness of a reporter, and a complete absence of heroic motifs (such as the poem *Camp Cozeners – Kostyrowie obozowi*). In view of his faith (certain radical Polish Brethren, renouncing violence, carried wooden swords), war represented a source of great moral anxiety for him. The issue of whether killing others could be justified appears, for example, in his well-known work entitled *Votum* (the term for a programmatic address delivered in the Sejm). Here Morsztyn presents a gloomy vision of

war, which for him represents a return to primordial chaos, a negation of all human values.

'Tis a certainty, no matter what they say,
He who knoweth, let him yield to reason's sway
And confess: has any soldier among us
indeed been righteous?

Bo to rzecz pewna, niech kto, co chce, mówi,
Kto wiadom, niech da miejsce rozumowi
i przyzna, jeśli który żołnierz żywy
był sprawiedliwy?

These words sound particularly bitter coming from an experienced warrior who had spent almost 10 years in the saddle, and was very familiar with the turmoil and mayhem of battle.

At the same time, Zbigniew Morsztyn was a surprisingly modern poet, sensitive to ideas coming in from various quarters. Reality as presented in his poetry is a world in transformation, a cosmos in which everything is moving, shifting, changing, the Baroque "*natura naturans*." This can be seen, for example, in the superb work *Emblemata*, in which the poet described the soul's longing for God, based on the prints from the collection by the Capuchin monk, then well-known in Europe. A very important role in the mystical experiences that comprise this collection (of 113 poems) is played by the language of the elements (water, fire, earth, and air), which — set into motion by divine will — change into one another, in a ceaseless chain of frantic metamorphoses.

II. Sarmatians

a. The Phenomenon of Sarmatism

Myth. The term "Sarmatism" refers to the ideology and culture of the Polish nobility from the end of the 16th century until the twilight of the 18th century. The starting point for Sarmatism came from a legend about the origins of the Slavs written by Renaissance historians (Marcin Bielski, Marcin Kromer), based on ancient and medieval sources. According to Pliny, early Central and Eastern Europe had been inhabited by a hardened people called the Sarmatians. In the

16th century they came to be identified with the ancestors of the Poles. Poland was therefore "Sarmatia," and its inhabitants were held to be "Sarmatians."

Ideology. Around this legend of ethnogenesis, an ideology gradually began to form, underscoring the special traits of the Polish nobility and their exceptional mission in the history of Europe. A Sarmatian was above all a warrior, who "inherits first the saber, before the land" ("*wprzód w szabli niźli w zagonach dziedziczy*" – Potocki). In popular 16th- and 17th-century works such as *Descriptio gentium*, the Pole is chiefly presented as a knight (while the German is a merchant, the Frenchman a lover). Freedom is the highest value he recognizes; he is even prepared to sacrifice his life for it.

In the 17th century, Sarmatian ideology underwent considerable change. In the epoch of wars and unrest, the Sarmatians increasingly stressed the value of the landowning life, only taking upon themselves the role of Cincinnatus as a last resort. The defense of freedom turned into the defense of noble privileges (Poland was then a country in which the nobility enjoyed the greatest political liberties), which subsequently engendered the abuse of rights (the first Sejm based on the famous *liberum veto* law was convened in 1651) and aversion to any state reforms. Since the noble democracy had, in the opinion of most citizens, achieved a state of perfection, why should any changes be made? In the latter half of the 17th century, Sarmatism began to be characterized by national pride (at times approaching megalomania), which showed up as a belief in the superiority of the Polish polity and Polish law, Polish customs and language, and Polish culture on the whole. The priest Wojciech Dębołecki maintained that Adam and Eve spoke to God in Polish. This was but one step away from xenophobia, which rapidly supplanted the tolerance and openness to the world that had typified Polish culture.

Faith in the value of one's own nation took on a religious dimension. Poles were supposed to be a new God-chosen nation, whose historical mission was to defend the European cross from the Asian crescent. This peculiar Sarmatian messianism was summed up in the catchphrase *antemurale christianitatis*, or the "bulwark of Christianity."

