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## *King-Spirit* According to Tymon Niesiołowski

Images in *Król-Duch* [King-Spirit] penetrate us when reading and, in the words of Hans Belting, “live in our bodies” along with other imagery. Their status, however, is even more uncertain than that of the works we see in the galleries and which remain in the albums of our memory or which we carry beneath our eyelids. They come from the outside, but at the same time we create them ourselves.<sup>1</sup> The visions from the first pages of the poem slip beneath those that follow, overlapped by their relentless mass, pushing forth at a stupendous pace. The details of the main text may be complemented or replaced with those written down as variants (provided we are reading the book as conceived by the editors). Subsequent contact with the poem wipes clean those earlier images, or makes us build new ones out of their remnants mixed with new experiences. A similar experience comes with pretty much any literary work, yet it is exceptionally intense in *King-Spirit*. The “new images”, characterised, as was put forward by the author in the foreword to Rhapsody I, by “a sparing use of colour” (XVII 81),<sup>2</sup> are never static; they are complete visions put forth before our eyes to contemplate. Their uniqueness and novelty comes from the technique, which may “offend with the inappropriateness of its style” (XVII 80).<sup>3</sup> Many years ago Wiesław Juszczak already noticed that the poem contained “those never-ending ‘film-like’ technical tricks, the camera zooming in and out, the constant shifting of focus in the scattered, fluid

- 1 Cf. H. Belting, “Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology”, *Critical Inquiry*, 2005, vol. 31, no. 2 (Winter), p. 306; M. Poprzęcka, “Obraz pod powiekami” [An Image under the Eyelids], in: eadem, *Inne obrazy. Oko, widzenie, sztuka. Od Albertiego do Duchampa* [Other Images. The Eye, the Perception, the Art. From Alberti to Duchamp], Gdańsk, 2008, pp. 139–140, 158–159.
- 2 All quotations from Słowacki after: Juliusz Słowacki, *Dzieła wszystkie* [Collected works], ed. J. Kleiner and W. Floryan, Wrocław, 1952–1975; the Roman numeral indicates the volume; the Arabic numeral is the page number. All quotations have been translated solely for the purpose of the present publication.
- 3 Cf. M. Piwińska, *Juliusz Słowacki od duchów* [Juliusz Słowacki of the Spirits], Warsaw, 1992, p. 405.

lighting. [...] There truly is something in them that puts them nearer to the figments of the imagination laboriously fished out from a shattered memory; they are as if reconstructed, they appear in vague wholes or sharply and suddenly drawn details, caused by some seemingly 'clinical' stimulus". Their way of being reflects the transformations that lie at the foundation of the philosophical concept of *King-Spirit*.<sup>4</sup>

More still, the pictures become epitaphs to the expanding consciousness of the spirits. In their dreams, tangible and expressive, in the images of their expository memory, the spirits recognise themselves and learn of their mission. The images precede understanding and lead to it. The priestess Oda sees her complex (in the literal, not metaphorical, sense) nature, even if she does not know yet of what she is speaking. The epiphanous images also cause decisions. Popiel is pushed to "scatter the world" by "This new sight! Magnificent!..." (VII 155), when he sees wings on the armour of his knights. The words 'to see', 'to look', 'to behold', 'sight', 'invisibility', etc., which appear in the poem in many forms (and are prominent in all of the poet's works), are not (or at least not only) a part of Słowacki's aesthetic vocabulary, but of his epistemological vocabulary.

On the basis of Juszcak's conclusions, Marta Piwińska points to several ways in which images are conjured up in the poem. She writes: "They are images that appear suddenly, last for a brief moment and are expressive. Some flashes of images, which seem to have left only a trace in words. Micro-visions. 'His leg / Bare today shines before my eyes' (VII 176) [...] A bare foot. The priestess's burning hand. The end of a plait and 'one crease of the robe' instead of the entire figure of Lech's daughter coming to free the prisoner. Some expressive detail caught by the eye in a critical moment".<sup>5</sup> "Not a description – but some kind of an apparition, so that the reader may see it the same way".<sup>6</sup>

Today's readers, having experienced the literary and artistic experiments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and having learnt the lesson of Postmodernism, are likely to perceive it this way. They will not look for illustrations or visual equivalents of Słowacki's poetry in art, especially if they are painters themselves: "No [...] work [by Słowacki] connects with any picture, any painting. Rarely, too, does our perception of reality call upon one of the poet's verses. [...] For he remains elusive even in what is visual in his poetry. [...] A modern painter, remembering Słowacki's poems, may see in their own creative method an importunate echo of that poetry. They may see the similarity of inspiration, means, goals".<sup>7</sup>

4 W. Juszcak, "Lekcja pejzażu według *Króla-Ducha*" [A Lesson in Landscape after *King-Spirit*], in: *Ikonoграфия romantyczna* [Romantic Iconography], ed. M. Poprzęcka, Warsaw, 1977, p. 319.

5 Piwińska, op. cit., pp. 409, 410.

6 Ibid., p. 407.

7 J. Sempoliński, "Malarstwo Słowackiego" [Słowacki's Painting] [1979], in: idem, *Władztwo i służba. Myśli o sztuce* [Power and Service. Thoughts on Art], selected, edited and introduced by M. Kitowska-Łysiak, Lublin, 2001, pp. 263, 265, 266.



**Fig. 1.** Tymon Niesiołowski, *Gold-Head* (from the *King-Spirit* cycle), pastel on paper (126.7 × 147.5 cm), 1909, National Museum in Warsaw, photo by Krzysztof Wilczyński / Ligier Studio

We may also find traces of Słowacki's methods of visualisation in painting at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a large part of which is a visual testimony to the reception of the poet's work. These traces can be seen, as Juszczak so convincingly wrote in *Modernizm* [Modernism], in the ways a history written down in a landscape is reconstructed, in the mutual "complementing" of the elements that are shown or in the luminist design of the painting,<sup>8</sup> not in the subjects or particular motifs – although many pieces, starting from the 1860s, but most numerous at the end of that century and at the beginning of the next, referred to Słowacki's work at this level as well, as an illustration or a visual commentary, mostly referring back to *Anhelli*, *Balladyna*, *Lilla Weneda*. Many of those paintings are baffling; they seem so very distant from our internal

8 *Malarstwo polskie. Modernizm* [Polish Painting. Modernism], introductory essay by W. Juszczak, biographical entries and catalogue by M. Liczbińska, Warsaw, 1977, esp. pp. 48–55.

visions that arise during reading. We read Słowacki's writings differently than those who did so a hundred years back, especially as concerns the later, "dark" texts, originally depreciated precisely for that "darkness". It was at that time, over a century ago, that they were "rediscovered" and appreciated for the first time, and after that for years they were subjected to interpretations and editing in a bid to understand them. In order to make them rational and sorted into a coherent and logical (as per the period's idea of 'logical') composition, they were pushed into the framework of traditional genres. It seemed then that all it would take in order to have *King-Spirit* reveal its internal workings would be to arrange everything in order, bestow it with a commentary and find the right key, be it philosophy of history, psychology or anything else. Now we are constantly moving away from the conviction that it is even possible that the reading of this poem – as we see it today, without dividing it into the main text and the variants – is ever going to have an end. *King-Spirit* is, after all, as many scholars believe, a myth, although of a special kind, where the *arche* is overshadowed by the *eschatos*; it is a "script" for a mystery performance.<sup>9</sup> Thus we consent to the tortuous initiation we must perform every time we reach for Kleiner's tomes that fall out of our hands. For Słowacki had warned: "You will endure hardship reading these poems – and you shall have to struggle, spirit of the reader, with the spirit of the poet..." (XVII 81).

