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Polish Readings of Byron's Epitaph on Boatswain*

Abstract

The *Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog*, which Byron had engraved on the memorial to his dog Boatswain in the grounds of Newstead Abbey, has been one of the most often reprinted and translated poems by Byron. In her book *Kindred Brutes* Christine Kenyon-Jones has thoroughly examined the genealogy of the poem and pointed to its potential for manifold interpretations and to its role in establishing the image of Byron as 'a misanthropic dog-lover'. The Polish reception of the poem confirms both its ideological and political potential and its role in the creation of one of the stereotypical images of Byron.

This paper examines Polish translations of Byron's *Inscription*, pointing to the role of the poet's lives, particularly L. Belloc's French biography, in the formation of the myth of the Byron and in the transmission of the knowledge of his works. It also traces literary allusions to the poem in the works of Polish writers. In the Russian-controlled Congress Kingdom of Poland the banning of the poem on the grounds of a theological error marked one of the first noted interventions of preventive censorship in 1825. Nonetheless, the Polish translations were published first in the Austrian-controlled Lviv in 1825, and then in the Russian-controlled Vilnius in 1834, both exploring the poem's political potential. On the other hand, in his drama *Fantazy* Juliusz Słowacki used ironic references to the poem to criticize the Byronic stance.

Keywords: Byron, Polish translations, literary allusions, biography, epitaph, dog.

While in Britain Byron's reputation had first been formed on the basis of his scandalous lifestyle and his longer works, such as *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*, in Poland his celebrity was first spread by adaptations of articles from French, Swiss and German periodicals¹ and the translations of his immensely popular Turkish tales. Whereas the role of the latter in the formation of the stereotypical image of the poet is generally acknowledged, not much attention has been paid to the significance of his short lyric works in this process. The poems directly

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¹ S. Wasylewski, *U świtu romantyzmu. Pierwsze sądy o Byronie w Polsce*, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 1913, vol. 12, p. 156–168.

linked to his life, such as *Fare Thee Well*, *The Dream* and the *Inscription on a Monument of the Newfoundland Dog*, were among the first works by Byron to have been translated into Polish (the first Polish complete translation of *Childe Harold* appeared only in 1857).² These short lyrics were often included in Byron's biographies, as illustrative of his character and of specific events from his life – and thus biographies may have played a significant role in the early dissemination of his poetry. As Julian North has argued, Byron's *Lives* greatly contributed to the development of his myth in Britain;³ in Poland his biographies not only promoted his stereotypical images, but also made some poems more readily available.

Before the appearance of Thomas Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron with Notices of His Life* (1830–1831), one of the most widely read books on Byron on the continent was Louise Swanton Belloc's French biography published shortly after Byron's death in 1824. An examination of the catalogues of French books available in Warsaw's libraries in the early 1830s reveals that they seldom held any copies of Byron's poetry, but did hold copies of Belloc's biography.⁴ Belloc's book must have been particularly useful to readers with good knowledge of French and limited knowledge of English as it contained a selection of Byron's poetry, including the *Inscription* and its prose French translation.

As Christine Kenyon-Jones has pointed out, the *Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog*, which Byron had engraved on the memorial to Boatswain in the grounds of Newstead Abbey, has been one of the most often reprinted poems by Byron and played a major role in establishing his image as “a misanthropic dog-lover”.⁵ In her book *Kindred Brutes*, Kenyon-Jones has thoroughly examined the genealogy of the poem and explored its potential for manifold interpretations. The study of the Polish translations of the *Inscription* and the allusions to the poem in the plays of Juliusz Słowacki and Cyprian Norwid reveals the ideological and political potential of Byron's epitaph and its role in the creation of some of stereotypical images of Byron.

Byron was a great animal-lover and in his youth Boatswain, a Newfoundland or possibly an Esquimaux, was his favourite dog.⁶ Byron's biographies include several stories which testify to the nobility of the dog and his devotion to his master. Already in 1807 Byron's friend Elizabeth Pigot prepared a fanciful booklet *The Wonderful History of Lord Byron and His Dog*. In November 1808 Boatswain probably contracted rabies, and, according to Moore, Byron “more

² Two translations of *Fare Thee Well* appeared in 1820: by J.U. Niemcewicz in *Bajki i powieści*, 2nd ed., vol. 2, 1820, p. 196–198, and by L.S. in “Pamiętnik Warszawski”, vol. 18 (September), p. 82–85; Mickiewicz's translation of *The Dream* was first published in “Dziennik Warszawski” in 1826.