Customs. Sarmatian culture developed during the age when the Baroque was triumphing in Poland. Certain historians (such as Janusz Tazbir) even see Sarmatism as being a specific Polish variety of this style. This is particularly evident in the field of customs. All of the foreign travelers who then visited Poland were astonished by the Sarmatian tendency for exaggerated gestures, behaviors, attire and rituals. We can even speak of a grand theatricalization of daily life. Polish clothing (including many eastern elements) was reminiscent of theatrical costumes: fabulously colorful (dominated by bright hues – red, amaranth, azure, and yellows), adorned with gold-woven belts, numerous jewels, gem-encrusted buttons, and furs, such attire caused a sensation in Europe (historians noted that at the masquerades then popular in the West, someone usually turned up in Sarmatian attire). Weapons were also richly decorated, and were not suitable for battle (a ceremoniously dressed nobleman was usually followed by a servant carrying his ordinary saber). Emotions were expressed in almost hysterical fashion (in church, for example, nobles might bang their heads off pews or draw their sabers).

Bombastic ceremonies were relished. When Chancellor Jerzy Ossoliński arrived in Rome in 1633, the event went down in the immortal city's history: he rode in with a hundred horses and camels decked in fabulously rich harnesses, the nobles sitting atop them in their national attire, escorted by exotic prisoners-of-war from the Polish-Lithuanian Republic's eastern wars. The horses had been shod with golden horseshoes before entering the city, purposefully affixed so that they should fall off, much to the glee of onlookers on the Roman streets. The noble Polish youths tossed gold coins into the crowed, the wings of the Hussars ruffled, and peacock feathers waved… Not even the royalty who visited the Papal capital in those times made such an grand entry.

The Sarmatian funerary rite, also called *pompa funebris*, was also of exceptional form. Such ceremonies sometimes required long months of preparation. Special scaffolding was built in churches (concealing the altar); the coffin was displayed upon it, along with a portrait of the deceased at its foot. The religious rites were frequently preceded by a procession, led by a rider wearing the deceased person's armor:

the so-called *archimimus*, who, like in ancient Rome, acted in the role of the deceased. The procession ended in church; the actor rode in on horseback, only to collapse in a deafening crash and clatter on the floor, thus portraying the symbolic triumph of death over earthly strength and prowess. Such burial ceremonies lasted up to four days, and ended with a wake that hardly reflected the gravity of the occasion, easily reverting into a drinking binge and revelry. Sometimes an entire army of clergy participated in a burial (a certain magnate in the 18th century, for example, was laid to rest by 10 bishops, 60 canons, and 1705 priests!)

Art. The Sarmatians usually took a very utilitarian stance toward art. It served as the backdrop to their rich rituals, the frame for bombastic ceremonies. It was also intended to preserve the fame of a noble line, to sing forebears' praises and to record great events. For this reason, portraits were most highly prized: they portrayed the entire figure in ceremonious garb, against a background of fragmentary architecture (such as a column, symbolizing stability and strength). Of a prominently utilitarian nature was the so-called "coffin portrait," closely linked to the funeral ceremony. Its shape was adapted to the contours of the coffin, and was affixed at its foot during the church rites. Coffin portraiture was characterized above all by a ghostly realism. The painter's task was to depict the departed individual in such a way that he looked "almost alive," and gave the impression that he was watching his mourners. Such painters, generally anonymous, sometimes achieved great formal mastery, employing some very modern means of expression (a bold, almost cubist toying with three-dimensional space, with for example a face depicted from the front, but the nose and ear in profile).