We find no reflection of that hardship in Tymon Niesiołowski's cartoons for *King-Spirit*. Looking at them gives us the impression that the artist had read the poem with the same ease he could wield the style of Gauguin, Puvis de Chavannes, Picasso, Matisse, or – at the very beginning of his artistic career, i.e. precisely in these cartoons – of Wyspiański.

The idea of illustrating Słowacki's poem may have come to the painter already during his student years, when, as Marian Turwid attests, Wyspiański supposedly "left at his disposal his own studio in the Academy building. Niesiołowski was then working on cartoons for stained glass compositions for *King-Spirit*".<sup>10</sup> But the pastel cycle did not come into being until later, in Zakopane, where the artist moved to after he had graduated. The environment he found himself in was a boon to his intellectual development and may have

9 L. Nawarecka, *Mistyczny sens mitu w „Królu-Duchu” Juliusza Słowackiego* [The Mystical Meaning of the Myth in *King-Spirit*], Katowice, 2010, pp. 11, 41–45. Cf. also e.g.: M. Tatar, "Struktura mitu religijnego a *Król-Duch* Słowackiego" [Structure of a Religious Myth and *King-Spirit*], in: *Studia romantyczne. Prace poświęcone VII Międzynarodowemu Kongresowi Słowistów* [Romantic Studies. Essays on the 7th International Congress of Slavonic Studies], ed. M. Żmigrodzka, Wrocław, 1973; M. Cieśla, *Mityczna struktura wyobraźni Słowackiego* [The Mythic Structure of Słowacki's Imagination], Wrocław, 1979; S. Makowski, "*Król-Duch* – czyli tajemnica początku i końca" [*King-Spirit*, or the Mystery of a Beginning and an End], in: *Trzyнадцать arcydzieł romantycznych* [Thirteen Romantic Masterpieces], Warsaw, 1996.

10 M. Turwid, "Tymon", in: idem, *Przygody ze sztuką* [Adventures with Art], Bydgoszcz, 1986, p. 126.

deepened his interest in Słowacki's poem, which may have made its way into Niesiołowski's "sophisticated reading" already in the Cracow period.<sup>11</sup> The painter mostly kept the company of writers – including Kasprzowicz, Orkan, Tetmajer, Żuławski and Żeromski – he was friends with Witkiewicz both father and son, and he had met Miciński and Przybyszewski back in Lvov.<sup>12</sup> The Tatra mountains were considered a special place, predestined for reading Słowacki, as they brought the mystical elements to the surface and intensified them; hence the notion that the bard should be buried on the peak of Ornak, and hence the presence (both overt and encrypted) of his works in *Nietota. Tajemna księga Tatr* [Nietota. The Mystery Book of the Tatras] by Tadeusz Miciński. This natural relationship between the poet's work and the Tatras is multidimensional: suffice it to say that the great exegete of Słowacki's mysticism, Jan Gwalbert Pawlikowski, was one of the pioneers of Tatra exploration and ardently advocated protecting their environment.

The earliest of Niesiołowski's cartoons for *King-Spirit*, entitled *Wanda*, was shown at the exhibition of the Society of Friends of Fine Arts in Cracow in 1908.<sup>13</sup> The "Jutrzenka" villa in Zakopane saw two more compositions displayed at a show which opened on Christmas Day of 1909, dubbed *Sen* [Dream] and *Rycerz* [Knight] by the press.<sup>14</sup> Niesiołowski sent a cycle of five pastels – *Król-Duch* [King-Spirit], *Wanda*, *Skrwawione skrzydła* [Bloodied Wings], *Złotogłów* [Gold-head] and *Sen Mieszka* [Mieszko's Dream] – to the "unceasing exhibition" at the Cracow Society of Friends of Fine Arts in December of 1910.

An entry referring to 1913 in the diary of Stefania Chmielakówna, a teacher from Zakopane, may indicate that the painter had not finished the cycle: "Tymon [...] was, for example, supposed to illustrate *King-Spirit*, his health

11 T. Niesiołowski, *Wspomnienia* [Memoirs], Warsaw, 1963, p. 38. At Zakopane, Niesiołowski took part in the preparation for the Słowacki commemorative gala in the jubilee year of 1909; the report from the gala mentions his name as one of the authors of the "artistic programmes", cf. S. Żeromski, *Listy 1905–1912* [Letters], ed. Z. J. Adamczyk, Warsaw, 2006, p. 203 (S. Żeromski, *Pisma zebrane* [Collected Works], vol. 37, ed. J. Goliński).

12 The composition of the literary and artistic circle to which Niesiołowski belonged is discussed by e.g. Michał Sokolnicki, *Czternaście lat* [Fourteen Years], Warsaw, 1936, p. 137; M. Turwid, op. cit., p. 128; M. Geron, *Tymon Niesiołowski (1882–1965). Życie i twórczość* [Life and Art], Warsaw, 2004, and others. Other testimonies include Stanisław Witkiewicz's *Listy do syna* [Letters to My Son] (ed. B. Danek-Wojnowska and A. Micińska, Warsaw, 1969) and the memoirs of Niesiołowski himself, op. cit.

13 *Sprawozdanie Dyrekcji Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Sztuk Pięknych w Krakowie z czynności za rok 1910* [Report of the Management of the Friends of Fine Arts in Cracow for the year 1910], Cracow, 1911, p. 19. *Wanda* was also exhibited in Zakopane in late 1909 and in the autumn of 1910.

14 A. Janowski, "Wystawa Towarzystwa 'Sztuka Podhalańska' w Zakopanem" [The Exhibition of the "Podhale Art" Association in Zakopane], *Ziemia*, 1910, no. 7 (12 II), p. 100: "Niesiołowski gave pastels – *Dream*, *Knight* and a faithfully rendered bunch of kingcups".



stands in the way, ruined by his rakish lifestyle".<sup>15</sup> Perhaps, however, she did not know of the cartoons displayed earlier, before she had just arrived in Zakopane. In the light of her words it is impossible to rule out that the works exhibited in Lvov and Warsaw in 1914, catalogued as *Karton do Króla-Ducha* [Cartoon for King-Spirit] and *King-Spirit*, were some other paintings<sup>16</sup> that were unrelated to the aforementioned group.

We know *Wanda* from a brief description by Zygmunt Lubertowicz, a poet and teacher at a provincial middle school who published a brief thesis entitled *Paleta barw i klejnotów w utworach Juliusza Słowackiego* [The Colour and Jewel Palette in Juliusz Słowacki's Works], Brody 1910,<sup>17</sup> the same year he saw the Zakopane exhibition: "Niesiołowski's paintings carry plenty of mysticism, for example *King-Spirit*, when Wanda comes to visit him in the dark blue night, shielding the pale light with her hands, shining into the green eyes and the face of the Spirit-knight [...]"<sup>18</sup>

The *Bloodied Wings* cartoon probably showed the scene from octaves XLII–XLVII of the first chant of Rhapsody I, while *Mieszko's Dream* may have featured one of Mieczysław's visions, probably the last, the one of the twelve angels, as it was the most detailed and conducive to turning into a visual work. The remaining two pictures of the cycle are now at the National Museum in Warsaw.<sup>19</sup>

15 Tytus Chałubiński Tatra Museum in Zakopane, Ms. AR 318: Stefania Chmielakówna, *Pamiętnik* [Diary], sheet 171 (entry dated 28 Sept. 1915). Entries from 1911 and 1912 are written as a diary, the events of 1913 were written down at the end of 1915 and in 1916 (B. Królczyk-Kurdas, "Franusku mój najśodszy! O uczuciu Stefanii Chmielakówny do Franciszka Smreczyńskiego na podstawie pamiętników i listów" [My Sweetest Frankie! Stefania Chmielakówna's Affection Towards Franciszek Smreczyński on the Basis of Letters and Diaries], *Małopolska*, vol. XIV, Cracow, 2012, p. 143).

