

## Resident bards. The court poet in light of memoirs from the Polish Eastern Borderlands in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century\*

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The so-called ‘residents’ were a specific group within *szlachta*, the Polish nobility, one snubbed both politically and socially. They had no permanent place of residence, often wandered from one manor house or palace to another in search of wherewithal. They represented various professions, but most often were idle. The fate they frequently met was resettlement deep into Russia or conscription into the army.<sup>1</sup> A certain governor of Podolia expressed his very unflattering opinion of the perambulant, petty nobility when expounding the need for the Russian government to resettle Poles from the Taken Lands:

Trzecią liczbę klasy szlachty tworzą ludzie niemający ani osiadłości, ani stałego przytułku, przechodzący z jednego miejsca na drugie, od obywatela do obywatela, z guberni do guberni, niemający przyczyn cokolwiek cenić, niemający nic do stracenia, niewolnicy tego, kto ich żywi, odziewa i laskami obdarza, i dlatego gotowi na każdy krok przeciwko sumieniu i uczciwości, [...] pracownicy i słudzy podczas powstania, ludzie niebezpieczni i mogący być szkodliwymi w każdym nieprzewidzianym wypadku. Wyprowadzenie ich z tego kraju byłoby użytecznym pod każdym względem, ale są oni na usługach obywateli za umową i bez umowy; rzadko który z nich żonaty, rzadko który

The third class of *szlachta* [nobility] consists of people who have neither a settlement nor a permanent home, who move from one place to another, from citizen to citizen, from governorate to governorate, who have no reason to value anything, who have nothing to lose, who are slaves to the one who feeds, clothes and shelters them, and who are therefore ready to take every step against their conscience and integrity, (...) workers and servants during uprisings, people who are dangerous and can be harmful in any unforeseen case. It would be useful in every way to drive them out of this country, but they are in the service of the citizens, with or without a contract; few of them are married, few know and own

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1 By way of ukases of 7 March and 3 April 1797, Tsar Paul I ordered to stop the resettlement of the Polish nobility, and to place idle and impoverished noblemen as non-commissioned officers in the line troops. See: H. Mościcki, *Pod berłem carów* [Under the Tsars’ sceptre] (Warsaw: 1924), p. 27.

zna i ma gospodarstwo, nawykli do większych lub mniejszych wygód życia dworskiego, rozproszeni, oddaleni od rodziców i krewnych<sup>2</sup>.

a farm, they are accustomed to the greater or lesser comforts of court life, they are scattered, distant from parents and relatives.<sup>2</sup>

Judging from the above, people who led such lifestyles were perceived by the Russian ruling elite as populating the margins of society, 'declassed individuals with no defined social status, (...) perceived, also by themselves, as dispensable.'<sup>3</sup> In the situation in which the Eastern territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth found themselves at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was not difficult to fall from the rungs of the social ladder to the bottom, sometimes even overnight. Therefore, those whom the cruel or ironic fortune deprived of autonomy, thus forcing them to seek the mercy of wealthier protectors, originated from various floors of the noble edifice.<sup>4</sup>

Residents seeking a cozy corner in the rich houses of magnates or nobility usually came from the poorest strata of *szlachta*; sometimes their debasement was the result of a loss of property in circumstances not always beyond their control, such as frivolity, promiscuous lifestyle, passion for gambling, weakness for alcohol, and finally laziness or spiritual inertia. Besides, it still seemed that the best future could be secured by way of pursuing the profession of a *dworak*,<sup>5</sup> or member of a noble-

- 2 Quoted after: H. Mościcki, "Wysiedlanie szlachty polskiej przez rząd rosyjski" [Displacement of the Polish nobility by the Russian government], *Wschód Polski* 1921, fasc. 1, p. 54.
- 3 S. Czarnowski, *Ludzie zbędni w służbie przemocy* [Dispensable people in the service of violence], in: *idem, Dzieła* [Works], vol. 2 (Warsaw: 1956), pp. 186-187. Cf. S. Grodziski, *Ludzie luźni. Studium z historii państwa i prawa polskiego* [Loose people. A study from the history of the Polish state and law] (Cracow: 1961), pp. 49-51; T. Veblen, *Teoria klasy próżniaczej* [*Theory of the leisure class*], transl. into Polish by J. and K. Zagórscy (Warsaw: 1971), p. 40.
- 4 The paupers who were forced to take up a job usually found it in the manor and farm administration. 'Even a small manor farm employed a whole administrative machine: a manager, a treasurer, a tallyman, scribes, personal assistants. The nobility was the most eagerly sought after in these positions as a reliable element, connected with the common origin of the state. These positions were well paid; the treasurers (...) received particularly high salaries. A candidate admitted to the manor administration was not required to have a special education, while higher requirements were set for admission to a magnate's court' (A. Stroynowski, *Pozycja społeczna drobnej szlachty Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego w końcu XVIII wieku* [The social position of petty nobles in late 18<sup>th</sup> c. Grand Duchy of Lithuania], *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Nauki Humanistyczno-Społeczne* (1976), fasc. 4, p. 102). The activities of the treasurer were clearly defined, the requirements were set. See: *Instrukcje dla ekonomy w dobrach Tomazsa Umiastowskiego na Białorusi (po 1812 r.)* [Instructions for the treasurer of the estates of Tomasz Umiastowski in Belarus (after 1812)] in *Instrukcje gospodarcze dla dóbr magnackich i szlacheckich z XVIII i XIX wieku* [Economic instructions for the magnate and noble estates of the XIII and XIX century], eds B. Baranowski, J. Bartyś and others, vol. 2 (Wrocław: 1958), pp. 251-263.
- 5 Franciszek Salezy Dmochowski, *Dawne obyczaje i zwyczaje szlachty i ludu wiejskiego w Polsce i w ościennych prowincjach* [Old customs and traditions of the nobility and country folk in Poland and in neighbouring provinces] (Warsaw: 1860), pp. 161-162 describes the historical tradition of acquiring the 'profession' of a courtier: 'The courts were the highest school for young people. After completing his studies, the young man was sent by his father or relatives to some court, where he grew fond of religion and was educated in the ways of the world. There he developed a love for reli-

man's or magnate's court, once a hugely popular choice of career. Ewa Felińska of Slutsk Poviát thus wrote of the path chosen by her father Zygmunt Wendorff, born in the 1760's:

W owej epoce były tylko dwa zawody dla młodej szlachty potrzebującej pokierować się w świecie, opierając się na zdolnościach osobistych: dwory magnatów i palestra. Do dworów pańskich wchodziłi zwykle synowie obywatelscy; była to niejako szkoła przygotowująca do życia obywatelskiego, albo też młodzież obdarzona śmiałością, zręcznością i pewnym usposobieniem zaręczającym późniejsze powodzenie. Komu brakło tych warunków, wołał iść do palestry i tam pracą i nauką zdobywać późniejsze stanowisko. Służba dworska, mieszcząc pod protektoratem możnego pana, bez wytkniętych wyraźnie obowiązków, bez ścisłej służbistości, była ponętniejsza dla młodzieży zrosłej swobodnie, lubiącej zwykle okazałość, zabawy i życie ruchliwe, do którego się przystępowało bez wielkiej mozoły. Byle trochę śmiałości, trochę sprytu, na czym nie zbywało młodzieży polskiej, i trochę giętkości w charakterze, do czego usposabiało wcześniej domowe wychowanie, mające na celu dalszą karierę młodzieńca, tworzyło się stanowisko wygodne, uwieńczone w końcu [...] wczesem i dostatkiem; panowie bowiem nigdy nie opuszczali w starości tych, co

In those times there were only two professions for young noblemen who needed to make their way in the world, depending on their personal skills: magnate's courtier or lawyer. Citizens' sons usually entered the noble courts; it was in a way a school of civic life, and these were young people endowed with boldness, dexterity and a certain disposition guaranteeing later success. Those without these qualities usually entered the legal profession and studied and worked hard to make a position for themselves. Service at court, under the protectorate of a powerful master, without any clearly defined duties, without strict servility, was more attractive for the young who had grown up free, who were usually fond of grandeur, festivities and diversion, and pursuing this life required little effort. All it took was a bit of daring, a bit of cleverness, which Polish youth was not lacking, and a bit of flexibility in character, which was encouraged early on by the home upbringing, aimed at the further career of the young man, to create a comfortable position, crowned in the end with (...) leisure and abundance; for the benefactors never abandoned in old age

gion, seeing how it was respected by the most eminent men in the country, how they strictly adhered to its regulations, and being obliged to attend all morning services, mass and evening prayers together with the master and lady of the house, constantly seeing the true modesty and piety of the higher ones, he became deeply attached to it and it became engraved in his mind forever. He became moral, because he had no other examples before him; only the old Polish virtues (...). He learned to be a good citizen by listening to the serious conversations of the gentlemen councillors (...). Here the young man became acquainted with the ancient history of his country and other countries, he learned about the current state of affairs and the shape of the government (...). Dmochowski's description does not lack criticism of the court customs. According to the author, the death of Stefan Batory was followed by a slow decline in morality, because 'ancient virtues and love for the general wellbeing of the country disappeared from the courts, factions were formed, and the courtiers (...) shared the disputes of the mighty, the vices of the wicked, the erroneous ways of the virtuous (...), the evil magnified the higher it reached, so complaints about courts are often justified, as in the proverb: 'Virtue and humility have no place at court'. After the reign of the Augusts [kings Augustus II the Strong and Augustus III of Poland – *translator's note*], courts become completely contaminated, and it can be freely said they were populated by (...), vagrants, idlers, wastrels, loafers, wanderers, free-loaders, frolickers, sluggards, lazybones whose tongues run like on a spinning wheel, the old tattlers, who lick the platters at court and listen to the ladies' conversations at court, have anointed their tongues with various news, and these they spread among the journeymen and dazzle the simple ones with their teachings; busybodies and scatterbrains'. See also: Ł. Gołębiowski, *Domy i dwory, przy tym opisanie apteczki, kuchni, stołów, uczt, biesiad, trunków i pijatyki; łózek, pościeli, ogrodów, porwozów i koni; błaznów, kartów, wszelkich zwyczajów dworskich i różnych obyczajowych szczegółów* [Houses and courts, including a description of the apothecary, kitchen, tables, feasts, liquor and drinking; beds, bedding, gardens, carriages and horses; jesters, dwarfs, all court and manor customs and various details] (Lviv: 1884); W Łoziński, *Życie polskie w dawnych wiekach* [Polish life in Past Ages] (Cracow: 1960); J. S. Bystron, *Dzieje obyczajów w dawnej Polsce. Wiek XVI-XVIII* [History of customs in Old Poland. 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century], vol. 2 (Cracow: 1934); A. Brückner, *Dzieje kultury polskiej* [History of Polish culture], vol. 3 (Cracow: 1931).

życie całe trzymając się ich klamki, nie zrobili sobie żadnego funduszu, takim wioską jaka dożywociem zwykle zabezpieczała schyłek dni od nędzy. Jednak nie wszyscy dworsko zaczynający zawód potrzebowali tej pomocy od mecenasów. Synowie obywatelscy, wykształceni na dworach i porobiwszy znajomości, wchodzili później w życie obywatelskie, żenili się, byli urzędnikami, zawsze jednak zostawali między opiekunem a klientem rodzaj życzliwości wzajemnej, który to związek rozciągał się na całe życie<sup>6</sup>.

those who had lived their whole lives off their favour and did not secure any wealth for themselves, such as a village which could keep them from poverty in their senior years. But not all who started off as courtiers needed such assistance from their patrons. Some citizens' sons, having received an education and made acquaintances, later entered the citizen life, got married, worked as officials, yet there always remained a certain mutual kinship between the patron and the client, one that lasted a lifetime.<sup>6</sup>

This is how Seweryn Soplica, butler at Parnawa, recalls such court service with tenderness and fondness:

Służba po pańskich dworach szlachcicowi krzywdy nie robiła: pan był panem, ale razem opiekunem sługi, i jeżeli jak ojciec karał, jak ojciec kierował i o losie pamiętał. Ale nie każdemu dostać się do pańskiego dworu! Trzeba było mieć za sługi ojca lub krewnych za sobą albo jakich dobrodziejów, co by się chcieli wstawiać [...].<sup>7</sup>