b. Sarmatism in literature

Sarmatians: the art of life, love, and death

Hieronim Morsztyn (ca.1581-ca.1623?) The Sarmatian type of sensibility manifested itself in the poetry of Hieronim Morsztyn, the first in a literary family renowned in the Republic. Enamored of

theatrical effects, the poet did not share the intellectual curiosity of the metaphysical poets, although he frequently addressed the same topics. Morsztyn was not interested by the riddles of the world, but was fascinated by its sensual and impermanent beauty. In the poem *Worldly Delight* (*Światowa rozkosz* – 1606), published in several editions in the 17th century, the poet poses the fundamental conflict of the epoch: how should one reconcile the pleasures of the "glorious" world with the destitution of the "unglorious world"? How should one avoid the trap of sensual love for things, and strive to know God? But it is no use looking for any sort of answers to these questions. The poet stops on the level of an allegorical parade of worldly delights (with tiresome lists of dishes, beverages, games, dances, etc.), and then a macabre vision of death and decay. In death, things reveal their true form, but this only adds relish to the momentary pleasure of life: "Who, but for the blind, hasn't eyed the lovely sights of this world?" (*Któż oprócz ślepego nie widał ślicznych świata tego pozornosci?*) Such lengthy lists of the boundless riches of sensual reality also form the basis for Hieronim Morsztyn's fairytale-imbued story in verse, *A Diverting Story about the Virtuous Princess Banialuka* (*Historyja ucieszna o zacnej królewnie Banialuce*).

Samuel Twardowski (ca.1600-1661). The problem of the clash between love for the sensual world and a yearning for spiritual values was also addressed by Samuel Twardowski, one of the most outstanding epic poets of the 17th century. Twardowski, however, gained his permanent place in the history of Polish literature not by right of his voluminous heroic poems – *Ladislaus IV* (*Władysław IV*) and *Civil War* (*Wojna domowa*) – but rather through his idylls and stories in verse. Twardowski was a master of sensual description, exceptionally sensitive to colors, shapes, and sounds. In both his dramatized idyll based on the then-popular metamorphosis motif, *Daphne Turned Into a Laurel Tree* (*Dafnis w drzewo bobkowe przemieniła się* – 1638), and his romance *Fair Pasqualina* (*Nadobna Paskwalina* – 1655) the poet grapples with worldly love. Apollo in love (whom we can perceive as an allegory of reason), crazed with passion, pursues the nymph Daphne in scenes that seem to be lifted wholesale from Baroque opera (per-

haps the poet's inspiration was indeed the musical spectacle that he may have attended in Warsaw in 1635). Twardowski's subtle octaves (based on the model of Tasso, adapted into Polish by Piotr Kochanowski, the felicitous translator of *Jerusalem Delivered*) superbly trace the progressive stages of ruinous infatuation. In *Fair Pasqualina*, Twardowski's weave of historical, mythological, folklore, and Christian threads, the resourceful and beautiful heroine, after many adventures, destroys the weapon of the god of love and then joins a cloister. Downcast Cupid, deprived of his "cannon," takes his own life, and the whole world breathes a sigh of relief once sinful, sensual love is no more.

Twardowski's mastery is chiefly evident in the romance's descriptive passages. The poet finds the beauty of the sensual world in ceaseless changes of hue and shape, in impermanent illusions, in revelations that last but a moment. Reality is for him a tempting illusion, which man should reject. The reader clearly senses, however, a contradiction between the moralistic message of the romance (promoting strict self-restraint), and the great zeal with which the author paints images of the sensual pleasures. Perhaps the quintessence of the conflicts present in the work can be found in the famous scene where the just-a-moment-before lustful satyr (who has been converted, of course, to Christianity), decides to release the naked Pasqualina, who had been tied up, or rather ingeniously outstretched between two young trees.

Józef Baka (1707-1780). The Polish Baroque lasted for a long duration, all the way until the latter half of the 18th century. Of course, the motifs and forms of Baroque literature were then already very much worn out. It took great invention, therefore, too breathe just a bit more life back into them.