³ J. North, *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet*, Oxford 2009, p. 3, 58–100.

⁴ For instance, *Catalogue des Livres Francais qui se trouvent a louer pour lire chez Aug. Emmanuel Glücksberg Libraire, Rue Miodowa no 497 sous Les Collones a Varsovie* (1833) lists Belloc's two-volume biography of Byron, Lamb's *Glenarvon*, but no copies of French translations of Byron.

⁵ C. Kenyon-Jones, *Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic-Period Writing*, Aldershot 2001, p. 50.

⁶ On the subject of Byron's pets, see Geoffrey Bond, *Lord Byron's Best Friends: From Bulldogs to Boatswain & Beyond*, [n.p. UK] 2013; on Boatswain's breed, p. 49. Bond's book includes a complete reproduction of Elizabeth Pigot's booklet mentioned below.

than once, with his bare hand wiped away the slaver from the dog's lips during the paroxysms".⁷ Byron memorably announced his death in a letter to Francis Hodgson: "Boatswain is dead! – he expired in a state of madness on the 18th after suffering much, yet retaining all the gentleness of his nature to the last; never attempting to do the least injury to any one near him. I have now lost everything except old Murray".⁸

By April 1809 Byron had a monument built to the dog in the grounds of the Abbey, and he actually planned to be buried next to him together with his servant John Murray. The appropriate measures were taken: the burial chamber to accommodate two coffins was built and proper instructions appeared in Byron's will in 1811.⁹ The inscription itself consists of two parts: the prose epitaph written by Hobhouse¹⁰ and Byron's poem, which juxtaposes the depravity of human nature with the virtues of the dog. The two appeared together in Hobhouse's *Imitations and Translations. From the Ancient and Modern Classics, Together with Original Poems Never Before Published* (1809), but the poem became widely known thanks to its publication in the second edition of *The Corsair* volume in 1814.

In Poland the poem became both famous and notorious as a result of Byron's European celebrity, particularly as it was often cited in Byron's biographies as illustrative of the poet's cynicism and misanthropy, and as late as 1872 it was quoted as an example of "self-conceit, bitterness, anger, and hatred of humankind, deriving from excessive self-love, on which all his works and actions w[ere] based".¹¹ Given its popularity, Belloc's book may have been at least partly responsible for the notoriety of the poem, and may have served as a source of the text for some translations.¹² In Belloc's book the *Inscription* appears in the section devoted to Byron's life at Newstead Abbey. Belloc viewed the verisimilitude of the Gothic architecture of the Abbey as expressive of the English mind, "where their ideas reveal themselves as independently as in their literature",¹³ so Newstead in her account became emblematic of the poet's mind. The story of Byron's life at Newstead is illustrated with passages from *Hours of Idleness*, the epitaph on Boatswain and the *Inscription on the Cup Made from the Human Skull*, with the text of *The Dream* appended at the end of the first volume. As in most contemporary biographies, Mary Chaworth is cast in the role of the love of Byron's life, and it is allegedly her rejection of his courtship that led to his life

⁷ T. Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron with Notices of His Life*, Paris 1830, Google eBook, p. 54.

⁸ Qtd in: *ibid.*, p. 54.

⁹ C. Kenyon-Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹¹ „Zarozumiałość, gorycz, gniew i nienawiść dla ludzkości, wypływająca ze zbytnej miłości własnej, będą podstawą dzieł jego i postępów”, *Byron i byronizm*, „Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1872, vol. 7, no 47, p. 373–375; no 48, p. 378–380, no 49, p. 387–389; no 50, p. 394–396; no 51, p. 403–404 (p. 379).

¹² Belloc's book appeared in 1824, and the first Polish complete translations of the poem were due to appear in 1825.