A nobleman was not harmed by serving at courts: the lord was the lord, but also a caretaker of the servants, and if he punished, as fathers do, he also guided and cared, like fathers do. But not just anyone could enter a magnate's court! One had to have the merit of the father or the relatives behind them, or some benefactors, who were willing to put in a good word (...).<sup>7</sup>

Magnates were willing to accept under their roof those who could serve them as their ear-pieces; the old adage according to which 'the court was a field for polishing and intellectual cultivation of an entire noble generation' ceased to apply. Now it 'was only a jousting arena, where the lords kept the (...) team of supporters they had lured in'.<sup>8</sup> The public usually perceived the friendship between a rich magnate and a poor nobleman as fundamentally false and suspicious. The memoirs of Bartłomiej Michałowski offer a sad foretelling of the misfortunes of an impoverished nobleman who trusted a wealthy lord. In line with the mentality of the time, a poor resident was ill-seen: either as naive, or as 'marked with some sort of vileness'.<sup>9</sup> But even this, ultimately financially beneficial, situation changed radically when *szlachta* was no longer needed by the magnates as political support at the *Sejm* (Diet) and regional dietines. Time wore down the status of the cronies, and 'the lords changed their old ways. It became hard for a poor nobleman to squeeze his way in anywhere'<sup>10</sup> – lamented his material and social position one of the characters from *Pan Jan ze Świsłoczcy* [Mr. Jan from Świsłocz], a representative

6 E. Felińska, *Pamiętniki z życia* [Memoirs of a life], vol. 1 (Vilnius: 1856), pp. 19-20.

7 H. Rzewuski, *Pamiętki Soplicy* [Memoirs of Soplica] (Warsaw: 1978), p. 69.

8 K.W. Wójcicki, *Obrazy starodawne* [Images of yore], vol. 2 (Warsaw: 1843), p. 246.

9 H. Rzewuski, *Pamiętniki Bartłomieja Michałowskiego* [Diaries of Bartłomiej Michałowski], vol. 1 (Sankt Petersburg 1856-1857), pp. 136-137.

10 I. Chodźko, *Pan Jan ze Świsłoczcy, kramarz wędrujący* [Mr Jan of Świsłocz, a wandering peddler] (Vilnius: 1824), p. 158.

the already numerous group of impoverished noblemen, dreaming of just about any occupation at a court.

In his Lithuanian memoirs, Ignacy Chodźko uses the example of his grandfather's friend to provide an insightful characterization of the residency<sup>11</sup> with elements of classification:

[Ludzie ci należeli] do licznego jeszcze natenczas, a dziś wygasłego zupełnie bractwa rezydentów i dworaków, rozsypanych gęsto po kraju [...] wchodzących w skład niejednej szlacheckiej ziemi i niejednego obrazu tamtoczesnych domowych obyczajów [...]. Dzielili się rezydenci stosownie do wewnętrznego swego powołania i posiadanych talentów [...]. Każdy z nich, posiadając wszelkie doskonałości swojej profesji, miał jeszcze, jak to wyżej namieniłem, reguły i zasady, jakby dawnych rycerskich zakonów, całej kongregacji wspólne, to jest: ochotę do nieustannej włości, póki zdrowie i własne lub darowanego konika nogi służyły; nienawiść do ciągłego zajęcia się i pracy; na koniec większy lub mniejszy pociąg do *Aquaevity*. Wdowcy bezdzietni lub starzy kawalerowie, nie mieli oni pospolicie żadnych ścisłych związków ani obowiązków. Każdy dom szlachecki był dla nich familijnym, bo wszędzie chleb powszedni i kąpiel opiekuńczy z ochotą dla nich otwarty znajdowali. Owszem, w czasach, gdy każdy gospodarz, pilnując własnej grzędę, niewiele zewnętrznych miał stosunków i związków, bierząc taki i rozwozca nowin, wiadomości, anegdot, dykteryjek, przybawający z życzliwym sercem i z wesołym humorem do domu, zawsze pożądanym był gościem, i zaraz poufałym stawał się domownikiem. Wreszcie przywiązanie szczerze do rodziny, około których się żywili, i poczciwość prosta, nieinteresowna, zalecała ich wszystkim. Niewiele żądali, bo wszystkie ich konieczne potrzeby życia, bez pracy i kosztu, bez próśb nawet, ludzkość i dobroć staroświecka ojców naszych opatrywała. Wszakże w przypadkach dotyczących się ich szczególnych talentów i profesji dozwolali oni sobie niekiedy małych wybożeń od ściśle sumiennej ścieżki. [...] główne działy rezydentów, dałyby się [...] na kilka poddziałków rozgałęzić: ogrodników, lekarzy [...], a nawet poetów! Ale dość i tej krótkiej wzmianki i opisu, abyśmy przypomnieli sobie ludzi żyjących bez troski, a przed którymi troski uciekały z domów; spomiedzy których nie jeden z nas miał piastuna dni dziecińczych, a mentora i najżyczliwszego domownika w młodzieńczym

[These people belonged to] a nowadays extinct, but then large fraternity of residents and courtiers, dispersed densely throughout the country (...) making up the population of many a noble land and many a landscape of the erstwhile household customs (...). The residents were divided according to their vocation and talents (...). Each of them, possessing all the perfections of his profession, had, as I have mentioned above, rules and principles common to the whole congregation, as if they were rules of knightly orders, namely: the desire for constant wandering, as long as health and one's own or a donated horse's legs permitted; the hatred of a permanent occupation and work; finally, a greater or lesser proclivity for *Aquaevita*. Childless widowers or old bachelors, they usually had no close ties or obligations. Each noble house was their family house, as in each they found their daily bread and shelter. In fact, in the times when every landlord, busy looking after his own perch, had few outside relations and contacts, such a collector and purveyor of news, anecdotes, stories, arriving at home with a kind heart and a cheerful mood, was always a welcome guest, and immediately became a trusted household member. Finally, sincere attachment to the families who fed them, and simple, unselfish honesty, promoted them all. They did not ask for much, because all their necessary needs of life, without work and cost, without even requests, were taken care of by the old-fashioned generosity and kindness of our fathers. However, when it came to their special talents and professions, they sometimes allowed themselves small deviations from the strictly conscientious path. (...) the main sections of the residents could be (...) divided into several subsections: gardeners, doctors (...), and even poets! But even this brief mention and description is enough for us to recall people who lived without care, and from whom care fled from homes, from among whom many of us had a nurturer of childhood days, and a mentor and the friendliest household member in adolescence; who in the end disappeared from among us like trees withering one after

