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Sita. Indyjski hymn miłości
(*Sita. Indian Hymn of Love*)
– a libretto by Jan Kasprowicz

Polish artistic and literary movement known as Young Poland (Młoda Polska) or Neoromanticism came into being at the end of the 20th century. At the turn of the century the ideas of artistic circles were crystallizing and Polish culture reached a turning point. Polish writers and artists were open to new international trends and looking for new sources of inspiration which could revitalize art and literature. The researchers investigating the period of Young Poland are unanimous that this movement was characterised by a perfect harmony and balance between the means of expression native and typical of Polish culture and foreign influence. If we are talking about foreign influence, by no means can it be reduced to the interactions with European culture as Oriental inspirations are clearly visible. Especially the interest in India became a powerful issue. At that time indology as an academic discipline had been already developed in Europe, particularly in Germany. The history of Indian studies in Poland begins in 1860, when a linguist, professor Bernard Jülg, started his lectures on Sanskrit grammar at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. In 1885 the great interest in Sanskrit among Polish linguists resulted in plans of establishing a chair for comparative and Sanskrit studies at the

Jagiellonian University for the indologist Jan Hanusz¹, a pupil of Albrecht Weber. However, due to his untimely death in 1887 the creation of the chair was delayed. In 1893 the Department of Sanskrit was established at the Jagiellonian University with Leon Mańkowski as its head. He studied Sanskrit in Breslau and Vienna under professors Stenzler and Hillebrandt. Leon Mańkowski was the head of the department until his death in 1906. Soon another academic centre of Indian Studies appeared on the scene. It was Lvov, where there used to be the Department of Sanskrit from the beginning of the 20th century till the Second World War.

The Young Poland writers impressed by Indian thought, literature and culture could grasp the knowledge about India directly from the academicians, be it Polish or foreign. And that was what they did in fact.

Jan Kasprowicz (1860-1926), a poet, playwright, critic and translator, a well-known representative of Young Poland, is a good example here. Between 1884-1887 during his studies at the German University of Breslau, which at that time was a powerful centre of Indian studies, Kasprowicz had an opportunity to attend a series of lectures on Indian philosophy and also on Schopenhauer's philosophy, and this experience impressed him very much. At the age of 28 Kasprowicz moved to Lvov, where in 1904 he received a Ph.D. In 1909 he became the head of the Department of Comparative Literature at the Lvov University. Continuing and developing his unquenchable curiosity in Indian philosophy he became a member of the Polish Philosophical Association established in Lvov, which gathered people deeply interested in Schopenhauer's philosophy and monistic Vedanta thought. This stream of philosophical view of the world is present in Kasprowicz's own poems. Stefan Kończkowski, a literary critic and editor of Kasprowicz's collected works, mentioned

¹ T. Pobożniak, "Jan Hanusz, ein polnischer Schüler Albrecht Webers", *Wiss. Zeitschr. der Humboldt Universität*, Berlin 1976.

that whenever Kasprowicz wanted to express a state of ecstasy or wrote about spiritual matters, he took his symbols from India.

Kasprowicz was also on friendly terms with Andrzej Gawroński, a professor of indology at the Jagiellonian and Lvov Universities. Also Antoni Lange, a pioneer of the Young Poland movement, one of the leading personalities of that epoch, belonged to the circle of his friends. Lange knew a number of European languages and Eastern ones, among them Sanskrit. His fascination with Indian literature was clearly visible in his work as a poet, writer and translator. He translated into Polish fragments from the *Mahābhārata* [for instance the story of Nala and Damayantī (1906), the Sāvitrī episode (1910)], some stories from the *Pañcatantra*, *Hitopadeśa*², *Kathāsaritsāgara* and parts from the *Gītagovinda* and *Ṛtusamhāra*³. There is information that he translated Daṇḍin's *Kāvyaḍarśa* but it was never published⁴. In 1886 Lange translated and published the abbreviated version of Fauche's French translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Then he tried to prepare a translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. *Epos indyjskie. Valmiki. Ramayana* (The Indian epic. Valmiki. The *Ramayana*) finally appeared in 1909. In fact it was a very detailed summary of the text with a great number of fragments, sometimes quite long, translated directly from Sanskrit.

I am not going to give the list of the poems of Kasprowicz in which one can find the echoes of his fascination with Indian thought as it is beyond the scope of the present paper. Before I start a closer analysis of the *Sita*⁵. *The Indian Hymn of love* I would like to mention

² Kurier Polski, 6 IX, 1920.

