

Summary

The Coryphaeus of Poetry: A Monograph on the Works of Ignacy Szydłowski

The dissertation is the first attempt to present the creative profile of Ignacy Szydłowski (1793–1846). Hailed in his time as the “coryphaeus of poetry” of Vilnius, nowadays this poet holds the status of a forgotten figure, and his work has not yet been presented in a monograph.

The composition of the dissertation reflects the scope of Szydłowski’s intellectual activity; thus, the individual chapters correspond to the successive functions that he fulfilled in the cultural life of Lithuania in the first half of the 19th century.

The first chapter, entitled *Ignacy Szydłowski: Biography Sketch*, aims to reconstruct the writer’s biography. Based on information obtained from archival documents, such as parish records or job descriptions of school personnel of the Vilnius Scientific District, the author establishes and organises biographical facts, while correcting entries concerning the poet found in the *New Korbut Bibliography of Polish Literature* and the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*. The findings contained in this part of the dissertation serve as the basis for the identification and description of four stages of Szydłowski’s life. The first stage covers about seventeen years (1793–1810), beginning with his childhood spent in his home village of Hajna, and ending with his graduating from the Minsk gymnasium. For Szydłowski, who was to later become a “judge in matters of literature”, this was the period of elementary education, quite cohesive in geographical terms, as he spent it entirely within one province (Minsk Governorate), in the territory of present-day Belarus. The second stage, covering the years 1810–1823, is the most prolific period in Szydłowski’s biography. The turning point that marks its beginning is his commencement of studies at the teachers’ seminary at the Vilnius University, which shaped his intellectual profile and influenced his decision to tie his future with the capital of Lithuania. This includes his teaching career in the Svislach and Vilnius gymnasiums. Furthermore, this stage covers the entirety of Szydłowski’s poetic work, which

began with his debut in 1815 and resulted in a legacy of about two hundred original and translated works, scattered over the pages of the most important Vilnius periodicals: *Dziennik Wileński*, *Tygodnik Wileński*, *Dzieje Dobroczynności Krajowej i Zagranicznej*, and in leaflets. An important part of Szydłowski's cultural activity at that time was also the implementation of tasks resulting from his membership in the Society of Rogues (1817–1822), an elite organisation whose goal was to shape public opinion by means of enlightened satire published in *Wiadomości Brukowe*. This extremely productive chapter in the author's biography was concluded by Nikolay Novosiltsev's investigation against secret student organisations in 1823. At that time, as a result of unjust suspicions directed at him, Szydłowski lost his teaching job and forsook his poetic work. The third stage of Szydłowski's biography covers his editorial and editing projects undertaken in the years 1823–1843. He compiled three textbooks for schoolchildren, i.e. *The Rules of Pronunciation and Poetry Taken from the Works of Euzebiusz Słowacki* (1826), the anthology *Latin Lessons in Literature and Morality* (1829) and *Examples of Polish Style* (1827), and from 1834 to 1843, he devoted himself fully to running the journal *Wizerunki i Roztrząsania Naukowe* (Scientific Images and Discussions). Due to his cooperation with the Censorship Committee, it is also the time when his dark reputation as a persecutor of young artists (especially the Romantics centred around Adam Mickiewicz) began to form. The fourth – extremely short, as it lasted merely three years – stage covers the last years of the author's life, marked by illness, spent in the shadow of Vilnius cultural life under the care of local philanthropists. Its beginning is marked by the collapse of *Wizerunki i Roztrząsania Naukowe*, and ends with his death in 1846.

The second, most extensive part of the dissertation, entitled *The Poet*, is devoted entirely to the description of Szydłowski's lyrical legacy in the form of both original and translated works. Considering its genre diversity and the specificity of the historical and literary era in which it was created, this chapter has a two-level structure. As a writer of the era of the Enlightenment-Romantic breakthrough, Szydłowski functioned at the intersection of two cultural formations, and the attempts to define his attitude towards the new trend, usually ending with a conclusion about his hostility towards Romanticism, significantly influenced the reception of his work. The analysis of the impact of both aesthetics on the author's writing practice was conducted in **two subchapters: *The Fencer of Classical Imagination* and *The Irreconcilable Enemy of Romanticism?*** The material discussed in the former covers the entirety of Szydłowski's original poetic output as well as the part of his translation legacy that falls within the framework of classicist poetics (translations of ancient lyric poems, the works of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French poets). His original

works are presented in subsections, by genre (odes, epigrammatic works, Society of Rogues' poetry, and miscellaneous poems). The other subchapter presents translations indicating the author's growing interest in the new aesthetic direction. These are primarily translations of Lord Byron's works: the historical poem *Parisina*, two *To Genevra* poems, and the first Polish adaptation of *The Giaour*. The proposed review of Szydłowski's lyrical works reveals both his writing skills and his excellent orientation in the current course of European literature, even if his attempts to adapt Western trends still bore the inalienable hallmarks of classicist craftsmanship.