11 Due to the variety of their activities, the typology of residents is broad and, as it seems, still open. In fact, there is no name adequate to the status of *dorożkarz* ('cab driver'), who drove from one wealthy household to another, looking for a roof over his head in exchange for entertaining the host with stories, anecdotes, and other works of 'light' penmanship. Among the more interesting literary oddities of this type was Feliks Poznański, who was active near Lviv.

wieku; którzy na koniec niknęli spośród nas jak usychające jedne po drugich drzewa w ogrodach, którym ziemia pożywczych soków odmawia!<sup>12</sup>

another in gardens denied the nourishing sap of the earth!<sup>12</sup>

According to Józef Dunin Karwicki, the functioning of residency as a social phenomenon is an example of patriarchy,

[...] dowodem wielkiej ofiarności, wielkiego miłosierdzia chrześcijańskiego [...] przodków, którzy w złej czy dobrej woli gotowi byli ostatnim kęsem chleba podzielić się z bratem szlachcicem, nie czekając, aby ten wskutek niesprzyjających okoliczności doszedł do nędzy i zmuszony był wyciągać rękę po jałmużnę<sup>13</sup>.

(...) proof of great generosity, great Christian mercy (...) of the ancestors, who in bad or good will were ready to share the last morsel of bread with a brother nobleman, saving him from falling into poverty due to unfavorable circumstances and from having to reach out for alms.<sup>13</sup>

The resident was a friend of the master of the house, he often owned a pair of horses, several mares, and even an apiary that brought him personal profit. In return for the received care, the resident entertained the guests with conversation, read books and newspapers to his master, accompanied them on hunts, rides, walks, mushroom foraging, prayers, and was a partner in a game of checkers or cards.

These men, who were usually bachelors or widowers, socially and financially derailed, tried to be useful in various ways to the best of their abilities:

[...] ten z lekka dozorował przy gospodarstwie rolnym, ów psy legawe lub jamniki układał do polowania, uczył śpiewania kanarków przy pozytywce lub sztucznego gwizdania kosów, nastawiał sidła na ptaszki, pułapki na myszy lub trutki na szczury, rozcierał tabakę dla państwa, [...] pędził różne wódki na alembiku itp., itp.<sup>14</sup>

(...) taking care of light labour at the farm, training pointer dogs or dachshunds for hunting, teaching canaries to sing by a music box or blackbirds to gurgle, setting snares for birds, traps for mice or poison for rats, grinding snuff for the master and lady of the house, (...) distilling various vodkas with an alembic, etc., etc.<sup>14</sup>

The most valued were 'residents who could hold their liquor (...). Those were talked about and envied by other households.'<sup>15</sup>

Poets occupied center stage among all other residents.<sup>16</sup> They lived in the castles of rich magnates and in manor houses of noblemen. They were usually put up in

12 I. Chodźko, *Śmierć mojego dziadka* [The death of my Grandfather], in: *idem, Obrazy literwskie* [Lithuanian images], Series 1 (Vilnius: 1855), pp. 101-106.

13 J. Dunin-Karwicki, *Ostatni z rezydentów* [The last of the residents], in: *idem, Ze starego autoramentu. Typy i obrazki wołyńskie* [Of the old sort Volhynian types and images] (Warsaw: 1899), pp. 129-130.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

16 Stefan Witwicki (*Wieczory pielgrzymia. Rozmaitości moralne, literackie i polityczne* [Pilgrim's evenings. Moral, literary and political miscellanea], vol. 1 (Leipzig: 1866), p. 23) thus wrote of 'oral poets' as one of the Polish peculiarities that set our customs apart from others.

the wings of the building or upstairs.<sup>17</sup> Various circumstances could weigh in on whether a resident found a protector or not; it was not always as traditional a path as the one taken by Franciszek Karpiński or Franciszek Dionizy Kniaźnin, who entered the Czartoryski court. In his short stories, Paweł Zawisza wrote about a folk singer who was taken to the court after astonishing and moving his future master. He gave education to the poor artist and introduced him to the society, which soon found it an honour to be around him.<sup>18</sup>

Widespread hospitality was an old custom inherited from the times of patronage. Roman Kaleta, commenting on patronage, which significantly influenced the development of 'the best literature of the period', also notes its drawbacks: the humiliation or even degradation of artists seeking to earn money. Before the establishment of institutions for writers, patronage was the only form of financial support for artists who were forced to live off their talent<sup>19</sup>. Patronage

[...] rzadko bywał bezinteresowny, mecenas bowiem zwykle stosował zasadę 'do ut des' (daję, byś dawał) i stawiał pocie różne wymagania. Do najpospolitszych należało żądanie pochwał, zasłużonych i niezasłużonych, przy czym w razie braku zalet i zasług pochwały zastępowano pochlebstwami<sup>20</sup>.