The provincial Jesuit Priest Józef Baka (active in the northeastern frontier lands of the Republic) was a bold experimenter. His means of escaping from the boredom of late Baroque verse was to draw upon popular songs and folk poetry, even children's chants. Using such a specific, superficially infantile, or even vulgar style, Baka described a grotesque *danse macabre* in the poem *Remarks on Ineluc-*

table Death (*Uwagi o śmierci niechybnej* – 1766). The poet lets the reigns of his imagination go, and is startling in his linguistic invention and boldness of associations. The short, tetrasyllabic (or even trisyllabic) verse contrasts with the gloomy theme of the work. The Jesuit poet invites the reader into a mad dance, speaks tenderly on behalf of death, whose language, full of diminutives, regionalisms, and neologisms, is a curious example of the Sarmatian interpretation of mortality. Death, laughing at people, is itself laughable, close, and familiar.

In Baka's work, the great topics of metaphysical poetry are trivialized, simplified, rendered in a sometimes caricaturized form. The poet writes easily (one might say: too easily), allows himself to be carried away by obvious rhymes and the charm of words. His *Remarks* are not a stern meditation, but rather a ghastly game, a crazy whirling, in which not only the pleasures of the world, but also the fear of inevitably leaving this world are forgotten.

Sarmatians: Romans and orators

Krzysztof (1609-1655) and Łukasz Opaliński (1612-1662). References to Roman republicanism are frequently encountered in Sarmatian culture. Poles envisaged "Sarmatia" to be a new Rome, in which the ancient state traditions and legal institutions were being revived. This donning of ancient costumes can be perceived, for example, in the classicizing works of the Opaliński brothers. They came from a well-known magnate family and received extensive education in Western Europe. The elder of the two, Krzysztof, quickly grew averse to politics and in his blank-verse *Satires* (*Satyry* – 1650), based on the models of Juvenal and Persius, he expounded an extraordinarily critical vision of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic. The elder brother, a sponsor of the arts and sciences (he supported and protected Jan Ámos Komenský, among other figures) and a guardian and patron of the modern school in little Sieraków, in his courtly retreat devised visions of the demise of morals and the collapse of the Sarmatian republic. At the moment of truth, during the Swedish invasion of Poland (1655), remaining faithful to his own bitter and cynical diag-

noses, he surrendered the army he commanded to Karl Gustav (thus Krzysztof Opaliński's name is synonymous with "traitor" in Polish culture).

The younger brother, Łukasz, well-versed in classical languages (Latin, Greek, and Hebrew), devoted almost his entire adult life to politics. He was a true Baroque erudite, and deliberated problems of a systemic, political, philosophical, or artistic nature with equal ease. Opaliński wrote in both Polish and Latin. In his Latin texts, he defended Sarmatia's good reputation in Europe (*Polonia defensa* – 1648), while in Polish he experimented with the form of Menippean satire in *Something New* (*Coś nowego* – 1651), and devised his own poetical agenda based on classical Roman poetics, in opposition to the Baroque (a versified poetics alluding to Horace's *Epistle to the Pisos*, paradoxically termed "the new poet").

Jerzy Ossoliński (1595-1650) The Polish parliamentary chamber, the Sejm (Diet), lay at the heart of Sarmatian culture, and oratory skill was thus highly prized. Speeches delivered at the Sejm and at lower-level "dietines," and orations presented in celebration of weddings, name days, and funerals were assiduously copied into noble household journals, called *silvae rerum* (literally "forests of things") in view of their rich and multifarious content (these ledgers frequently supplanted printed literature; they provided a record of everyday life, faithfully reflecting not just the needs, longings, and problems, but also entertainments of contemporary Poles). Jerzy Ossoliński, a prominent politician, was at the same time among the most superb Polish public speakers of the 17th century. Remarkably educated (chiefly in France and in Italy), he dazzled Rome not just with his ceremonious arrival to the city, but also with his classical Ciceronian Latin, in which he delivered speeches that enchanted the hard-to-please Roman populace.