16 *Katalog wystawy Jana Bulasa, Tymona Niesiołowskiego, Wilhelma Wachtla* [Catalogue of the exhibition], Friends of the Fine Arts Association in Lvov, May 1914 [Lvov], inv. no. 43 and 44: *Karton do Króla Ducha* [Cartoon for *King-Spirit*]. In 1914, Niesiołowski's work *King-Spirit* was exhibited at the Zachęta Gallery of Art in Warsaw (Janina Wiercińska, *Katalog prac wystawionych w Towarzystwie Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie w latach 1860–1914* [Catalogue of Works Exhibited at the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in the period 1860–1914], Wrocław, 1969, p. 249). No review of those exhibitions that mentions Niesiołowski's works has been found so far.

17 Lubertowicz went on to publish the brochure *Uwagi nad artyzmem poezji i stylu Juliusza Słowackiego* [Notes on the Artistic Quality of Juliusz Słowacki's Poetry and Style], Bielsko, 1935.

18 Z. Lubertowicz, "Wystawa sztuki w Zakopanem" [Art Exhibition in Zakopane], *Świat*, 1910, no. 41, p. 7. *Wanda* is also mentioned in a review from an earlier exhibition held in Zakopane: "The pastel of *Wanda* has great compositional assets, it is conceived originally and in a painterly manner. [...] The work has its special physiognomy, its expression, and owing to this rare quality it would not stop being interesting even if it were much less well made" (V, "Wystawa sztuki w Zakopanem" [An Art Exhibition in Zakopane], *Zakopane*, 1909, no. 3 [13 II], p. 3).

19 Both works are pastels on paper: *Król-Duch*, 119.2 by 89.3 cm; on the reverse: "Rysowałem / w Zakopanem 19/VI 1909 / Tymon Niesiołowski", drawing no. W.13266,

All publications refer to them as *Król-Duch* and *Bolesław Śmiały* (perhaps it is *Knigh*).<sup>20</sup> However, if we accept the list from the catalogue of the Cracow exhibition to be the full list of titles for the cycle, then the first cartoon would have to be the *Gold-head*, while the other is *King-Spirit*. Such a verdict matches the iconographic content of the works.

“Gold-head” is what Słowacki calls the statue of Perun, which, awakened by Chrobry’s hammering border posts into the bottom of the Dnieper, floats up to the surface of the river:

Jakiś słowiański Bóg zbudzony w błocie  
Wstawał powoli... i z czarnej pościeli  
Podnosił piersi... ciesielską robotą  
Rzezane... jedną dłoń... i głowę złotą.  
[...]  
I wstał, i postać się okropna wzmogła,  
Świecąc łbem złotym – na wodnej zieleni,  
Lecz ręki jednej wydobyć nie mogła,  
Którą słup trzymał wbitą do kamieni.  
Jedna ze śmielszych rusalek pomogła  
I gryzła zębkiem w granitowej rdzeni,  
Aż dłoń zjedzona mając przez korale,  
Wypruł się straszny złotogłów na fale. (XVI 439)

Some Slavic God, awakened in the mud, / Was rising slowly... and from the black bed-sheets / He was lifting his breast... by carpenter’s work / Carved... one hand... and a gold head. (...) And he stood up, and the horrible figure rose, / Shining its golden head – on the watery green, / But it could not pull out one of its arms, / Held down by the post hammered into the rocks. / One of the more daring mermaids helped / And with its little tooth bit in the granite core, / Until, his hand eaten by the coral, / The terrifying Gold-head lifted himself onto the waves.

The tale of how Perun came to be in the “water silt” is told in Nestor’s Chronicle: “Vladimir then began to reign alone in Kiev, and he set up idols on the hills outside the castle with the hall: one of Perun, made of wood with a head of silver and a mustache of gold [...]”. After he was baptised, and his state along with him, the prince “ordered that Perun should be bound to

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purchased from Elżbieta Grabska in 2003; *Złotogłów*, 126.7 by 147.5 cm, signed “TN” bottom right; on the reverse: “rys. w list. ro. 1909 / w Zakopanem”, drawing no. W8129, purchased from a private collection in 1961.

- 20 Tymon Niesiołowski 1882–1965. *Katalog wystawy* [Exhibition catalogue], National Museum in Warsaw, October–November 1982, [Warsaw, 1982], no. 156, 157; *Formiści* [The Formists], ed. I. Jakimowicz, MNW, Warsaw, 1989, no. 643, 644; *Tymon Niesiołowski (1882–1965). Katalog wystawy monograficznej* [Monographic exhibition catalogue], Regional Museum in Toruń, October–December 2005, [Toruń, 2005], no. 26, 27; M. Geron, “Twórczość Tymona Niesiołowskiego do 1914 roku” [Niesiołowski’s Pre-1915 Output], in: *Studia o artystach XVIII–XX w.* [Studies on the Artists of the 18th to 20th Centuries], ed. J. Malinowski, Toruń, 2003, pp. 217–218; eadem, “Tymon Niesiołowski”, op. cit., pp. 41–43.

a horse's tail and dragged along Borichev to the river. [...] After they had thus dragged the idol along, they cast it into the [Dnieper]. But Vladimir had given this injunction: 'If it halts anywhere, then push it out from the bank, until it goes over the falls. Then let it loose'. His command was duly obeyed".<sup>21</sup> Słowacki had read all of this – spiced up with additional detail, such as the mention of the statue surfacing thrice before resting at "Perun's place" ("the idol's burden") – in Nikolai Karamzin's *Istoriya gosudarstva rossiyskogo*, of which he took notes in *Raptularz 1843–1849* [Notebook 1843–1849]. In *King-Spirit* he tells the entire tale in a synchronous story-within-a-story (the Spirit that is about to become Bolesław the Bold speaks about the present of Bolesław the Brave's time and recalls the moment Vladimir brought down the wooden statue), but he changes the colour of Perun's head to gold, thus linking it to a line of other golden heads (the drowning "golden heads" of the Bold's knights crossing the Bug, the king's sacrifice "at Złota Hława" = Golden Head). Perun is a "monster", a "horror", but he also represents a divine force, he is supposed to force Poles to submit to the Great Rus' (Perun's place would "your knee / Polish... draw – and put down your head / Before a God like I – God's devil" XVII 794). The gold on the head decorates (as with the golden gate, the "golden sunflowers" of the trumpets, shields like the sun, Bolesław the Brave's golden armour) and sanctifies him, as it decorates and sanctifies Bolesław the Bold at the outset of his rule. The king's moral downfall and the collapse of the realm manifests itself in the loss of the ruler's "golden shine of majesty"; then the process spreads onto the entire country: "The clear ambers of the ghosts were blown away / The golden finish of every house and manor" (XVI 475–476). In a sense, the Gold-head of the Dnieper foreshadows that disaster, and the shine of his forehead confirms his status as a god, a prophet ("he was, swimming – like the prophets..." , XVI 440) and a seer:

Fala żeń takie wydobyła tętna,  
Jakie Ty z wieszczą wydobywasz Boże,  
Gdy mu na oczach naród stoi miły  
A ciało niesie do wielkiej mogiły. (XVII 764)

The wave had drawn out of him the same pulses / That you, O God, draw out of  
a seer, / When in his eyes stands the beloved nation / And his body carries him to the  
great tomb.