The third chapter, *The Editor*, offers an insight into the editorial activities of Ignacy Szydłowski, in chronological order. His seventeen-year work in this field begins and ends with a journal project. He took over the reins of a periodical publishing house for the first time in 1818, when he became the editor of *Tygodnik Wileński*. The other episode of this kind in his biography was the management of the journal *Wizerunki i Roztrząsania Naukowe* established in 1834. Between these two projects, in the years 1826–1829, he prepared three books to be published: *The Rules of Pronunciation and Poetry Taken from the Works of Euzebiusz Słowacki*, *Latin Lessons in Literature and Morality*, or *A Collection of the Most Beautiful Excerpts in Prose and Verse from Ancient Latin Authors*, and one of the two planned volumes of *Examples of Polish Style in Various Types of Pronunciation and Poetry*, containing a set of exemplary implementations of various genres of free speech. In the characteristics of the periodical current of his activity, special attention was paid to the mark left on the profiles of both periodicals by Szydłowski's own tastes and interests. His editorial choices prove to reflect the evolution of his own views on writing, and thus, in the case of *Tygodnik Wileński*, which he ran in the most favourable period, the literary content significantly intensifies, while in *Wizerunki i Roztrząsania Naukowe*, which was published after he had abandoned his own poetic work, scientific ambitions prevail, and native literature is treated with scepticism. Finally, the chapter challenges certain negative opinions about the latter periodical, pointing to the special situation of journalism after the fall of the November Uprising.

The fourth chapter, entitled *The Critic and Censor*, focuses on two aspects of Szydłowski's activity that made him the Vilnius "judge in matters of literature". This area especially requires careful, critical reflection, as it is to these particular employments that the poet owes his bad reputation as an enemy of young literature and a government ally. The chapter is divided into three parts. **The first subchapter, *In the Role of an Arbitrator***, discusses Szydłowski's critical literary performances. The juxtaposition of his reviews of

Wincenty Kiszka-Zgierski's scribbled writings and his articles on Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's early novels provides an outline of two separate "styles" of his criticism. **The second subchapter, *At the Position of a Censor***, in turn, aims to verify the myths that have evolved with regard to Szydlowski's cooperation with the Vilnius Censorship Committee. Undoubtedly, a significant impact on the course of this cooperation should be attributed to the circumstances in which it was undertaken, i.e. in a relatively short time after Novosiltsev's investigation, when the poet withdrew from his post as a teacher, remaining with the status of a suspect and limited opportunities to improve his living conditions. Efforts have been made to characterise Szydlowski's attitude towards the works he banned, the histories of which are reconstructible on the basis of archival documents of the Central Censorship Committee in Saint Petersburg. Stories of the author's alleged censorship interventions described in memoirs from the era are also quoted, while paying attention to the limited probability of some of the accusations brought against him. These include, in particular, the denunciation of *Gazeta Polska* because of its coverage of Mickiewicz's name-day as well as the alleged authorship of a report against *Konrad Wallenrod*. In the last, **third subchapter, *In the Eyes of Contemporaries***, the process of creating Szydlowski's "dark legend" is analysed. This part indicates the direct impact on the historical and literary reception of the writer's oeuvre made by his "portraits" recorded in the memoirs and correspondence of the Romantics, especially members of the Philomaths and the Filaret Association. The observation of this relationship, confronted with the findings made in the previous chapters, leads to the conclusion that the profiles of this poet presented thus far in the literature on the subject are, in fact, far from scientific objectivity.

The main part of the dissertation is concluded with **the fifth chapter, *The Teacher***, dealing with Szydlowski's work as a professor of Polish pronunciation, poetry and literature in the schools in Svislach and Vilnius. The subject of interest in this chapter is his teaching practice in terms of the selection and distribution of teaching content, preferred working methods and textbooks. On the basis of "showpiece" publications of students of these schools, Szydlowski's understanding of the controversial notions of "literature" and "pronunciation", as well as his concept of teaching them, have been outlined. As it turns out, by the former of these terms he understood the assimilation of the history of writing in a diachronic order, while the latter was construed by him as familiarisation with the rhetorical aspects of prose, aimed at developing in students the ability to express themselves efficiently in speech and writing. He treated textbooks selectively, recognising the primacy of contents concerning the native language, and even expanding them with the achievements of authors from the times of

Stanisław August Poniatowski's reign. In terms of working methods, Szydłowski was particularly attached "examples", i.e. exemplary implementations of specific genres, which were subjected to an analysis referred to as "dissection". The chapter also aims to answer the question about the place of teaching in the hierarchy of all areas of activity that Szydłowski dabbled in. For this purpose, attention has been paid to the signs of the poet's attitude to teaching that appeared in his correspondence. In addition, an attempt has been made to distinguish the names of future writers among Szydłowski's gymnasium students (including Ludwik Spitznagel, Juliusz Słowacki, Emeryk Staniewicz, Leon Rogalski, Aleksander Chodźko), pointing out the professor's possible participation in their debut.

The dissertation is complemented by a two-part **annex**. Part one contains Szydłowski's unknown works, functioning only in handwritten form, which are the subject of analysis in the dissertation. Most of them come from the folder of documents confiscated from the writer in 1823 and stored in the collection of the Vilnius University Library, found by the author. The exceptions are three poems for Julian Titius and his mother, originally intended for alba amicorum and then copied by the addressee to a diary, and a poetic letter for Zofia Śniadecka, obtained from the archives of the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow. As an exception, the annex also includes a prospectus of Szydłowski's writings, found in a rare leaflet, announcing the publication of a two-part collection of his poetry, which, however, did not materialise as a result of Novosiltsev's investigation. The rules for the transcription of all texts are presented in the editor's note. Part two consists of an extensive bibliography of Szydłowski's works in the fields of poetry (original and translated), literary criticism and journalism, and editing. The list includes first editions as well as addresses of subsequent editions or reprints and the locations of their manuscripts, if known.

Paula Radolich

..