¹³ „Leur pensée s'y montre aussi indépendante que dans leur littérature”, L.S. Belloc, *Lord Byron*, vol. I, Paris 1824, Google eBook, p. 25.

of dissipation in London, interrupted by solitary sojourns in the company of his beloved New Foundland dog at Newstead. The inscription is quoted both in English and in the French prose translation, though Belloc dismissively comments on the poem as noteworthy “only for the feeling of misanthropy which seems to have dictated [it].”¹⁴

Boatswain himself entered the canon of Byron’s apocryphal stories through Thomas Moore’s *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, which became almost instantaneously available in three French translations – one of which was made by Belloc – and widely read.¹⁵ Moore not only stresses Byron’s fondness for dogs but also provides an anecdote to illustrate Boatswain’s “generosity of spirit, which might well win for him the affections of such a master as Byron’s”:¹⁶ the anecdote is to account for Byron’s desire to be buried with the dog. Moore obviously feels obliged to provide excuses for Byron’s misanthropic poem, so he places it within the classical tradition of monuments to dogs (the Dog’s Grave at Salamis) and cites examples of devotion of great eighteenth-century men to their dogs.¹⁷ In his view, the most obvious analogue for Byron is Alexander Pope’s eulogy for his dog Bounce: he quotes Pope from a letter to Henry Cromwell, dated 19 Oct. 1709, where Pope (at the age of twenty one, so nearly the same age as Byron in 1808) – as he writes of his solitude and of his faithful dog – reflects, “Histories are more full of examples of the fidelity of dogs than of friends”.¹⁸

Interestingly, Moore does not quote Byron’s poem in full, but only cites Hobhouse’s lines preceding the poem, and the final couplet of Byron’s *Inscription*, omitting the attack on human nature. Thus Moore places the poem in the tradition of elegies, epitaphs and monuments for pets, which had become fashionable in the eighteenth century, and attempts to distance it from the convention of theriophily – detracting of human nature by praising animals as superior in their virtues to humans.

Through its bitter cynicism and attribution of the soul to a dog, the poem was particularly disturbing to Byron’s Catholic admirers, even if some were quite willing to allow for a soul in a dog. Lamartine’s praise of Fido the dog in his novel in verse *Jocelyn* (1836, IX. 80–124) reads as a direct response to Byron’s inscription. It reveals, on the one hand, the approval of the devotion of the master to his dog, and on the other criticism of Byron’s blasphemous stance:¹⁹

¹⁴ “Ces vers sont peu remarquable, si ce n’est par le sentiment de misanthropie qui semble les avoir dictés”, *ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁵ E. Estève, Edmond, *Byron et le romantisme français*, Paris 1907, p. 208.

¹⁶ T. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁷ For discussion of the poem in the context of the tradition of theriophily, see C. Kenyon-Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 12–27.

¹⁸ T. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 54; A. Pope, *The Works of Alexander Pope*, with notes and illustrations by J. Warton and others, vol. 7, London 1822, Google eBook, p. 111.

¹⁹ The French critics see Lamartine’s verses as continuation of the tradition of the French epitaphs for dogs. See H. Guillemain, *Le Jocelyn de Lamartine: étude historique et critique, avec des documents inédits*, Genève 1967, p. 457.

Non, tu n'es pas du cœur la vaine illusion,
 Du sentiment humain une dérision,
 Un corps organisé qu'anime une caresse,
 Automate trompeur de vie et de tendresse!
 [...]
 Viens, viens, dernier ami que mon pas réjouisse,
 Ne crains pas que de toi devant Dieu je rougisse;
 Lèche mes yeux mouillés, mets ton cœur près du mien,
 Et, seuls à nous aimer, aimons-nous pauvre chien!²⁰
 No, of the heart thou art not a vain illusion,
 Of human sentiment a bitter derision,
 An organiz'd body living by a caress
 Specious automaton of life and tenderness!
 [...]
 Oh! Come then latest friend, whom my step doth delight,
 And fear not that for thee I should blush in God's sight,
 Place thy heart upon mine! Lick mine eyes still all wet,
 Sole each other loving, poor dog let us love yet!²¹

Lamartine is negating Byron's misanthropic eulogy of the dog, which for him is "of human sentiment a bitter derision." Significantly, his speaker, who is a country priest, endows the dog with an immortal soul, and promises not to "blush [for him] in God's sight", which reads like a reversal of Byron's line, "Each kindred brute might bid thee blush for shame." So if in Byron's poem animals "blush for shame" for man, in Lamartine's lines the human speaker does not blush for his dog in front of the Christian God. Lamartine questions the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church and insists on the compatibility of Catholicism and moderate pantheism, at the same time providing a Christian response to Byron. He continues the tradition of his admonitions to Byron in his *Méditations* (1820) and *Le dernier chant du pèlerinage d'Harold* (1825) and also appeals to more general sentiments of dog-lovers. His Catholic concerns would have been shared by Polish readers of Byron.