Perun therefore embodies the spiritual grandeur of the Great Rus' (which had, however, chosen Fame over the Word),<sup>22</sup> the country "Where to be underwater

21 *The Russian Primary Chronicle, Laurentian Text*, translated and edited by S. Hazzard Cross and O. P. Sherpowitz-Wetzor, <http://www.mgh-bibliothek.de/dokumente/a/a011458.pdf> [accessed 1 Nov. 2015].

22 The national aspect of Perunin *King-Spirit* is discussed by Elżbieta Kiślak (*Car-trup i Król-Duch. Rosja w twórczości Słowackiego* [The Tsar-cadaver and the King-Spirit. Russia in Słowacki's Works], Warsaw, 1991, pp. 332–334).





**Fig. 2.** Tymon Niesiołowski, *King-Spirit* (from the *King-Spirit* cycle), pastel on paper (119.2 × 89.3 cm), 1909, National Museum in Warsaw, photo by Krzysztof Wilczyński / Ligier Studio

in the sun is not a miracle [...] / Where a spirit to a wooden, golden giant / Speaks – and he will place lightning in his hair... [...] / Where of the peoples appear men inspired” (XVII 765). Should we consider the prophetic power of the Gold-head a positive value, it might stem from his aquatic nature, as in the case of the mermaids. Although they are described as “parasitic spirits”, “vested into a body through thought – without love... / Yet trembling over their form” (XVI 437), it is their image, the reminder of the “songs of the naiads”, that links the Dnieper landscape to the sea grotto in Pornic, to the poet’s present-day, shining through the present-day of the *King-Spirit*, which is intertwined with the time of Bolesław the Brave, Bolesław the Bold and Vladimir the Great, as well as with eternity:

Dziś jeszcze córki złotego księżycyca  
Z fal patrzą na mnie oczyma złotemi  
I wiatr morski mię – jak lutnia zachwyca,  
Gdy kwiateczkami nad morzem błademi  
Szeleści... a tam drugi ton na falach  
Brzęczy na perłach, muszlach – i koralach. (XVI 437)

Even today the daughters of the golden moon / Watch me from the waves with golden eyes, / And a sea wind enraptures me like a lute, / When the pale little flowers over the

sea / Are ruffled by it... and thence another tone on the waves / Hums on the pearls,  
shells – and the corals.

Słowacki wrote to his mother from Brittany: “What I felt, my dear, having looked at the Ocean – that I cannot express to you. There is some mysterious link, some sympathy between this sea and me – and it must be real, as no other sea has ever had a similar charm for me”.<sup>23</sup> The watery depths will become, in the poet’s eye, the origin of being, the nest of all change, a place wherein the spirit toils without end. In *Samuel Zborowski*, it is not only the ghosts who live in Amphitrite’s kingdom, but also her daughter Diana, who is ready to make a sacrifice of her own flesh and bone.

An aquatic scenery is also a backdrop of Stanisław Wyspiański’s *Legenda* [Legend]. In 1909, Niesiołowski published a variation on this drama – his one-act play *Wanda*, the plot of which, however, resolves entirely on land. Its main connections with Wyspiański’s piece are the protagonist, the fantastic elements (e.g. Marzanna or the personified thoughts) and, finally, the “unknown Dziad” (the vagabond), who “cranks the hurdy-gurdy”, like Śmiech and Łopuch do in *Legend*. Written in melodious verse (as most of the text is meant to be sung), *Wanda* harks back to Wyspiański’s works in its textual and stylistic layers as well. Thus if we should search Niesiołowski’s piece for references to Słowacki (the titular character, the figure of the hurdy-gurdy player, the motifs of a dream and an aurora shining in a grave), then Wyspiański’s mediation – if such a mediation is indeed discernible – weakens that link and makes it irrelevant.

The reception of the *Gold-head* cartoon is similar. Before we come to reading its content, before we see Słowacki, we see Wyspiański. One mermaid, the one on the right, had been taken straight from the painting *Ogień* [Fire], a part of the design for the *Four Elements* stained glass, designed in 1895–1897, never executed, the other from the pastel *Skarby Sezamu* [Treasures of Sesame], ca. 1897.<sup>24</sup> The entirety of the composition can be compared to the illustrations for *Iliad*, to the cartoon *Wanda*, even to Wyspiański’s stained glass window from the Franciscan church in Cracow, *Stań się!* [Let There Be!], in the lower part of which we can see some “little amphibian creatures” and luminous air bubbles, similar to those Niesiołowski used to mark the water part. The statue of Perun, although very firm and heavy in its unequivocally defined wooden matter (“breast... by carpenter’s work / Carved”), brings to mind – due to its elongated proportions and, even more so, to the

<sup>23</sup> *Korespondencja Juliusza Słowackiego* [Letters by Juliusz Słowacki], ed. E. Sawrymowicz, vol. II, Warsaw, 1963, p. 19 (letter of 2 Oct. 1843).

<sup>24</sup> Also, the shape of the figure and her floating hair bring to mind the *Fallen Angels* in the Franciscan church polychrome and the figure in *Water* in the *Four Elements* cycle. The gesture of the backward-bent arm may reflect the gesture of the young man in the *Taming of the Elements* by Józef Mehoffer (who was Niesiołowski’s other professor), painted for the conference hall of the Industry and Commerce Chamber in Cracow.

fact that it is bound by ropes, multiplied by the water rings – an image of a human coffin, i.e. Saint Stanisław from the stained glass windows of the Wawel Cathedral.

The Gold-head in Niesiołowski's representation, forcefully rising to the surface of the Dnieper, menacing and angry, with seaweed rolling down his head and neck like hair, fits Słowacki's vision: "Some horror [...] / Fearsome, with water grass hanging from it" (XVI 438). However, the poet only provides bits and pieces of the description; he names Perun's particular traits, moving between them from octave to octave. The painter has reduced them, showing the god in one, an expressively concrete shot. In place of the lightning bolt, "woven into the divine hair" by Perun in *King-Spirit*, he has an arrow (whose head points to and accentuates, in a fairly naïve trick, the diagonal movement of the figure) and "Thor's hammer", which in fact agreed with the other descriptions of the god's appearance.<sup>25</sup> The statue's head is not golden, only a yellowish reflection on the forehead could be seen as an allusion to the name Słowacki gave to it and to the title of the cartoon. In fact, Niesiołowski's version of Perun links the Dniester deity (completely omitting its aspect as a personification of the power of Rus') and the posts hammered into the bottom of the river as seen in an anthropomorphic shape by the King-Spirit. The cylindrical form of the sculpture's lower part and its copper-coloured open eyes correspond to the words:

Słupisko jakieś... z księżycową twarzą  
Przedemną... wodę rozsiekle w dwa pręgi,  
W żelaznej marze tak się oczy żarzą,  
Jako czerwonych miesięców okręgi. (XVI 438)

Some large post... with a moon-like face / Before me... chopped the water in two, / In the iron phantom the eyes burn so / As do the rings of red moons.

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25 E.g. Wawrzyniec Surowiecki wrote: "All that is known from contemporary tales about Perun, the main deity wielding thunderbolts, is that he was represented in human form and that he held an arrow, i.e. a fiery bolt, in his hand" ("Śledzenie początku narodów słowiańskich" [Research on the Beginnings of Slavonic Nations], *Roczniki Towarzystwa Królewskiego Przyjaciół Nauk*, vol. XVII, separate edition Warsaw, 1824, p. 134). According to Kraszewski, "Perkunas was represented by a piece of flint (Thor's hammer), with a head crowned with thunder, bearded and with thunderbolts in his hand. – There were giant statues of the Ruthenian Perun, with a torso of oak wood, a head of silver, a moustache and ears of gold, legs of iron, a thunderbolt-shaped piece of flint in his hand" (J. I. Kraszewski, *Sztuka u Słowian, szczególnie w Polsce i Litwie przedchrześcijańskiej* [Slavonic Art, especially in pre-Christian Poland and Lithuania], Vilna, 1860, p. 312). The identity of Perun and Perkun was confirmed by later research, cf. A. Gieysztor, *Religia Słowian* [Religion of the Slavs], Warsaw, 1982, pp. 48–49. Niesiołowski may have seen stone hammers in many archaeological collections, including private ones, or illustrated ones in scholarly or popular publications (e.g. *Światowid*, 1899, vol. I, p. 50).