Sarmatians: politicians and philosophers

Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro (ca.1620-1679) Representatives of the magnate families, such as the Opaliński or Ossoliński lines, were

destined for politics. Usually, however, their reflections about the problems of the Polish state system did not exceed beyond popular maxims about the art of governance. One of the exceptions was to be found in Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro, the author of a Latin work entitled *Monita politico-moralia* (1664) that was widely read in Europe (20 editions within a century, and translations into French, German, and Russian), constituting a collection of guidelines for how to govern in order to earn the respect of those governed. Written in a dense, sententious style, this work stems from the tradition of noble democracy in which the opinions of citizens had to be reckoned with. Fredro's inclination for aphorisms and maxims, as well as a noble conservatism, can also be discerned in the Polish *Proverbs of Common Speech* (*Przysłowia mów potocznych* – 1664), which are at times, it seems with great exaggeration, compared to La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims*.

Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski (1642-1702). The vast *oeuvre* of Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski defies clear-cut description. It encompasses Marinist idylls, philosophical Latin *emblemata*, religious verses and poems, frivolous comedies (based on themes drawn from the *Decameron*), works in the fields of philosophy and aesthetics. Above all, however, Lubomirski was a politician who achieved the highest dignities in the Republic (he even pursued the crown). These experiences are expressed in his famous Latin dialog, *De vanitate consiliorum* (1699?), repeatedly printed in the 18th century. This is an extraordinarily pessimistic vision of noble parliamentarism, marked by the bitter reflections of an experienced "statist," who in vain tried to promote his political plans. The volume *Conversations of Artaxes and Evander* (*Rozmowy Artaksesa i Ewandra*), containing essays couched in the form of a dialog, is also not devoid of bitterness and skepticism. Of all the diverse themes taken up in the work (ethics, writing style, religion), political deliberations come to the foreground. Lubomirski shows off the erudition typical of the 17th century (chiefly neo-stoic philosophy), but nothing can conceal the fact that the literary magnate does not believe in people, that he views their obsequious behavior with suspi-

cion, and easily sees through their true intentions. The author of these *Conversations* makes no secret of his disappointment in politics, and seeks an escape from it in the pleasures of private life, full of reading material and free mental pursuits.

Sarmatians – in the realm of Sarmatian historiography

Wespazjan Kochowski (1633-1700). War, the fundamental experience of the Poles born in the first half of the 17th century, served to verify Sarmatian attitudes. Wespazjan Kochowski was one of those who had been through the poverty and hardship of a soldier's life. This Roman-named poet nevertheless sought a higher meaning in the chaos of daily life. In his soldierly verses he recorded the heroic dreams and yearnings of his generation, which frequently sought solace in religion. Kochowski's religious texts are extreme examples of Baroque concettism. In his collection of verses *Virgin's Garden* (*Ogród panieński* – 1681), devoted to the Virgin Mary, composed in the *concetto* framework of 16 "flower beds." Each of these garden plots contains 100 verse-flowers (most frequently distiches), based on Marian metaphors that the poet drew from the Bible, the Patrologia Latina, and the works of philosophers and theologians.

Kochowski's religiosity is also determined by his view of history. The poet sees traces of God's hand everywhere, he interprets reality by chiefly discerning Divine Providence within it. In his eyes, history becomes *gesta Dei per Polonos*. The Sarmatians are a new chosen people, and the poet views himself as another David, a Sarmatian psalmist. His *Polish Psalmody* (*Psalmodia polska*), published in 1695, is a peculiar manifesto of old Polish messianism. Kochowski interprets domestic history from the perspective of the concealed designs of God, whose plans are being carried out by the gallant knights from the Vistula lands. Against this backdrop, he presents himself as a Sarmatian and a man embroiled in the great drama of history. The pivotal point of the cycle (very nicely imitating the biblical style) portrays the famous victory over the Turks at Vienna, evidence of God's special guardianship over the Polish nation.