(...) rarely was disinterested, as the patron applied the principle of 'do ut des' (I give so that you give), and made various demands on the poet. One of the most common was the demand for praise, both deserved and undeserved, and in the absence of merit, praise was replaced by flattery.<sup>20</sup>

And so, panegyrics, *dumkas* and ballads were written to satisfy their benefactors.<sup>21</sup> 'Resident bards', as Julian Tuwim referred to poets and graphomaniacs living at courts of the wealthy, were most often people who were at some sort of disadvantage: if not financial, then physical. Those physically disabled were able to turn their handicap into the core of their 'artistic' activities and a grotesque tool of their trade. Those

[...] ostatni Mohikanie błazeńskiego cechu to [...] rozmaite, dziwaczne, wykołejone egzystencje, co za łaskawy chleb zabawiały swych żywicieli gawędą

(...) last of the Mohicans of the jester's guild were (... ) various bizarre, depraved creatures, who in exchange for upkeep entertained their hosts with

- 17 See: J. Obst, *Nasze dwory wiejskie* [Our rural manor houses] (Vilnius: 1911), p. 118 (copy from *Kwartalnik Literwski* [Lithuanian Quarterly]).
- 18 P. Zawisza, *Opowiadania Imci p.(...). Nie te czasy, nie ci ludzie* [Stories of Mr. (...). Different times, different people] (Poznań: 1886), pp. 199-200.
- 19 Cf. Roman Kaleta, *Miejsce i społeczna funkcja literatów w okresie Oświecenia* [Social position and function of literary men in the Enlightenment], in: *Problemy literatury polskiej okresu oświecenia* [Issues in Polish literature of the Enlightenment period], Series 1, ed. Z. Goliński (Wrocław: 1973), p. 25.
- 20 J. Krzyżanowski, *Sztuka słowa. Rzecz o zjawiskach literackich* [Art of words. On literary phenomena] (Warsaw: 1984), pp. 12-13.
- 21 Cf. D. Künstler-Langner, *Od zachwyty do pochwały. O staropolskich postawach panegirycznych* [From awe to praise. On approaches in Old Polish panegyrics], in: *Kłamstwo w literaturze* [Lie in literature], eds Z. Wójcicka, P. Urbański (Kielce: 1996), pp. 20-31.

i żartem, piosnką i facecją, zdolnością do kielicha i fenomenalnym apetytem, a nieraz samym pokracczym wyglądem<sup>22</sup>.

storytelling and jokes, songs and anecdotes, a capacity for drinking and a phenomenal appetite, and sometimes with their mere hideous appearance.<sup>22</sup>

As proof of their existence, Tuwim cites passages from the colourful biographies of Tomasz Hussarzewski, Józef Hohol, Benedykt Hulewicz and Adam Wąsowicz. The most original of this quartet of residents, Hohol, who lived at the court of Kiev voivode Franciszek Salezy Potocki, even earned his rightful place in Jarosz Bejła's satirical *Mieszaniny obyczajowe* [Customary miscellanea], where he was portrayed as an inveterate drunk and vagabond, a regular at the roughest country inns, who entertained his employer with tales and *dumkas* when taking a break from his drunken peregrinations<sup>23</sup>. Thus, the main role of the writer-in-residence was to describe the court life in a colourful way, to praise the host and to dispel his sorrows.

In a footnote to a passage in *Dworzec mego dziadka* [My Grandfather's manor house], Franciszek Morawski paints a portrait of an itinerant, semi-professional master of amusing tales and anecdotes, a ringleader of some of the best local events, whose purpose in life was to cheer up the houses he visited. This peddler,

[...] obrawszy sobie kilkanaście domów, objeżdżał je i po kwartale lub dłużej w nich przebywał. Był to zwykle ubogi szlachcic, a całym jego majątkiem bryka i para koni wypasionych po dworach. Powołaniem jego było mieć w zapasie na czas swego pobytu mnóstwo żarcików, anegdot, politycznych nowinek, zdarzeń okolicznych, waśni rodzinnych, projektów do małżeństw; słowem, ciągle dom rozweselać. Starał się on dla większej wziętości za każdym powrotem do tegoż samego domu z nowym zapasem żartów i anegdot przybywać. On to wszystkie kuligi układał i na nich prowadził. Zabitym był patriotą, wielce nabożnym i nie ostatnim do kielicha<sup>24</sup>.

(...) having chosen a dozen or so houses, showed up at one after another and stayed in each for a period of three months or more. He was usually a poor nobleman and all his earthly possessions were a carriage and a pair of horses grazing on the manor pastures. It was his job to have plenty of jokes, anecdotes, political news, rumours of local events, family feuds, marriage plans in stock for the time of his stay; in a word, to provide constant merriment to the house. For the sake of greater popularity, he tried to come with a new supply of jokes and anecdotes every time he returned to the same house. He organized all the sleigh rides and led them. He was a die-hard patriot, very pious, and did not shy away from a drink.<sup>24</sup>

Kazimierz Bujnicki thus wrote of resident poets from Livonia:

[...] oprócz kapeli i teatrów, ku zabawie państwa i gości miały domy bogate wierszopisów zwanych

(...) besides musical bands and theatres, rich houses kept rhymers, whom they called poets, for the

22 J. Tuwim, "Bardowie rezydenci" [Resident bards], in: *Przekrój* [Profile] no. 74 (1946), pp. 10-11.

23 J. Bejła [H. Rzewuski], *Mieszaniny obyczajowe* [Customary miscellanea], vol. 1 (Vilnius: 1841), p. 254.

24 Quoted after: W. Pusz, *Współistnienie romantyków z klasykami czyli prawdziwy koniec polskiego Oświecenia* [Co-existence of Romantics and Classics, or the true end of Polish Enlightenment], in: *Na przełomie Oświecenia i Romantyzmu. O sytuacji w literaturze polskiej lat 1793-1830* [Where Enlightenment and Romanticism met. On the situation of the Polish literature of the years 1793-1830], ed. P. Żbikowski (Rzeszów: 1999), p. 49.