Bolesław's post, which is to emerge one day "as testimony from the river / As a wraith... with a face red with the shame of rust" (XVI 438), now awakened Perun, but at the same time trapped his arm, the one "eaten [...] by coral", not allowing him to rise from the bottom. It is not until the mermaid bites through the "granite core" (or, in a variant, cuts through it with a rainbow) that the god is released. Niesiołowski's Gold-head has both hands, complete and conspicuously balled into oversized fists (similarly disproportionate as in Xawery Dunikowski's 1903 sculpture *Fatum* and in Zbigniew Pronaszko's 1922 design for the statue of Adam Mickiewicz). Only the outline of the right wrist seems half-bitten or hacked at. It is that arm that "Amphitrite's daughter" had set free, she holds it in her hand still, pushing it upwards, helping the statue get out "onto the waves". The water mirror cuts through her body, shining from beneath the surface with a bluish glow. We see here at the same time the worlds above and below the water surface, just as the narrator of this passage of *King-Spirit* speaks of it. The illusion of a transparent surface, nearly perpendicular to the plane of the picture, is present solely (and still not too conspicuously) in the foreground; further on, the parallel whirling lines mark the underwater part of the image. The spatial depth is alluded to and conventional, at a glance everything seems to be happening almost at the very surface of the cartoon.

Much of it is taken up by the bodies of the mermaids, which in the "decorative" order of the composition play a role no less important than "the elder god of Perun's wrath". They are as bright as he is dark, as dynamic (in the contours as well) as he is heavy and crude. The faces of the water women have nothing to do with sweetness; their gestures, full of horror, have nothing to do with the stereotype of gracefulness. Is this why they resemble angels: not rising, but stricken-down, who are full of perfection because they do not seek a remaking of the spirit?

I mają swojej nikłości sumnienie,  
Bo wyjść na słońce nie mogą bezkarne.  
Wiedzą, że prosto z mgieł jak gwiazdy spadły,  
Nie pracowały na kształt — lecz ukradły. (XVII 763)

And they are aware of their irrelevance, / As they cannot go out to the sun unpunished. / They know they fell from the mists as if they were stars, / They did not work for their form — they stole it.

Niesiołowski keeps the sensual charm of their figure, as, according to Słowacki, "they were wondrous" despite their attachment to the form, and thus "there is in the spirit a yearning after them" (XVII 763).

If the shape of the Dniester goddesses reflects the ambivalence of how Słowacki assessed them in *King-Spirit*, perhaps Niesiołowski's partial anthropomorphisation of Perun can also be read as reflecting Słowacki's concepts. The "golden idol", rolling "like a block", is at the same time a living god, terrifying

but sensitive and inspiring “a sorrowful mercy” (XVII 764). To see life in dead matter, sanctified by worship and then degraded, is a task that only one to whom “the speech of statues is known”, one who hears the hearts beating in columns (XVII 794), can accomplish; Wyspiański will be Słowacki’s successor as a loudspeaker for the words of the statues.

The face of the Gold-head – the furled brows and half-open mouth – resembles the face of the protagonist of Niesiołowski’s other cartoon, especially since in both the head is viewed slightly from below. Does this mean that the painter understood Perun as one of the King-Spirit’s incarnations? Such a mistake in interpreting the Dnieper scene seems completely understandable in the face of the “[p]lurality of persons in a single *I*. Plurality of times within a single *now*. Plurality of places within a single octave”.<sup>26</sup> Since Niesiołowski combined the iron post hammered in by the Piast monarch with the figure of the Ruthenian deity “by carpenter’s work carved”, it is not impossible that he added to them a third voice, speaking from the “green darkness”, from underwater.

The knight from the next picture, the one that should be entitled *Król-Duch*, is a similarly compound character. His form seems to be a synthesis of several incarnations of the royal spirit. Each of the elements into which we can break down this representation can be linked to a specific person (or persons) within the poem.

A golden suit of armour is Her the Armenian’s final vestment on his funeral pyre, Bolesław the Brave wears it as well (“Somewhere up there, the Brave, in golden armour”, XVI 440)<sup>27</sup> in the image conjured up or brought back by the incorporeal King-Spirit before he incarnates into Bolesław the Bold. The latter, as has already been said, quickly loses the “golden shine of majesty” and is hence afforded only iron. “Now I shall have you in your iron armour, / Bend you before me and strike you in spirit” (XVI 479), says Piotrowin’s ghost to the king; occasionally the word “iron” is replaced with “metal plate” (“wrapped in his armour like a tower of metal plate”, XVI 467). Popiel wears a helmet in *King-Spirit*, but his is “black, made of lead”, and he hides his head in it “like in a hood” (VII 180); its shape is similar to what Niesiołowski’s hero wears. The colour of the knight’s face and his eagle wings point to Popiel. With the successive murders Popiel becomes ugly “in flesh”, and after the burning of his mother his face “disintegrated/ And showed the greenness of the body” (VII 72). On his way to Swityn castle, he feels “indescribable shame / To have a face like verdigris, a gaze like fire in a cloud” (VII 180). In the pastel painting, the mask-like visage glows with the same shade of green. The incarnation of a bloody yet suffering tyrant is dominant in Niesiołowski’s vision. In 1912 the painter published a drama entitled *Kniaz Popiel* [Prince Popiel] in the

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<sup>26</sup> Piwińska, op. cit., p. 292.

<sup>27</sup> As an able fighter who hesitates to assume spiritual leadership, Bolesław I the Brave is also called “Iron-man” (XVII, 793), as one wielding iron and iron only.



monthly magazine *Museion*. Although its plot is based on the old legend of Popiel's poisoning his uncles, the titular character – with the consciousness carried over from *King-Spirit* – sees his crime as an act of cruelty which saves a nation from slumber and passivity:

Ka bym nie ja na świecie duszą  
To wy by wszystkie posnęli.  
Bom ja wam był  
Jako grad co zboże w perzynę obraca,  
Jak wiew co domy i bory przewraca!  
I jako wód wezbrana rzeka,  
Jako szarańczy chmura zła,  
I jako Boża błyskawica.<sup>28</sup>

If I weren't in the world with my soul / You would have all fallen asleep. / As I was to you / Like hail that turns grain to naught, / Like wind that tumbles houses and woods! / And like the river rising with water, / Like an evil cloud of locusts, / Like God's thunderbolt.

The background of the upper part of the composition is filled with “the wings / Of beaten eagles...”, which Popiel's army “sticks into their armour”; he himself pins a “wing wet and bloody” (VII 154, 155). In *The Plan of King-Spirit* Słowacki describes the episode as “The origin of the wings worn by Slavic hussars” (XVII 913). But in the poem they never resemble the actual wing contraptions of the hussars; instead they adopt the form of angelic wings that may, however, give the wearers a terrifying aspect; in the scene of his liberation by Wanda, Popiel is “[with] wings bristling... like infernal creatures” (VII 158). The later forms of the King-Spirit no longer have wings, albeit sometimes their armies are described as winged. Only the Brave looks “Like an angel, who, flying – as if stands, / With momentum, and wings trembling at his carapace” (XVII 758). Under his reign, “Poland had struck against her foes, / In flesh similar again to Popiel's / Spirit... Wearing wings...” (XVII 793). But he refuses the spiritual mission; hence, abandoned by the spirit, “he finished his struggles”, and his “fame gained out of hard strength / Goes to the graves – but not beyond the graves...” (XVII 758).