³ Kurier Polski, 24 XII 1920, *Z poematów indyjskich. Kalidasa. Ritusamhara (Pory roku)*, Skwar, translated by A. Lange.

⁴ E. Doncbach, "Przy okazji pewnego listu Antoniego Langego", [in:] *Sprawozdania z Czynności i Posiedzeń Naukowych ŁTN*, R. XXX. 9, Łódź 1976, p. 2.

⁵ All the names of the characters are given with the spelling adopted by the authors.

only one of them, namely the *Sawitri*⁶. The story of Sāvitrī could be known to Kasprowicz due to several translations and adaptations, such as those of Kazimierz Brodziński⁷ and Friedrich Rückert⁸. The poem is quite faithful to the original, while describing the plot and its setting. It shows the power of pure love. The same issue creates the kernel of his *Sita. Indyjski hymn miłości* (*Sita. The Indian Hymn of Love*).

The *Rāmāyaṇa* was known to Kasprowicz from the translations of Hippolyte Fauche and Antoni Lange, as well as from Hermann Jacobi's work *Das Rāmāyana, Geschichte und Inhalt*. It is not certain when Kasprowicz wrote his *Sita. The Indian Hymn of Love*. It would be reasonable to consider the date of its creation very close to that of writing the *Sawitri* (1907). The *Sawitri* could be seen as the putting of the idea of women's salutary love into a shape of a ballad, whereas the *Sita* was a libretto to a musical drama in three acts devoted to the same theme. The work was dedicated to the aristocrat Prince Władysław Lubomirski⁹. Lubomirski was an amateur composer but his relative importance in the history of Polish music lies in the fact of his patronage of a group called "Young Poland in Music", established in 1905 to promote new compositional tendencies in Poland. Among its members were Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937) and Ludomir Różycki (1883-1953), also the pianist and composer Apolinary Szeluto (1884-1966), and the conductor, violinist and composer Grzegorz Fitelberg (1879-1953). One of the young composers, namely Karol Szymanowski, was an admirer of Kasprowicz's writings. In

⁶ Published in 1908 in the volume of Kasprowicz's poems entitled *Ballada o słończniku i inne nowe poezye*.

⁷ Translation (in his *Pisma*, 1844) after Franz Bopp *Die Sündflut nebst drei anderen der wichtigsten Episoden des Mahābhārata* (1829).

⁸ F. Rückert, *Brahmanische Erzählungen*, Leipzig 1836.

⁹ "J.O. Księciu Władysławowi Lubomirskiemu muzyczny dramat ten poświęcam" (*I dedicate this musical drama to H. H. Prince Władysław Lubomirski*) says the dedication (Jan Kasprowicz, *Sita. Indyjski hymn miłości w trzech odsłonach*, Poznań 1917; J. Kasprowicz *Dzieła*, ed. by S. Kołaczkowski, vol. XIII, Kraków 1930).

1902 he composed three songs to the poems of Jan Kasprowicz: *Święty Boże (Dear God)*, *Jestem i płaczę (I am and I weep)* and *Błogosławioną niech będzie ta chwila (Blessed be this moment)*. As Stefania Łobaczewska states in her biographical work on the life and work of Karol Szymanowski these three songs were of great sentimental value for Szymanowski¹⁰. In 1907 he composed the music to Kasprowicz's poem *Salome*. The Young Polish Composers' Publishing Company with the financial help of Prince Lubomirski was able to print the works of these talented composers beginning their career. Undertaking this kind of activity Lubomirski hoped to promote his own mediocre compositions. Partly he succeeded as his operetta "Die liebe Unschlud" was staged in Vienna in 1912 and his *Andante* was performed in Warsaw in 1919 and had a good write-up. It was Lubomirski who was supposed to compose music to the Kasprowicz's libretto but he never did it. Kasprowicz was waiting for years in vain. Finally the *Sita* was published in Poznań in 1917. It is regrettable that the musical qualities of the text, its internal rhythm and simplicity and elegance of the structure can appeal only to the readers. We could easily have another Indian opera in Poland after Moniuszko's *Paria*. Judging by the libretto it seems more interesting and sophisticated than *Paria*, also more Indian even if Kasprowicz treats the subject matter of the *Rāmāyaṇa* quite freely.