The first Polish imitation of Byron's *Inscription* I came across dates from 1820. Entitled *Nagrobek pieskowi* (Epitaph to a dog), it consists of only four lines not so much corresponding as responding to Byron's poem.²² Following the convention of ancient epitaphs, the speaker asks a passer-by to honour virtue in a mean creature and feel affection for it as it is an image of fidelity which human beings lack.

²⁰ A. de Lamartine, *Oeuvres complètes de Lamartine*, tome quatrième: *Jocelyn*, Paris 1860, Google eBook, p. 371.

²¹ Idem, *Jocelyn: An Episode*, trans. Mme F. H. Jobert, Paris-London 1837, Google eBook, p. 350–351.

²² *Nagrobek pieskowi*, „Pszczola Polska” 1820, vol. 3.11, p. 232. The fact that only the last four lines of the poem had been the subject of the adaption seems to confirm my conclusion that Polish translators often used articles in periodicals as their sources owing to limited access to the editions of Byron's works. The four last lines of the poems, viewed as the least offensive, were published in John Watkins's *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Right Honourable Lord Byron* (London 1822), which otherwise seriously condemns the poem on moral grounds (p. 89–90), and I assume many had quoted the passage before Watkins.

Thus the dangerous idea of endowing a dog with a soul is safely avoided. Characteristically of the early translations of Byron, the Polish adaptation was published anonymously and without any reference to Byron in the periodical “Pszczola Polska” in Lviv. It is illustrative of the old-fashioned tendency to appropriate foreign texts without acknowledging their original sources, and in spite of Byron’s European celebrity this tendency is observable in Poland in early translations of his works, such as the first translation of *The Giaour* by Ignacy Szydlowski, published in “Dziennik Wileński” (1822–1823), which appeared without any mention of Byron’s authorship.

What is particularly interesting in the Polish reception of the poem is the fact that in 1825 its translation in “Rozmaitości”, a supplement to “Korespondent Warszawski” (No 19), was banned by censorship in Warsaw. This censorial intervention must be understood in the context of the tightening of censorship in the Russian-controlled Kingdom of Poland, which – when it came into being in 1815 – had one of the most liberal constitutions in Europe. Originally, the censorship had been based on the British pattern, but in 1822 preventive censorship was introduced. It was exercised by Polish authorities, whose representatives were occasionally more zealous in their interventions than deemed necessary by their Russian superiors. The official reason for banning the poem was the theological error of attributing the soul to an animal.²³ The archives of the Polish government in the Congress Kingdom were lost during the Second World War, and the only copies of the records may be available in Russia,²⁴ but I believe that the ban may be interpreted as a veiled attack on the proponents of the newly emerging Polish Romantic Movement, though ostensibly it was an attack on free thinking and lack of Catholic orthodoxy. By 1825 Byron’s name had become one of the battle cries for young people questioning the status quo both in politics and poetics – the censorship may have intervened, reluctant to blatantly proscribe Byron’s verses on political grounds but using theological grounds instead.

The idea that the translation may have been considered as dangerous in political terms is confirmed by two subsequent translations of the poem. Also in 1825 a translation appeared in the Austrian-controlled part of Poland in the cultural supplement “Rozmaitości” affiliated with “Gazeta Lwowska”.²⁵ Its author, Feliks Chlibkiewicz (1805–1830?),²⁶ is a hardly remembered poet who published several other translations of Byron’s lyrics, such as *When Coldness Wraps This Suffering Clay* from *Hebrew Melodies* and *Written in an Album, at Malta* (As o’er the cold sepulchral stone). His translation openly announces that it was based on

²³ N. Gąsiorowska, *Wolność druku w Królestwie Kongresowym 1815–1830*, Warszawa 1916, p. 180–81; A. Kraushar, *Senator Nowosilcow i cenzura za Królestwa Kongresowego (1819–1829)*, Kraków 1911, p. 106.

²⁴ W. Caban, *Cenzura w Królestwie Polskim w latach 1815–1915*, [in:] *Granice wolności słowa. Materiały konferencji naukowej Kielce 4–5 maja 1995 r.*, ed. G. Miernik, Kielce–Warszawa 1999, p. 9–18 (p. 9).

²⁵ *Napis na grobowcu psa z Nowej Funlandyi*, trans. F. Chlibkiewicz, „Rozmaitości” 1825, vol. 16, p. 125.