The sign of this king, the “swordsman [...] with innards of stone” (XVII 784), is the *Szczerbiec*, a chipped sword attached to the knight's belt in Niesiołowski's cartoon. In the poem, Bolesław the Bold inherits it from his great ancestor. In his downfall, he misses the “jagged stick at his side, / That bore a fault of ancient fame” (XVI 447); he sees the weapon lose the royal sacrum: “On the blade of my black scimitar / The chip grew over and – my spirit fell...” (XVI 462).

The flames, visible on the right of Niesiołowski's picture, interspersed with the snaking lines of smoke that twist around the figure, probably signify

28 T. Niesiołowski, “Książ Popiel” [Prince Popiel], *Museion* II, 1912, fasc. VII, pp. 40–41 (the entire play is published in fasc. VI–VIII).

the flames of Her the Armenian's pyre; and perhaps also the destructive yet cleansing conflagration of the country under Popiel.<sup>29</sup> In the first case, they would describe the moment just before the spirit leaves its bodily form. The portrayal of the character could be interpreted in two ways: as a lying figure seen from above – rather unusual for the painterly manner of representation, but possibly indicated by the head bent back – or as a body tied to a vertically positioned cross. The former perspective, with all its strangeness, would be very close to the image indicated by octaves II and III.

Ja Her Armeńczyk leżałem na stosie  
Trupem... przy niebios jasnój błyskawicy,  
[...]  
Niebo szerniało... ale świeciło się  
Grzmotami... jak wid szatańskięj stolicy.  
A ja świecący od ciągłego grzmota  
Leżałem. – Zbroja była na mnie złota.

I duch niewyszły z umarłego ciała  
Czuł jakąś dumę, że spokojnie leży; (VII 145)

I, Her the Armenian, lay down on the pyre, / Dead... under the bright lightning of the  
skies, (...) / The sky went black... but glowing / With thunder... like a vision of a devils'  
capital. / And I, alight from the constant thunder / Lay down. – I was dressed in golden  
armour. / And the ghost, not having left the dead body, / Felt some sort of pride that  
it had lain down calmly;

The green reflexes upon the golden armour, mannered and irritating in their importunate regularity in Niesiołowski's pastel (as if they were a caricature of how Gauguin contrasted these colours), come therefore from the bluish lights of the thunderbolts, which eventually strike the pyre, extinguish its "red flames" and kill the witches singing their runes.

Iconography usually shows the victims of burnings bound to a stake, with their hands often tied behind their backs. Here, the knight is spread out on a cross. This is how we read the image, even if after a moment we notice that the vertical elements of the cross are wooden planks in the upper part and some kind of hollowed-out trunk in the lower. In Słowacki's work, *King-Spirit* in each of his incarnations has several traits of Christ. Her the Armenian acquires that similarity by declaring: "My sufferings and honest torture / And a constant struggle against a horde of devils, [...] / I shall state..." (VII 145). Mieczysław is ready to pick up the cross and to make a sacrifice not only for his own resurrection, but "for the people" as well

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29 Lucyna Nawarecka (op. cit., p. 57) asserts: "The entire universe of *Rhapsody I* is dominated by images of fires, flames and embers [...]. Some images, such as 'flame of aurora', 'fiery sun' or the 'flaming broom upon the sky', are on a cosmic scale. The cause of this universal conflagration is the 'thunderbolt spark', i.e. Popiel".

(XVI 433). Later, when he descends, like Christ into Hell, into the Greek afterlife (where Her had wandered before) and promises the spirits of “all-important Greeks” a resurrection in the Word, even his very appearance resembles that of the Saviour, as he wears a helmet “of a crown of thorns” (XVI 433). Bolesław the Bold’s “Ruthenian mother” forces him as a child to vow a sacrifice to Vladimir’s heirs: “You shall take a death as wilfully bloody / As Christ – I know it from the spirit – at the Golden Hława...” (XVI 443). Even Popiel has some traits of Christ: the “All-love, washed away in blood – and all-suffering” (VII 183).

In Niesiołowski’s pastel, there are other sanctifying elements than just the cross, i.e. the protrusions arranged in a semicircle on the knight’s helmet,<sup>30</sup> as if foreshadowing the luminous halo that will form as the guiding spirit approaches the “final destination” – the Solar Jerusalem. Thus, the entirety of the picture can be analysed as a mixture of visages and stories of the successive avatars of the King-Spirit and a synthesis of the features of his extra-corporeal being. It is thus a repetition – or application – of the formula Słowacki himself uses, for example, when explaining the heterogeneous nature of the priestess Oda (“from all the creatures bound together / Like a doe and a serpent – a star and a woman”, XVI 398) with the sum of the forms the spirit creates in the lower stages of its development and the future shapes obtained when pursuing the ideal of Christ, the father of all things.<sup>31</sup>

Even in the mixture of the presented accessories (justified by the created synthesis of the characters), Niesiołowski remains faithful to the poet who did not care for chronology when using historic sources. He mentioned this in a dedicative letter to *Balladyna* (“may thousands of anachronisms terrify the historians and chroniclers slumbering in their graves”, IV 21). Słowacki must have imagined Popiel’s armour – described in *King-Spirit* several times as a shirt made of wires, i.e. as chain mail, while Her’s armour ought to have been a Greek breastplate. The knight in Niesiołowski’s piece wears a Renaissance plate mail, which is “futuristic” when compared to the poem’s “historical” matter. Is it, however, a conscious application of the poet’s concept? Probably not. It is more likely to be a result of the specific iconographic sources used as a reference, which may testify to the painter’s attitude towards

30 They can be interpreted as the rods of the helmet’s raised visor, seen from below and enlarged; such a view is evident, e.g. in the statue of King Arthur at the tomb of Emperor Maximilian I Habsburg in the Innsbruck Castle church (by Peter Vischer the Elder, 1512/1513), but also in figures of holy knights placed on the corners of townhouses, which are especially popular in German countries.

31 S. Makowski, “Monogeneza bytu i heterogeniczność świata przedstawionego w *Królu-Duchu*” [Monogenesis of Existence and Heterogeneity of Presented World in *King-Spirit*], in: „W krainie pamiątek”. Prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Bogdanowi Zakrzewskiemu w osiemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin [In the Land of Memories. Studies Presented to Prof. Bogdan Zakrzewski on the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of His Birth], ed. J. Kolbuszewski, Wrocław, 1996, pp. 228–230.