Wacław Potocki (1621-1696). Potocki was the most eminent poet of the late Baroque in Poland. A great loner, called at times the Polish Diogenes, he was guided in his huge body of works by the Sarmatian system of values, set forth by the Bible and the works of Roman historians and moralists. The peculiarity of this markedly talented writer stemmed from his experience in changing faiths. An Arian by birth and conviction, after an edict was passed banishing his coreligionists (1658) Potocki decided to give up his faith in order to remain in the Republic. However, he never reconciled himself with this unfair law that infringed upon people's consciences.

The poet perceived a true chasm between Sarmatian ideals and Sarmatian reality. This critical diagnosis of the Polish state of affairs was expressed in two huge collections of epigrams, *Moralia* and *Garden of Trifles* (*Ogród fraszek*). Bitter reflection about the downfall of former ideals is also present in his verses about noble emblems and legends, in the large volume *Collection of Coats-of-Arms* (*Poczet herbów* – 1696). Despite this, Potocki always believed in the historical mission of the Sarmatians and their superiority over other nations. And so, he took great pains to reconstruct the lost values of noble society. His culminating achievement as a writer is *The War of Khotim* (*Transakcyja wojny chocimskiej*), an original combination of epos, discursive poem, and diary in verse, written about 1670; a more precise date cannot be ascertained here because Potocki only submitted his texts for printing very rarely. There is no equally expressive or suggestive vision of war in all of 17th-century European literature. The battle descriptions in Potocki's poem are marked by Sarmatian experiences (the poet's own participation in the famous battle against the Cossacks at Beresteczko in 1651), and so are striking in their brutal realism and vivid language. Potocki seemingly "assaults" the reader's senses and imagination with images that are a far cry from literary conventions. We can safely say that it was not Virgil or Lucan, but rather the poet's own experiences that dictated to him the most moving pages of *The War of Khotim*, a poem with exceptionally strong impact, which despite certain compositional imperfections, can easily bear comparison to the greatest European epic masterworks of the 17th century.

Sarmatian self-portraits: diarists and epistolographers

Jan Chryzostom Pasek (ca.1636-1701). One of the most characteristic traits of Sarmatism was a cult of the past, of national and family traditions. Whoever was able to, therefore, put pen to paper in order to leave as much information as possible to posterity about their family and kinship ties, familial history and deeds, and the virtues of famous forebears. The 17th century saw a great flowering of diary-writing in Poland. Most of these journals are nowadays of significance only for historical researchers. One of them, however, represents a true masterpiece, a splendid document of literary value about the views and convictions of the average Polish nobleman: the notes, preserved only in fragments, of Jan Chryzostom Pasek, a pupil of the Jesuits in Rawa Mazowiecka. Pasek, like many of his contemporary Sarmatians, was first and foremost a soldier. Nevertheless, he waged war for the sake of neither fame nor fatherland, but rather for money. This poor nobleman from Mazowsze (Mazovia) saw war as his only chance in life. Pasek portrayed himself as a faithful defender of noble liberties, a gallant soldier (although at times cruel and greedy for loot), a good homesteader and husband. He viewed the world with a naive curiosity. He could not bring himself to criticize his own person or the noble estate, convinced that what was good for the nobility was at the same time good for the Republic.

This Sarmatian diarist had the gift of storytelling. He knew how to build tension, compose descriptions, and weave dialogues into them. He wrote in a colorful style, with lively and vivid language, into which he interspersed Latin phrases in order to demonstrate his education. He was also able to adapt his style to the events he describes. In the battle scenes, the sentences are short, frantic, the dialogues are cut short, the language colloquial. Yet in the speeches that Pasek was fond of including into his recollections, the sentences are long, complicated, full of baroque conceits and learned allusions. Discovered in the 19th century, Pasek's *Memoirs* (*Pamiętniki*) had a great impact on subsequent Polish literature, encouraging the development of the noble-tale genre and the appearance of the masterwork of the popular novel: Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Trilogy*.