An invocation to Indra opens the first act. Soon it becomes obvious that these prayers to Indra are meant by the author as proceeding the wedding ceremony of Rama and beautiful Sita. Jan Kasprowicz refers here to the Vedic mythology describing Indra, the god of atmosphere and weather, as the most important among the deities of Indian pantheon. This god, holding his mighty weapon, the thunderbolt, and a quiver of arrows and his miraculous bow, constantly wages war with the demons. Kasprowicz chooses him to be the main opponent of Rawana, the demon of darkness. Indra's at-

¹⁰ S. Łobaczewska, *Karol Szymanowski. Życie i twórczość (1882-1937)*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Kraków 1950, p. 599.

tendants according to Kasprowicz are bright spirits. The battle between white Indra's knights and the dark army of Rawana is endless. It goes without saying that Kasprowicz refers to the usual motif of his poems, namely the eternal fight between the good and the evil. Kasprowicz's Rawana is depicted as the direct cause of Rama's resignation from the throne and exile. This was Rawana, once a lover of the youngest among Dasaratha's wives, Kikehi, who instigated her to make her own son the heir to the throne and banish Rama. The only person who can oppose the evil is noble Sita, whose soul mirrors Indra's immortality and her eyes Indra's realm – the blue sky (p.12). Her love is pure (symbolised by white lilies thrown before her feet by the bridesmaids - p.12) and true. In the second act Kasprowicz turns aside from the contents of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki by building a plot of Rama's jealousy. Rama due to the cunning suggestions of Kikehi suspects that Sita is in love with Lakszmana. Kekehi excites Rawana's passions towards Sita and advises him to carry away Sita to his kingdom. The absence of Sita at Rama's site could give her a chance to enchant Rama and have power over him. This act ends with the abduction of Sita. The third act shows the fight on Lanka, a duel between Rama and Rawana, the regaining of Sita and finally, after the vile insinuations of Kikehi that Sita's chastity is questionable, the trial of Sita's purity by fire takes place. Sita turns out to be a faithful wife; Agni, the witness of her purity, leads her out from the burning pyre. The musical drama ends with a hymn in honour of Sita's pure, salutary love. It turns out that there is no place for illicit feelings.

Perhaps for an indologist the existence of the plot of Rama's jealousy in Kasprowicz's libretto would be an intriguing issue as such a motif is developed in different Indian versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. However it seems that Kasprowicz was familiar only with Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. Kasprowicz's own personal experience could be responsible for introducing the motives of jealousy, betrayal and unfaithfulness. His first marriage – to Teodozja Szymańska in 1886 – finished after a few months. In 1893 he married Jadwiga Gaşowska, who several years later, in 1899, left him and their two daughters for Stanisław

Przybyszewski, the writer and his friend staying for some time at their house. In 1905 their divorce was finalised.

It seems that the poet adapted the theme taken from the *Rāmāyaṇa* to express his own feelings, desires, hopes and doubts as well as his own longing for marital happiness.

Coming to the end of the present article let me mention one more fact situated on the fringes of literature and music and connected with Kasprowicz. In 1914 Jan Kasprowicz translated into Polish Rabindranath Tagore's *Gītāñjali* and *Gardener*. From that moment the influence of Tagore's ideas and artistic achievements became visible in Kasprowicz's own works. As his third wife Maria Kasprowicz wrote in her *Diaries*, Sanskrit literature and Tagore were the subjects discussed vehemently with Professor Andrzej Gawroński during his visits in Kasprowicz's house in Zakopane, where the poet spent the last years of his life. Almost at the same time Karol Szymanowski was asked to compose music to the songs of the Noble prize winner in 1913 – Tagore. In spite of his interest in Orient visible in his works composed at that time (*The love songs of Hafiz*, *The songs of infatuated Muezzin* and *The song of night* to the poem of Jalāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī – to mention only a few) he prepared to that task unwillingly. In his letters he asked his friend, the great poet and writer Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, to translate Tagore's songs into Polish to help him fulfil his obligation although Kasprowicz's translations, who was his favourite poet, were available at that time. Finally Szymanowski composed four songs (published in 1918, Vienna, by Universal-Edition) to the poems from Tagore's cycle *Gardener* translated by Iwaszkiewicz. These are: *My Heart*, *The Young Prince I*, *The Young Prince II* and *The Last Song*. It was Grażyna Bacewicz who composed music to two Tagore's poems¹¹ in the translation of Jan Kasprowicz.

¹¹ These are: the song entitled *Mów do mnie miły* (*Speak to Me, My Dear* – 1936) and *Rozstanie* (*Leave-taking* – 1949).

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