history. He looked for those sources, following Wyspiański, at the Wawel Castle. It was there, in the southern nave of the cathedral, that he found the stone monument of Piotr Kmita, dating from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century: a knight in armour and a helmet. In the Holy Trinity chapel he must have seen the still fresh (painted in 1902–1904) polychromes by Włodzimierz Tetmajer, with the bright archangels on the ceiling spreading their arms wide.<sup>32</sup> It was also there, beneath the pillars separating the main and northern naves, that the memorial of Władysław III of Varna was placed in 1906, with a figure of the young king in armour as sculpted by Antoni Madeyski, his body posture symmetrical and still, with the Szczerbiec sword on his breast and the eagle-decorated pillow under his head underlining that symmetry. All it took was to enlarge the eagle's wings, add a visor to the helmet (like the one Kmita had) and change the position of the arms (to that seen in Tetmajer's work) for King Władysław to become the King-Spirit. Only the face of Popiel, decisively different from the idealised, youthful visage of the ruler, seems to echo another piece, which may well have inspired Madeyski,<sup>33</sup> namely the statue of Guidarello Guidarelli, which fascinated many a poet and which Niesiołowski probably saw in Ravenna during his voyage to Italy in 1908, just before he started the *King-Spirit* pastel cycle. The sunken eyes, the lips open in pain, and especially the portrayal of the face, the only organic and bodily fragment shown lying in the crown of the helmet as if on a dish, were transposed from the Italian marble to the pastel image. Thus, Niesiołowski turns out here to be Wyspiański's ardent follower not as a copycat of ready-made icon sets (as in the case of *Gold-head*), but as an explorer of the relics of the past. Only the strangely buckled-on sword of his knight is reminiscent of the Szczerbiec of Polonia hanging (also along the central axis of the figure) on a loose red scarf ("A coronation coat floats behind her (...) / At the side a sword, a silver sword / Szczerbiec"<sup>34</sup>) in the cartoon for a stained glass

32 An armed archangel, usually leaning on a sword (thus posed differently than Tetmajer's angels and so more removed from Niesiołowski's idea), was a relatively frequent motif in the art of that time, even in representations popularised by postcards, e.g. a card from Kazimierz Sichulski's cycle of illustrations to the *Red Flag* song, published ca. 1905 by *Naprzód* magazine. Another postcard by the same publisher, entitled *The Martyr of Labour*, with an image by František Kupka, may have provided Niesiołowski with the motif of crucifixion with the arms tied to the beam (both cards are reproduced by Józef Kozłowski in the book *Proletariacka Młoda Polska. Sztuki plastyczne i ich twórcy w życiu proletariatu polskiego 1878–1914* [Proletarian Young Poland. Visual Arts and Artists in the Life of the Polish Proletariat 1879–1914], Warsaw, 1986, Fig. 5, 34).

33 This issue is viewed differently by Angela Sołtys ("Pomniki Antoniego Madeyskiego na tle problemu restauracji Katedry Wawelskiej" [Monuments by Antoni Madeyski in the Light of the Restoration of the Wawel Cathedral], *Studia Waweliana*, vol. III, Cracow, 1994, p. 164).

34 S. Wyspiański, "Królowa Polskiej Korony" [Queen of the Crown of Poland], in: idem, *Dzieła zebrane* [Collected Works], vol. I, Cracow, 1964, p. 49.

window in Lvov cathedral. Perhaps the swollen and bunched up snaking rose stems, growing up from the bottom border of *Polonia*, were also a model for the dark lines of smoke of the *King-Spirit* pastel, which also have a serpentine shape to them.<sup>35</sup>

The link to the cartoons for Wyspiański's Wawel windows is concealed as if on purpose. Its trace can be found in the idea of filling the entire composition with the figure and the upwards shot of the head, which is, however, less pronounced than in Wyspiański's Henry the Pious and Wanda. Perhaps the apprentice wanted to improve on the master. Even though he recognised Wyspiański's greatness, Niesiołowski did not accept his work in its entirety. When comparing the stained glass windows from the presbytery of the Franciscan church in Cracow, he favours *Święty Franciszek* [St. Francis], as "nothing shocks us in this composition; we receive the impression the artist wanted to pass on to us. There is no question of whom the figure represents". Meanwhile, *Błogosławiona Salomea* [Blessed Salomea] "with her excessive affectation loses that beautiful simplicity. [...] As a work of art it has a flaw in composition, her arms badly placed, cut through with the bar in the window, and already skeletal, while the face is young and, while spiritually charged, far from the expressions typical of the dead". The Madonna of Franciscan polychromes upsets the painter with her wavy robe, "too conventional, given the local jacket she wears," and "plenty of diverse elements" at once. In Wyspiański's portraits, he criticises the blank paper left as the background, which results in a "fragmented thing" and is "detrimental to the painting", as, once it was framed, "the lack of completeness became even more apparent".<sup>36</sup> Niesiołowski disapproves of exactly those elements of his master's art that justify a comparison with Słowacki: the degree of fragmentation, the "disharmonious" juxtapositions, the ambiguity. The Wawel cadavers emerge from the void; they create themselves before our eyes in a king-spiritual cosmic drive upwards, out of ashes, blood, smoke and water. Meanwhile, Niesiołowski's knight is there, he endures, perhaps he simply "presents himself". The flames at his knees only theoretically endanger his material form. What Wyspiański showed as a visible collapse, a dynamic transition of the form, his apprentice leaves as just a harbinger of destruction to happen beyond the boundaries of

35 Of Wyspiański's drawings, a sketch reproduced on the cover of *Witeź* magazine (1908), which is a re-working of the *Bishop Stanisław* watercolour from the "Bolesław dolls" cycle, may be considered a possible model for Niesiołowski's *King-Spirit* cartoon.

36 T. Niesiołowski, "Malarstwo Wyspiańskiego" [Wyspiański's Painting], *Comoedia*, 1938, no. 1, p. 10, 11; a passage referring to Wyspiański in Niesiołowski's *Wspomnienia* [Memoirs] does not repeat these critical observations, and his leaving the background empty is almost complimented: "Many of his pastels may indeed seem preparatory works. This does not depend on the amount of effort put into them; this is simply breaking with the conventional image" (Niesiołowski, *Wspomnienia*, op. cit., p. 40).



the pastel. What was incomprehensible and terrifying has been turned into coherent and aesthetic.

A reproduction in a catalogue to Niesiołowski's exhibition shows the *King-Spirit* pastel with the right edge cut off, partially along the flame outline, possibly due to a part of the base having been burnt or rotted off. This correction, imposed by time and impressed onto the work, not only gave the still composition energy, but also, aesthetics-wise, broke its insufferable finish while also being an allusive negative of the flat, black, animal-shaped spots on the left-hand side, seemingly appearing from another order of imagination. Most importantly, it made the pastel's relation to Słowacki's poem more plausible: it clearly showed how and where the matter would vanish, the body would be lost and the spirit released to seek a new form to "earn" its entry onto a higher level of perfection. The incompleteness of the image enriched its meaning, opened it up to the future (as it should per the poet's philosophical ideas) and at the same time drew it closer, at least to a certain degree, both to the "new images" that Słowacki created in *King-Spirit* out of the visible bits and pieces and to the constant fragmentations and crossings-out in the variable and non-cohesive structure of the text.