²⁶ For the information on Chlibkiewicz and Rdułtowski I am indebted to Małgorzata Kamela from *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*.

the English original. Characteristically, as is quite common in Polish translations of Byron, it uses the diction and rhythm strongly resonant of Adam Mickiewicz's poetry, in this case *Forefathers' Eve, Part IV* (1822), one of the founding texts of Polish Romanticism. While Gustaw, the protagonist of Mickiewicz's drama, challenged womankind and social inequality as a rejected lover, Chlibkiewicz borrows the poetic diction and rhythm of his ranting to render Byron's detraction of humankind. Chlibkiewicz also underlines the poem's potential for a political reading – as Kenyon-Jones has argued, in theriological literature it was natural to identify animals with the oppressed.²⁷ Thus in Polish literature of the time any oppressor would have been associated with the tsar and the oppressed with Poles, and this is apparent in Chlibkiewicz's text. It is not therefore merely the poem's blasphemous theological premise, but also its subversive potential that may have irritated the Warsaw censorship.

The same tendency to use Mickiewicz's poetic style and to deploy political allusions is characteristic of the next translation of Byron's poem, which appeared ten years later in 1834, this time in Russian-controlled Vilnius. The translation was the work of Konstanty Rdułtowski, a friend of Mickiewicz, and – if one may be allowed some gossip – the son of an incestuous union between a brother and his elder half-sister, which unavoidably makes one think of Byron's relationship with his half-sister, Augusta.²⁸ Like Chlibkiewicz, Rdułtowski translated from the English, and the translation appeared in a New Year's miscellany (*noworocznik*) "Znicz", which bears the censor's stamp of Leon Borowski for 29 August 1833. "Znicz", whose title in Polish means *the torch*, is an interesting publication as it appeared in the aftermath of the tragic failure of the November Uprising (1830–1831) and was published by Józef Krzeczkowski, a man of letters strongly involved in a conspiracy student movement in Vilnius. Krzeczkowski was able to publish the miscellany in Vilnius, where Leon Borowski, professor of the dissolved Vilnius University, a teacher of Mickiewicz, the translator of Byron's *Lament of Tasso*, one of the first translations of Byron into Polish, held the post of a censor. Such a publication would not have been possible in Warsaw, where strict punitive measures had been introduced, directly affecting the publishing market.²⁹ Krzeczkowski's miscellany includes among others one of the last publications of Mickiewicz in the Polish lands before his works were banned and a translation of Byron's *Epistle to a Friend, in Answer to Some Lines, Exhorting the Author to Be Cheerful and to Banish Care* addressed to Francis Hodgson, first published in Moore's *Life*. This context of the publication of Byron's epitaph suggests that the choices of the poems for translation may have been politically motivated. As has

²⁷ C. Kenyon-Jones points to the fact that in lines 15–18 "animals are associated with underprivileged groups in *human* society, and therefore bound up with movements for these groups' better treatment or liberation" (op. cit., p. 39).

²⁸ For the account of the Rdułtowski family, see J.M. Rymkiewicz, *Do Snowia i dalej...*, Kraków 1996, p. 113–148.

²⁹ According to B. Szyndler, Vilnius censors were far more liberal than their Warsaw counterparts. Apparently some Warsaw writers whose articles had been banned in Warsaw managed to have them published in Vilnius (B. Szyndler, *Dzieje cenzury w Polsce do 1918 roku*, Kraków 1993, p. 116).

often been pointed out, Byron's poetry offered Polish writers a means to address the otherwise banned issues of national independence and personal freedom as part of what Maria Janion has called a "language of conspiracy".³⁰ The writers developed a coded system for addressing the proscribed themes through the use of allusions; the readers developed the skill of reading between the lines. Like Chlibkiewicz's translation, Rdułtowski's version offered a possibility of this type of subversive reading. Thus again, and much more forcibly, Byron's attack on humanity reads as an attack on any kind of tyrannous oppressor, and the lament on the grave of Boatswain as an expression of grief on the grave of the fallen in 1830–1831. This appropriation is performed through the lexical choices and amplification, which is also linked to the transformation of Byron's heroic couplets into Polish thirteen-syllabic rhyming couplets, which, as in Chlibkiewicz's translation, echo the rhythm of Mickiewicz's poetry. Byron's "proud son of man [...] / unknown to glory, but upheld by birth" is rewritten into "proud of his ancestors, but unknown to glory / self-appointed lord of the earth" (trans. M.C., "z swoich przodków dumny a nieznaný sławie / Samozwany pan ziemi"). The last four lines of the Polish translation exhibit striking ambiguity. Byron originally wrote:

Ye! who perchance behold this simple urn,
 Pass on – it honours none you wish to mourn:
 To mark a friend's remains these stones arise,
 I never knew but one, and here he lies.³¹

In Rdułtowski's translation these lines are rewritten as:

Przechodniu! przy tym grobie nie zatrzymuj kroku.
 Passer-by! Do not stop thy step at this grave.
Nie chciałbyś lezki jednej twemu ująć oku
 Thou wouldn't like to shed a tear from thine eye
Dla mego przyjaciela, co tutaj spoczywa...
 For my friend, who rests here...
Jednego tylko miałem! ten grób go pokrywa!
 I only had but one! this grave covers him! (trans. M.C.)³²

The rendering of Byron's "ye" as "wayfarer" or "passer-by" (*przechodniu*), though typical of Polish epitaphs, may be seen as an allusion to the famous epitaph at Thermopylae, since it is the standard translation of the opening apostrophe of the famous Greek epitaph. The Polish speaker actually, though indirectly, encourages the passer-by to "shed a tear" at his friend's grave.

While Chlibkiewicz's and Rdułtowski's translations placed Byron's poem within the tradition of Mickiewicz's Romanticism with its deeply emotional rebellion against the political status quo, the *Inscription* was also alluded to in the dramas written by Juliusz Słowacki, and by Cyprian Norwid. Słowacki's *Fantazy*, written in the 1840s, is often viewed as a critique of the Byronic stance of his fel-

³⁰ Qtd. after M. Maciejewski, *Narodziny powieści poetyckiej w Polsce*, Wrocław 1970, p. 37.

³¹ All quotations from Byron's *Inscription* are from vol. I of *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. J.J. McGann, Oxford 1980, p. 224–225.

³² *Nagrobek psa. Z Byrona*, trans. K. Rdułtowski, „Znicz. Noworocznik na 1834”, Wilno 1834, p. 120–121.

low poet and friend Zygmunt Krasiński. Like Krasiński, the eponymous *Fantazy* is a cosmopolitan Polish aristocratic poet, who fashions himself in the Byronic manner. He is intent on marrying the beautiful Diana, a daughter of impoverished Count Respekt, recently returned from exile in Russia, though the girl is in love with Jan, a veteran of the Polish 1830–1831 Uprising, who is serving his sentence as a plain soldier in the Russian army. Jan comes to Podolia in the disguise of a Bashkir soldier, accompanying a befriended Russian officer, who has been a friend and benefactor of Diana's family. Meanwhile Diana is persuaded by her parents to marry *Fantazy*, as it is the only means of saving their estate from requisition for debts. Jan, in an act of anger against his rival, allegedly accidentally shoots *Fantazy*'s dog when asked to display his skills at the traditional Bashkir art of shooting a bow. This is the moment in the play where the allusion to Byron's poem appears – apologizing for the event, Count Respekt tells *Fantazy* that his wife is already looking for a proper place to bury the dog and erect a monument to him, and if *Fantazy* and Diana agreed better, the latter might find a suitable inscription for the monument “in an English book” (“w książce angielskiej” Act 3, scene 2, l. 90–97), which clearly shows Count Respekt knows Byron's poem only from hearsay, but his daughter reads Byron in English.³³