Jan III Sobieski (1629-1696) Aside from diary-writing, letter-writing also flourished during the epoch. Or, more aptly, letters were preserved in household archives, and were sometimes copied down into the nobility's *silvae rerum*. Outstanding epistolographers included Daniel Naborowski, Jan Andrzej Morsztyn, and Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski. One particularly interesting document of the era, however, consists of the letters of King Jan III Sobieski – soldier and champion of the battle of Vienna (1683), bright with European fame. For decades, this austere leader and strategist wrote letters full of love to his beloved French wife, the Queen Marysieńka (Mariette). The lovers' correspondence clearly bears the mark of their familiarity with Honoré D'Urfé's then-popular romance *L'Astrée*. They call each other by conventionalized names drawn from literature, and also employ a refined cipher of erotic illusions. The Sarmatian king proves to be equally deft whether on the battlefield, putting pen to paper, or in the bedroom. He writes nimbly and volubly, he knows how to relate his military expeditions to his wife, including his most important expedition to Vienna, which he undertook – as was fitting for a Sarmatian – in order to conquer in the name of God, stating: *Veni, vidi, Deus vincit*.

III. The Polish Baroque – in the domain of styles

1. Mannerism. The first stage of the Polish Baroque was characterized by Mannerist tendencies. The twilight of the Renaissance was already clearly visible in the latter works of the master of Renaissance Classicism, Jan Kochanowski. His *Threnodies* (*Treny* – 1580) already clearly manifest anxiety and disbelief, which leave their imprint on the poet's style. Kochanowski undermines the testimony of the human senses, feverishly grasps for words, is at times unclear, resorts to elliptic constructions, makes bold enjambments, and employs grating phonic effects. A complicated world, after all, requires means of description different than those offered by Classicism.

The triumph of literary Mannerism can already be perceived in the works of Mikołaj Sęp-Szarzyński (who died several years before Kochanowski). On the surface, not much has changed here. Ancient authorities still seem to reign (for example, Sęp-Szarzyński cites Horace

and Anacreon, for example), but a superficial imitation of the "letter" of Classicism is coupled with a complete break with its "spirit." Attempts are made to express uncertainty, anxiety, and disbelief within classical forms. The order of the cosmos is thus juxtaposed with the chaos of the human world, and universal truth is supplanted by individual experience. The early stage of Polish Mannerism is characterized by intellectualism – extreme intellectualism in the case of Sęp-Szarzyński (his poetry consists in essence of conceptual clashes), moderate in the case of Grabowiecki. The works of these poets appeal to reason, not to emotion. A new type of language finds its way into poetry: that of philosophy, theology, science. Difficult genres (such as the sonnet) become preferred. Style is complicated, refined, one can even speak of a certain "formal affectation" (to employ the description by aesthetics historian Władysław Tatarkiewicz).

It is within the domain of international Mannerism that we should also situate the Latin works of the Jesuit Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (known as "Casimire," 1595-1640). This imitator of Horace (as well as the Jesuit poets then in vogue) skillfully combined antiquity and Christianity in his verses. This brought him European fame and the designation "the Christian Horace." From today's perspective, however, his theoretical reflections on poetry are most interesting. In a manuscript treatise *De acuto et arguto* (presented in 1623 in Rome), Sarbiewski provided a superb definition of the *pointe* ("*acutum*"), analyzing thereby the statements of various contemporary theoreticians of poetry. For Sarbiewski, the *pointe* is an unexpected juxtaposition of two contrary concepts, meaning *concors discordia vel discors concordia*. It stems from observations of the laws of the world, not from superficial poetical displays.

The apex of Mannerism in Polish literature comes during the first half of the century. In the worlds of Daniel Naborowski and Jan Andrzej Morsztyn, we witness a complicated play with literary tradition, an escape from persuasiveness, a poetic toying with language (for example, exploiting the meaning of a single word), bold conceits, and finally exceptional formal virtuosity.