poetami, a z których dowcipniejsi odgrywali razem rolę trefniśiów, bez ujmy wszakże klejnotowi szlachectwa. Byli to bowiem *bene nati*, ale ubodzy, rezydenci przypuszczeni do stołu pańskiego (rozumie się na szarym końcu); zadaniem ich było pisać wierszowane *invita Minerva*, powinszowania i śpiewy, zwane *kantami*, na obchody uroczyste, tudzież rymowane facejki godowe, na zawołanie w czasie obiadu, a deklamowane z pewnym natężeniem, ażeby je brano za improwizacje. Im mniej było w tych wierszach sensu, tym większą w słuchaczach wzbudzały wesołość, tym gęściej sypały się oklaski dla poety, sypiącego wiersze jak z rękawa. Improwizatorowie ci nie doznawali nigdy od nikogo upokorzenia; śmiano się z ich rymów, ale w sposób nie obrażający, owszem, zachęcający. Nie dawano im za napój wina z wodą, ani wieńczono liśćmi kapusty [...], ale im nalewano wina czystego i nieskąpo, dla dodania weny. Stąd żaden z nich nie zadał sobie śmierci z rozpacy, lecz dokonywał szczęśliwie żywota w domu swego benefaktora. Poeta domowy, na podobieństwo średniowiecznych bardów i minnezengerów, opiewał splendory domu swego mecenasa, sławę przodków, rodowód bogaty w parantele świętą itd. mało się troszcząc o ścisłą historyczną w panegirykach prawdę; było to dozwolone *poeticae licentiae*<sup>25</sup>.

entertainment of the hosts and guests. The wittiest ones also played the role of pranksters, but without dishonouring the jewel of nobility. This is because they were *bene nati*, albeit impoverished, residents allowed to sit at the family table (at the very end of it, of course); their job was to write rhymed *invita Minerva*, congratulations and songs known as *kanta*, for grand celebrations, as well as short sketches, delivered at the drop of the hat at dinner, and with a certain intensity, so as to make them seem like improvisations. The less sense these poems made, the jollier they made the audience, and the more it applauded the poet who produced them as if effortlessly. The improvisers were never humiliated by anyone; people laughed at their rhymes, but not in an insulting way, they indeed encouraged them. They were not given watered down wine, nor crowned with cabbage leaves (...); they were given pure wine and in abundance, for inspiration. Thus none of them ever took their life out of misery; instead they lived out their days happily at the houses of their benefactors. A household poet, much like medieval bards and *Minnesänger*, extolled the splendours of his patron's house, the fame of his ancestors, his lineage filled with saints, etc., without caring much for strict historical truth; this was accepted *poeticae licentiae*.<sup>25</sup>

Not far from Livonia, on the same side of the River Daugava, in Justynianów, stood the beautiful palace of Justynian Niemirowicz-Szczytt, a writer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The owner of the palace was an animator of the cultural life of the northern part of Belarus.<sup>26</sup> A passage from the diary of his son Józef Szczytt reads:

Śmiało mogę powiedzieć, że nie było w tej stronie wówczas świetniejszego domu nad dom ojca mego [...]. Łączył on ze starodawną skromnością obyczaje nowego wieku, gustowność życia, upodobanie w literaturze i manierę, nawiedzany był przez najpoważniejsze osoby, a zawsze tak gośćmi napelniony, że nigdy mniej nie siadało osób do pierwszego stołu niż trzydzieści, w marszałkowskim dwadzieścia i tyleż w szafarskim. Liczba osób domowych wynosiła do dwóchset<sup>27</sup>.

I can boldly say that there was no better house in this part of the country than my father's house (...). It combined the old-fashioned modesty with the customs of the new century, tastefulness of life, liking for literature and manners; it was visited by the most respectable people and was always so full of guests that there were never less than thirty people at the first table, twenty at the marshal's and the same number at the steward's. The number of household members was up to two hundred.<sup>27</sup>

25 K. Bujnicki, "Upodobanie w niespodziankach" [A liking for surprises], in: *Kronika Rodzinna* [Family Chronicle] (1869), p. 27.

26 R. Aftanazy wrote about the history of the Niemirowicz Szczytt family in *Dzieje rezydencji na dawnych kresach Rzeczypospolitej* [History of residences in the Old Borderlands of Poland], vol. 1 (Wrocław: 1994), pp. 239-241.

27 J. Szczytt, "Ułamek z pamiętników" [Fragments of diaries], in: *Kronika Rodzinna* (1881), p. 278.

A similar description of the court can be found in memoirs of Justinian's granddaughter, Elżbieta Pakoszowa née Rudomin:

Stół w Justynianowie nie był wystawny, ale porządnym i obfity. Stół był długi, gdyż [...] domowników i rezydentów zawsze tam dużo się znajdowało, co Justynianów za własny dom uważając, tak wygodnie, jakby u siebie tam gościli. [...]

Dom [...] na sposób staropolski urządzone, niż przepychem ścian i mebli więcej przytulkiem dla tylu biednych ozdoby, zawsze był zapelniony zbiegowskim krewnych, którzy w osobie jego pana, a dziada mego, jakby patriarchę swego widzieć byli radzi, błogosławieństwa jego pragnąc, tłumnie się tam zbierali<sup>28</sup>.

The table at Justynianów was not sumptuous, but it was fine and plentiful. The table was long because (...) there were always a lot of people living and staying there, who considered Justynianów their own home, that is just how comfortable they felt there (...).

The house (...) was decorated in the old Polish way; its beauty came from the shelter it offered to so many poor rather than from the grand decor of walls and furniture; it was always full of relatives, who in the house's master, and my grandfather, were happy to see their patriarch, and wished for his blessing, so they gathered there in crowds.<sup>28</sup>

The description of the name-day festivities of the then already aged Justynian is characteristic and respectful:

Dzień imienin zacnego starca obchodzony gromadnie [...] a sam on piękny, czerstwy, rumiany, bogato po polsku przybrany, zdobny orderami, przedstawiał obraz dygnitarza kraju [...], wszystkich zarówno ścisłał [...] tych starców rezydentów, co jego chlebem wiek cały się żywili, innej służby prócz różańca nie znając. I nie tylko dla tych postrojonych już w żupany i kontusze rezydentów swoich znajdował słowa życzliwości, idąc do kaplicy rozmawiał nieraz z uboższą szlachtą [...], życzliwym udarował słowem. [...] A i w kaplicy pięknie było patrzeć na starca otoczonego wierną sobie drużyną, co złamanym już głosem pomagał dworni swojej śpiewać pieśni, hymny i psalmy własnego układu, i nawet wydrukowane po wielu domach takie zdarzało się widywać książeczki, i to wierszem pisane<sup>29</sup>.