The scene of killing the dog and the response to it by the characters in the play are deeply disturbing to the twenty-first century reader. Our sympathy tends to be with Jan, so why does he kill an innocent animal only because of its association with *Fantazy*? The only person disturbed by the event seems to be *Fantazy*, and even he does not display much emotional response. It is his hosts, the mundane Count Respekt and his exalted wife, who expect him to adopt the pose of the young Byron mourning his dog, though only Diana would be able to see how both appropriate and inappropriate the poem is for the occasion. Byron's disparaging apostrophe to man could be directly applied to *Fantazy* and to the Respekts. *Fantazy* after all “passes on” and does not mourn his hound; in his actions he appears “By nature vile, ennobled but by name.” So are the Respekts, living the life of noble appearances, but willing to trade their daughter for financial benefit. The allusion can be seen as constituting yet another criticism of *Fantazy*'s Byronic stance. At the beginning of the drama *Fantazy* announces that part of his strategy for winning Diana's affection is “to cast off the Byronic varnish of Satan” (“z siebie lakier byroński szatana / zrzucić” I. i. 47–48). Paradoxically, in a completely unexpected climax of the play, through the self-sacrificial death of the Russian officer, to whom he lost in a card-playing duel, he becomes “baptised man!” (“człowiekiem ochrzczon!” V. 4. 337). If the central theme of the drama is the question of what constitutes true humanity, Byron's poem is part of this discussion. While its misanthropy can be seen as part of the Byronic stance, which *Fantazy* must cast off to become truly humane, at the same time it can be viewed as a charge against his lack of true feelings in his treatment of the other characters. Of course, the reference to the monument to a dog is also part of the character-

³³ All quotations are from J. Słowacki, *Fantazy (Nowa Dejanira)*, [in:] *Dzieła wybrane*, ed. J. Krzyżanowski, vol. 4: *Dramaty*, ed. M. Bokszczanin, Wrocław 1974, p. 359–495.

ization of the Respekts – especially of the Countess, who constantly assumes sentimental pretense in her following of an already outdated fashion for English gardens, Ossian and Walter Scott, and thus would think of Byron's poem as expressive of sensibility.

This use of a Byronic allusion to characterize women's affected sensibility is both questioned and amended by Cyprian Norwid in his drama *Pierścień wielkiej damy* (*The Ring of a Great Lady*) (1872), where he suggests that Lamartine is a more appropriate choice than Byron for the purpose. The counterparts of the Respekts in the play are Justice Dureyko and his wife, Lithuanian gentry turned bourgeois. Justice Dureyko boasts of building a tomb for a poodle with an inscription by his wife in his home village, and she modestly acknowledges that the poem was an imitation of Lamartine.³⁴ Thus Lamartine is presented as a model for bourgeois sensibility in contrast to Byron, of whom Norwid was a great admirer. This view of the two poets is confirmed by a comment that Norwid made on the names inscribed in Tasso's alleged prison cell in Ferrara – Byron's name cut roughly with a key and Lamartine's neatly inscribed with a pencil.³⁵

In the second half of the twentieth century the *Inscription* in Konstanty Rdułtowski's translation entered the Polish canon of Byron's works as a result of being included in Julian Żuławski's 1961 edition of Byron's poetry.³⁶ While in 1987 the essayist and novelist Władysław Łysiak openly subscribed to Byron's misanthropic stance, quoting lines 15–22 of Byron's attack on man in his collection of essays *Wyspy bezludne* (*Desert islands*) in the praise of the need for solitude,³⁷ now the poem can be found on several blogs and websites devoted to dogs.³⁸

The fortunes of the Polish reception of the *Inscription on the Monument of the Newfoundland Dog* underline the significance of transmission of literary texts and images. As a result of its publication in Byron's biographies, the poem contributed to the formation of one of the stereotypical images of its author, that of a blasphemous and affected man-hater. Literary allusions to the poem testify to its being relatively well-known, and Słowacki explored its potential for questioning the Byronic stance. The translations, on the other hand, illustrate the tendencies of nineteenth-century Polish writers to appropriate foreign texts to communicate between the lines with their audience, at the same time revealing the strong impact of Mickiewicz's diction on the Polish literary language.

³⁴ C. Norwid, *Pierścień wielkiej damy*, [in:] *Pisma wybrane*, ed. J.W. Gomulicki, vol. 3: *Dramaty*, Warszawa 1968, p. 367–475.

³⁵ Idem, *Pisma wybrane*, ed. J.W. Gomulicki, vol. 5: *Listy*, Warszawa 1968, p. 541.

³⁶ G.G. Byron, *Wiersze i poematy*, ed. J. Żuławski, Warszawa 1961, p. 60–61.

³⁷ W. Łysiak, *Wyspy bezludne*, Kraków 1987, p. 15.

³⁸ Anon. <http://www.tsson.friko.pl/psy.htm>; anon., *Epitafium Psa – psie epitafia*, <http://hela.com.pl/rodzina/epitafium.htm>; anon., *Co mi w duszy gra...*, <http://malowane-wierszem.blogspot.com/2011/09/nagrobek-psa-george-byron.html> [access: 1.12.2014].