The twilight of Mannerist tendencies, in turn, is evidenced by the work of Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski, in which, alongside Man-

nerist linguistic rebuses (such as the Latin emblems of *Adverbia moralia*) and poetic palimpsests in the spirit of Marino (for example, the religious romance *Tobias Delivered – Tobiasz wyzwolony*), we also encounter Baroque emotions and religious persuasion (such as *Poetry of Holy Lent – Poezyje postu świętego*).

2. Baroque. The Baroque style proliferated far and wide in Poland. It dominated practically from the start of the 17th century until the mid-18th century. The intellectual character of Mannerism only ostensibly corresponded to the mood in post-Tridentine Europe (the resolutions of the Council of Trent concerning art were formulated in this spirit). The weakness of this style, of course, lay in its intellectual elitism. Mannerism, with its ostensible ambiguous truths, false poses, and cult of refined form, was simply not suitable as a weapon in the spiritual (and other) disputes underway in Europe throughout almost the entire 17th century. A lighter literature was needed, one that, while reflecting the complicated nature of the world, would at the same time chiefly appeal to the emotions.

Hieronim Morsztyn's poetry was just that: sensual, dazzling, simple and persuasive, clearly distinguishing the truth from falsehood, beauty from ugliness, good from evil. The work of Kasper Twardowski, full of graphic allegories, developed within the domain of the Jesuits' meditative inspiration. Polish culture's profound reception of the Baroque was confirmed by the painterly language and style of Samuel Twardowski, and by the pithiness and plasticity of Wespazjan Kochowski and Wacław Potocki, the true masters of Polish Baroque poetry. The works of Zbigniew Morsztyn (who clearly concretizes the subtle conceits of his cousin Jan Andrzej) also maintain the spirit of the Baroque.

The final eminent Baroque poets (such as the priest Józef Baka) almost intermingle with the representatives of renewed Classicism in the 18th century.

3. Classicism. Classical trends did not die out in Poland in the 17th century. However, they were marginal with respect to the leading styles of the epoch. It has been repeatedly pointed out that Classicism usually

flowered during periods of political calm and economic prosperity. In the 17th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Republic was tormented by numerous conflicts and wars. The country grew impoverished and depopulated. These were not, therefore, conditions conducive to a harmonious, ordered vision of the world. Despite this, as if in defiance of the turbulent times, certain authors still appealing to classical ideals of order, simplicity, and clarity did continue to appear.

The traditions of Renaissance Classicism were cultivated in the 17th century by Szymon Szymonowic (1558-1629), who in his *Idylls* (*Sielanki* – 1614) referred to both ancient authors (Theocritus, Virgil) and modern-age ones (Jacopo Sannazaro). In doing so he was able, although wearing a classical guise, to express his own intimate, oftentimes bitter experiences and his vision of a world steeped in crisis ("all is plunging downwards" – "*wszystko na dół się pomyka*"). Classical rules of stylistic economy ("as many words as things" – "*ile słów, tyle rzeczy*"), running counter to the Mannerist/Baroque trends of the epoch, also served as a beacon to the Opaliński brothers, who had their eyes fixed upon Roman models.

Also noteworthy is the salient presence of masterpieces of French Classicism within the Polish culture of the period. Jan Andrzej Morsztyn translated Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid* (staged 1661), his cousin Stanisław tackled Racine's *Andromache* (staged 1696), and Krzysztof Niemirycz published his translation of La Fontaine's *Fables* in 1699. Molière's plays were performed at court stages (*The Would-Be Gentleman* was staged in 1687). A manuscript translation of *The Affected Young Ladies* has also survived from the epoch, bearing in Polish the title *Parisian Comedy* (*Komedyja Paryska*).

It is telling that most of these translation projects were undertaken near the end of the century. With this, 17th-century Classicism paved the way for the flowering of Polish Enlightenment literature.

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