The name-day of the noble old man was celebrated in crowds (...) and he himself, beautiful, robust, flushed, richly dressed in Polish fashion, adorned with orders, represented the image of a dignitary of the country (...), he hugged all of them (...) these old resident men, who ate his bread for ages, knowing no other service but the rosary. And he found words of kindness not only for his residents, already dressed in high-collared jackets and split-sleeve overcoats, on his way to the chapel he would talk to the poorer nobles (...), gracing them with cordial words. (...) And in the chapel it was beautiful to see the old man surrounded by his faithful entourage, who, with his voice already cracked, helped his courtiers to sing songs, hymns and psalms of their own arrangement, some of which were printed as small, rhymed books and kept at many homes.<sup>29</sup>

Jan Onoszko, indicated by Szczytt junior as a resident noble, enjoyed the hospitality of Justynian Szczytt. It was likely there where he wrote most of his works published posthumously<sup>30</sup>.

Antoni Edward Odynieć flogs the resident poets with a whip of irony, calling

28 E. z Rudominów Pakoszowa, "Pamiętnik" [Diary], in: *Kronika Rodzinna* (1881), p. 278.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 473.

30 For more on the life and works of Jan Onoszko, sentimentalist-resident, see: D. Samborska-Kukuć, "Kim był Jan Onoszko? (Próba rekonstrukcji biografii)" [Who was Jan Onoszko? An attempted biography], in: *Wiek Oświecenia* [Age of Enlightenment] (2020); *idem*, "Między Bogiem, życiem i śmiercią. Tradycje religijnej poezji baroku w twórczości Jana Onoszki" [Between God, life and death. Traditions of religious Baroque poetry in the works of Jan Onoszko], in: *Pamiętnik Literacki* [Literary Memoir] (2002), fasc. 3.

them ‘flies’ that Pegasus had to shoo away. They had no ambition to be famous, that is, to be printed, in contrast to their genre relatives, the ‘bumblebees’, whose aim was to make themselves known to a wider audience of readers. Odyniec mentions their considerable number in Lithuania, calling them maniacs and idlers

[...] włóczącymi się ze swymi wierszami jak dziady z ewangeliczką (tylko że nie piechotą), po szlacheckich dworcach na wsi i wyzyskującymi [...] gościnność i upodobanie w wierszach gospodarzy<sup>31</sup>.

(...) wandering with their poems like beggars with Gospel (only not on foot), around the manors of the nobility in the countryside and exploiting (...) their hosts’ hospitality and liking for poems.<sup>31</sup>

A bard of this kind, as Odyniec writes referring to Jan Szurłowski, without any idea of what to do with his life, with just barely minimum education,

[...] powożąc się sam w kałamaszce, z psem zazwyczaj zamiast konia, jechał od bramy do bramy, rzekomo jakby w gościnę, a w gruncie rzeczy po jałmużnę w kształcie ofiary dla poezji<sup>32</sup>.

(...) driving himself the small wagon, usually with a dog instead of a horse, went from one gate to another, ostensibly to pay a visit, but in reality to ask for alms disguised as an offering for poetry.<sup>32</sup>

The artistically anemic works of *minorum gentium* poets living on the mercy of benefactors, flooded provincial manors and courts.<sup>33</sup> Their works were sometimes sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument as a love confession or a dirty drinking song. The mania for rhyme and poetry in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century had its source in the way monastic schools taught.

Śmiało można by twierdzić, że nie było szkoły, która by nie wydała jakiego laureata. Tylko że jak ochota do pisania wierszy nie zawsze łączyć się zwykła z ochotą do nauki i pracy, tak też i większa połowa tych samorodnych synów Apollina usypiała na wiek na swych laurach szkolnych, lub [...] słyneła jeszcze czas jakiś w granicach swego powiatu [...]<sup>34</sup>.

There probably wasn’t even one that did not produce such a laureate. However, since the willingness to write poems was not always combined with the willingness to study and work, the majority of these self-proclaimed sons of Apollo rested on their school laurels, or (...) were famous for some time within the borders of their district (...).<sup>34</sup>

Particularly popular was the sentimental convention, poetics *à la* Karpiński, as it was suitable for expressing various emotional states characteristic of provincial social life. The liberal approach of the author of *Laura i Filon* to literary aesthetics,

31 A.E. Odyniec, *Wspomnienia z przeszłości opowiadane Deotymie* [Memories of the past as told to Deotyma] (Warsaw: 1884), p. 128.

32 *Ibid.*

33 T.S. Grabowski, “Z pogranicza polsko-białoruskiego” [From the Polish-Belorussian Borderlands], in: *Księga pamiątkowa ku czci Stanisława Pigońia* [Commemorative book in celebration of Stanisław Pigoń] (Cracow: 1961, p. 445) lists the following provincial manor houses and palaces as hospitable to resident poets: Stary Konstantynów, Panów, Cybulów, Nikopol, Oława, Kroźęta, Cudnów, Mosarz, Poczanowska Góra, Harodek Grodzicki.

34 A.E. Odyniec, *Wspomnienia z przeszłości opowiadane Deotymie*, p. 106.

which were in opposition to Classicism, resulted in the phenomenon of mass rhyming, regardless of the talent or literary aesthetic predisposition of the author:

[...] uznano, iż każdy, kto ma czule serce, może pisać, przedmiotem zaś poezji stać się ma świat zwykłych, prostych, codziennych uczuć i spraw. W ten sposób tradycja sentymentalizmu przejawiała swą wyłączną aktualność dla całego zastępu domorosłych poetów, motywujących uprawianie skonwencjonalizowanego piśmiennictwa wygodną formą czułości, która miała zastąpić zarówno głębszą refleksję nad współczesną sytuacją literacką, jak i rzetelny wysiłek w budowaniu wypowiedzi poetyckiej<sup>35</sup>.