Niesiołowski's paintings, as per the author's intent, are finite and complete; they do not incite the viewer to conduct a reduction into discrete elements, which I attempted here, to anchor in Słowacki's poem. It is a method that is similar to that used by the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century critics of Jacek Malczewski's *Śmierć Ellenai* [The Death of Ellenai] or of Leon Wyczółkowski's *Alina*, who were annoyed by the absence of the angel above the corpse of the exiled woman or the lack of the willow that Grabiec was turned into. But I did not merely intend to determine what the image's title should be based on verifying which parts of the painterly vision match the text. If nearly everything matches up, why does this dialogue of image and word turn out to be lifeless and numb today? Is it just the immobilisation – both literal, of the knight himself, and visual, of the entire composition with its stubborn symmetry (not removed by the main axis that is positioned slightly to the left) and its studious, hieratic nature – that makes it seem alien to the dynamic imagery of *King-Spirit*? Probably not, since the *Gold-head* cartoon, with its completely different concept, brings forth the same emotions. In both paintings, nearly the entirety of the image plane is filled to the brim with pieces that can be identified and that in a way provoke viewers to limit themselves to a purely iconographic analysis. The dependence on the literary source on the one hand, and on Wyspiański's formula in the visible layer on the other, is nearly paralysing to the sight. The painting speaks, perhaps even too much and too precisely, but it remains blind; we become invisible to it. And, what is more, when standing in front of it we realise that our "bodily images", incited by the reading of *King-Spirit*, do not want any outside concretisation; quite the contrary, they fear it. Słowacki himself reportedly explained to Władysław Łuszczkiewicz why the poetic visions were untranslatable into painting by

quoting the part of *Pan Tadeusz* that describes Zosia with a carrot in her hand: "In poetic thinking and fantasy it is a splendid picture, which painting would have to debase and reduce it to a prosaic reality".<sup>37</sup>

Niesiołowski leaves no "prosaic reality" here. What can be seen, however, is the ambition, expressed in the artist's programme, to create "a well-organised whole".<sup>38</sup> Perhaps that is what we understand as a dissonance with Słowacki's late texts. But Niesiołowski read a different *King-Spirit* than the one we do today, one tamed in the important and even today still valuable critical edition by Ignacy Matuszewski, who, as we know, was the first to show how Słowacki related to the "new art", not just literature, but also (maybe even more importantly) to painting. This was emboldening. "How many times while reading *King-Spirit* did I think about how only a pre-Raphaelite could properly illustrate this mystic epic," wrote the critic. "What material for painting could a Burne Jones or a Walter Crane find in the visual episodes of the poem, sculpted, it would seem, out of precious stones and transparent crystal!"<sup>39</sup> Never mind that Matuszewski, when making such a choice of artists, confirms his partiality towards ready-made poetic images that would fit into "episodes" (instead of images formed before our eyes, if only for a fleeting moment), or that his conviction that pre-Raphaelite painting is appropriate for *King-Spirit* would today be considered at least unusual. The crucial part is his supposition (or claim, even) that the poem can be illustrated.<sup>40</sup>

37 L. Méyet, "Łuszczkiewicz o Słowackim" [Łuszczkiewicz about Słowacki], *Kurier Warszawski*, 1900, no. 189, quoted after: J. Starnawski, *Juliusz Słowacki we wspomnieniach współczesnych* [Słowacki as Remembered by His Contemporaries], Wrocław, 1956, p. 199.

38 Niesiołowski, *Wspomnienia*, op. cit., p. 103.

39 I. Matuszewski, *Słowacki i nowa sztuka (modernizm)* [Słowacki and the New Art (Modernism)], 4th edition, ed. and with an introduction by S. Sandler, Warsaw, 1965, p. 218.

40 In addition to Artur Grottger's two known illustrations to *King-Spirit*, several others were made: a drawing by Mieczysław Jakimowicz *Król-Duch*, noted in the *Katalog wystawy nieustającej TPSP* [Catalogue of the Unceasing Exhibition at the Society of Friends of Fine Arts] in Cracow in August 1905, lost; Antoni Gawiński's cycle *Rapsod Króla-Ducha* [The *King-Spirit* Rhapsody] (three works shown in Warsaw's Zachęta in 1909, two watercolours probably belonging to the cycle are extant at the Mazovian Museum in Płock and at the Museum of Art in Vilnius; Franciszek Siedlecki's watercolour (National Museum in Warsaw) and an etching known from a remark in the press in 1914; Jerzy Hulewicz's woodcut *Na tle Króla-Ducha* [On the Background of *King-Spirit*], reproduced in *Zdrój* 3/1919, vol. IX, fasc. 3; Zygmunt Wierciak's illustrations to four quotations from the poem were published in the occasional brochure *Juliusz Słowacki 1809–1849. Kraków 27 – 28 VI 1927*, ed. S. Przepolski. Various authors attempted to link many other works with *King-Spirit*, e.g. recently those by Mikołaj Konstanty Čiurlionis (R. Okulicz-Kozaryn, *Litwin wśród spadkobierców Króla-Ducha. Twórczość Čiurlionisa wobec Młodej Polski* [A Lithuanian among the Heirs of *King-Spirit*. Čiurlionis's Output in the Context of Young Poland], Poznań, 2007). Of the works of Tymon Niesiołowski, the cartoon for the *Bolesław the Bold* stained glass window (watercolour, ink, before 1911, National Museum in Warsaw) and the work *Demon* (gouache, watercolour, 1910, National Museum in Poznań) can also be linked with

It is only in this context that the visual shape of Tymon Niesiołowski's cartoons starts to become understandable and justified, and even seems to move from illustration to interpretation. Perhaps they belong amongst works so tightly bound to their time that modern methods of art history, ones that remove the problems of origins and historical placement of the picture from the analysis, are incapable of processing them.<sup>41</sup>

In 1913, Niesiołowski's cartoon cycle was considered his apex achievement. Jan Kleczyński, always prone to bouts of enthusiasm, claimed that in those pastels "we can see that he is an artist who has climbed to the highest gallery of the palace of the art of painting, an artist aiming for broad harmonies of lines and colour, in compositions filled with a strong, rich imagination and fantasy".<sup>42</sup> Niesiołowski's paintings must also have caught the eye of Jan Lorentowicz, who "adored Słowacki"<sup>43</sup> and planned a larger work devoted to him, aside from his 1927 sketch *Juliusz Słowacki wśród Francuzów* [Juliusz Słowacki among the Frenchmen]. He owned one of the pastels of the cycle (perhaps *King-Spirit*). He probably did not see the divergence from the poetic suggestion of the original work that a modern reader of Słowacki finds so jarring. Nor did his daughter Irena, the future painter and stage designer, who reminisces about her childhood thus: "I could not look at the world around me other than through the lovingly narrowed eyes of Stanisławski's pictures, hanging above the sofa in my father's library, and the figure of the King-Spirit painted by Niesiołowski taught me poetry before I could even pronounce that word".<sup>44</sup>

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

## Abstract

Juliusz Słowacki's poem *King-Spirit* [Król-Duch] assaults the reader with images which appear in motion, in sudden flashes, and usually in the form of fragments taken out of the darkness. These visions are of a cinematic rather than a painterly nature. For this reason the 1909 cycle of pastel illustrations to *King-Spirit* by Tymon Niesiołowski (only two of which remain in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw) may seem to

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### *King-Spirit.*

- 41 Today's humanistic research is more interested in the compatibility of word to image, not the other way round, as the contrary phenomenon is associated with Erwin Panofsky's embarrassingly incomplete catalogue of questions, which ignores the visibility of the image.
- 42 J. Kleczyński, "Wystawa 'Sztuki' krakowskiej w Warszawie" [Exhibition of Cracow "Art" in Warsaw], *Sztuka. Pismo Ilustrowane* (Warsaw-Cracow) 1913, vol. III, fasc. VIII–XII (January), p. 29. Niesiołowski's cycle was decidedly unfavourably reviewed by Tadeusz Niedzielski ("Dookoła wystawy w TPSP" [Around the Exhibition at the TPSP], *Krytyka*, 1910, vol. 4, pp. 345–346).
- 43 I. Lorentowicz, *Oczarowania* [Enchantments], Warsaw, 1972, p. 10.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

the modern viewer's eye to be far removed from the text of the poem. But at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in his revolutionary monograph entitled *Słowacki and the New Art* [Słowacki i nowa sztuka] (published in 1902), Ignacy Matuszewski not only pointed to the equivalents of Słowacki's late writings to be found in the visual arts, but also expressed his belief in the possibility of illustrating these texts. Niesiołowski's cycle is thus a testimony to the contemporary interpretations of Słowacki. It demonstrates the changes that the style of reading Romantic texts went through during the century.