(...) it was concluded that anyone who has a tender heart could write, and that poetry should focus on the world of common, simple, everyday feelings and affairs. In this way, the tradition of sentimentalism manifested its exclusive validity for a whole host of home-grown poets, motivating the practice of conventionalized writing by a convenient form of tenderness that was to replace both deeper reflection on the contemporary literary situation and a reliable effort in constructing a poetic utterance.<sup>35</sup>

The subject matter of this exceptionally prolific and extensive creative activity of court poets, usually bordering on graphomania, oscillated either around love situations: returns, partings, banter, flirtations, reminiscences, et cetera, or praise of rural life with all the charm of simple existence in virtue, blessed poverty and neighbourly love, or the outfits of young patriots setting off to battle after a tender farewell to their lover. The idyll proved to be the functional genre here, as the communicative lightness of its conventional pastoral costume inspired the imagination of readers, whose main focus was entertainment.

Utwór, który spodobał się czytelnikom, krążył ze dworu do dworu, odczytywano go na zebraniach sąsiedzkich, przepisywano, powtarzano z pamięci; zdarzało się, że i autor, który poezje swe drukiem wydał, większą popularność uzyskał przez odpisywanie po dworach i dworkach poszczególnych utworów, aniżeli przez lekturę drukowanych tomów<sup>36</sup> –

A work that appealed to the readers was circulated from manor to manor, it was read at neighbourhood meetings, copied and recited from memory; sometimes the author, who published his poems in print, gained more popularity by way of individual pieces being hand-copied at manor houses than by being read in print –<sup>36</sup>

– read Jan Stanisław Bystróż. Circulating poems became part of the household *silvae rerum*, scribbled down on loose sheets of paper, written in the empty spaces in calendars. Such works found a fertile ground, reigning in provincial manor houses keen on sentimental songs accompanied by guitar or clavichord, where the works of Karpiński, Ludwik Krupiński, Wincenty Reklewski, and brothers Kazimierz and Andrzej Brodziński had already made a career.<sup>37</sup> The child of the sentimental muse, satisfying the popular taste, would croon both at courts and

35 T. Kostkiewiczowa, "Tradycja sentymentalizmu w poezji epoki romantycznej" [Tradition of Sentimentalism in the poetry of Romanticism], in: *Problemy polskiego romantyzmu* [Issues of Polish Romanticism] Series 3, ed. M. Żmigrodzka (Wrocław: 1981), p. 151.

36 J.S. Bystróż, *Dzieje obyczajów w dawnej Polsce. Wiek XVI-XVIII*, vol. 2, p. 419.

37 See: J. Kleiner, *Sentymentalizm i preromantyzm. Studia inedita z literatury porozbiorowej 1795-1822*

under thatched roofs, and having achieved incomparable popularity, it began to live a life of its own, orphaned by its author and deprived of its pedigree, nobody's child because it was adopted by everyone - singers and listeners alike, it wandered between the court and the cottage, where 'the maid listens to what her lady sings, learns it, then boasts in front of her village peers, who again, not wanting to give way to the court fashion, learn from her as much as they can, and after some time the song comes into use'<sup>38</sup> and makes its author famous. The latter, though eager for applause, 'had to pay (...) the highest price for fame, which is called oblivion.'<sup>39</sup> It is worth adding that the obscure origin of such a work, created most often by a landed nobleman, sometimes even by a professional poet, was conducive to the appropriation of such a song, ballad, or *dumka* by the people, who treated it as their property (such was, for example, the fate of *Laura i Filon*).<sup>40</sup>

The unusual multitude of poetic contributions by the resident bards is proof not only of the specific tastes and literary preferences of potential readers, who were most often local residents of the home province of Adam Mickiewicz, dubbed *wieszcz* or soothsayer.<sup>41</sup> It also testifies to the 'Horatianism' of the author, eager for fame, trying at all costs to make a name for himself on a wider readership forum, and illustrates the 'charming egotism of (...) the artist who tries (...) to escape the wide shadow that history casts over all books in the end'.<sup>42</sup>

*Translated by Maja Jaros,  
verified by Jerzy Giebułtowski*

[Sentimentalism and Pre-romanticism. Studia inedita of post-partition literature 1795-1822], ed. J. Starnawski (Cracow: 1975), pp. 93-99.

- 38 Waclaw [Szymanowski], "Jeszcze kilka słów o guberni mińskiej" [A few more words on the Minsk Governorate], in: *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* [The Illustrated Weekly] (1869), no. 84-85, p. 77.
- 39 S. Wasylewski, *Życie polskie w XIX wieku* [Polish life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century] (Cracow: 1962), p. 43.
- 40 Adam Mickiewicz, wanting to test the folklore expertise of Jan Czeczot, sent him *Kurhanek Maryli* [Maryla's grave] with a false annotation that read 'from a Lithuanian song'. This most avid folklorist did not recognize a falsification. Thus it was proven that an intentional or accidental simulation of an authentic piece can deceive anyone. Cf. B. Dopart, *Mickiewiczowski romantyzm przedlistopadowy* [Mickiewicz's pre-November Romanticism] (Cracow: 1992), p. 63. See also: Cz. Hernas, *W kalinowym lesie. U źródeł folklorystyki polskiej* [In the wayfaring tree forest. At the sources of Polish folklore studies], vol. 1 (Warsaw: 1965), pp. 193-196.
- 41 For more about the nomenclature of writing activity during the Romantic breakthrough, see: J. Kamionkova, *Życie literackie w Polsce w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku. Studia* [Literary life in Poland of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Studies] (Warsaw: 1970), pp. 275-276.
- 42 P. Hertz, *Rozważania na marginesie lektury polskich "poetów mniejszych" pierwszej połowy XIX stulecia* [Side notes on the Polish "lesser poets" of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century], in: *idem, Domena polska* [Polish domain] (Warsaw: 1961), p. 51.

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## ABSTRACT

The article discusses a specific social phenomenon, which was the functioning of the first half of the nineteenth century in the rich magnate or noble courts of the Borderlands of a group of residents – usually single men without a permanent profession, often leading a wandering lifestyle and serving their employers with their skills. In this group, court poets stood out (‘resident bards’ as Julian Tuwim defined them), for whom residency was a form of patronage, creating small occasional, panegyric, entertaining and love pieces, usually in a sentimental convention. The output of these poems in *minorum gentium* is usually devoid of artistic value, but due to its great popularity it gives a credible testimony to the tastes of the epoch.

**KEYWORDS:** bards, diaries, Polish literature of 19<sup>th</sup> century