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“A Holy, Great, and Difficult Task.” Some Remarks on the Generic Contexts of *Nowy Zaciąg* by Wacław Potocki

One of the most important creative endeavors undertaken by Wacław Potocki—a converted Arian and one of the most outstanding authors of the Polish Baroque—was a poetic paraphrase of the holy history, most of which is lost today. It consisted of the now-lost *Pieluszki Chrystusowe*, *Wieniec Najświętszej Panny*, *Prześladowanie Kościoła Bożego*, and *Arfa Starego Testamentu z Nowym*, among others. Nevertheless, numerous other works still bear testimony to the importance of the inventive input of biblical content in the surviving oeuvre of the poet. These include the diptych, dating from the Arian period, *Tydzień stworzenia świata* and *Pan Bóg dobry, człowiek zły we wszystkich drogach swoich*, which comprise a synthesis of universal history with a perspective on salvation, right from the Genesis incipit, down to the apocalyptical triumph of the Holy Jerusalem; the biblical “series” of the Łużna poet also includes *Judyta*, classified as belonging to the group of romances, which is a brief account of the brave Israeli widow’s victory, composed in ottava rima and set in the context of the civil war that was wreaking havoc within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1648; *Pieśni nabożne z różnych miejsc Ewangeliej świętych* and *Dialog o Zmartwychwstaniu Pańskim*, written for the stage, are also a part of the poet’s multi-generic endeavor.

Nowy zaciąg, published by the Warsaw Piarists in 1698, two years after the author’s death, is the most important of the Łużna poet’s elaborations of great biblical themes. The work has a complex title that is composed of two alternative ones, as it were, the second of which breaks down into two parts. What needs to be stressed, however, is that none of the titles conveys the generic character of the poem, nor do they reveal its artistic shape and inventive specificity.¹ The first title—*Nowy zaciąg pod chorągiew starą*

¹ It also needs to be added that the title of the first edition of 1698, *Nowy zaciąg pod chorągiew starą triumfującego Jezusa, Syna Bożego, nad światem, czartem, śmiercią i piekłem, gdzie traktamentem*

triumfującego Jezusa, Syna Bożego, nad światem, czartem, śmiercią i piekłem, gdzie traktamentem doczesne błogosławieństwo, żoldem wesole sumnienie, wysługą korona królewska, która już niezliczonemu tego towarzystwu znaku na wieki wieczne kwitnącym okryła laurem skronie—being a “witty” devout travesty of conscription letters issued to commanders of troops, namely the *litterae inscriptionis stipendii* [in Polish: *listy przypowiednie*], indicates inspiration with the Sarmatian *disciplina militaris* and suggests a literary work devised as rhetorically close to conceit-employing thematic sermons.² The second title, *Krzyż albo żaloszna historyja krwawej męki i niewinnej śmierci Chrystusa Pana, Zbawiciela świata z pism świętych*, does not exclude preaching as inspiration but seems to introduce a certain emblematic quality as well. The latter part of the second title, most telling in terms of genology (mentioning *historyja*, that is, history), announces a storyline determined by the successive stages of the Passion of Christ while its dynamics, by the very nature of its subject matter differing starkly from the dynamics found in epics, build up in accord with the intensity of devout *compassio*. Even taken together, the two varying, yet complementary, titles of the poem do not inform the reader about the recapitulatory character of the work that provides a great synthesis of the Old and New Covenants and perhaps gives us an inkling of the style of presentation of the holy history effected by the poet in the now-lost *Arfa Starego Testamentu z Nowym*. We do not know virtually anything about this work, mentioned by the author in two of his texts coming from a generically heterogeneous collection of epigrams, *Ogród nieplewiony*, though its title suggests that it was an attempt to deploy the art of typological hermeneutics of the Bible in the service of poetic catechesis.³

doczesne błogosławieństwo, żoldem wesole sumnienie, wysługą korona królewska, która już niezliczonemu tego towarzystwu znaku na wieki wieczne kwitnącym okryła laurem skronie. Krzyż albo żaloszna historyja krwawej męki i niewinnej śmierci Chrystusa Pana, Zbawiciela świata z pism świętych ... ojczystym wyrażona rytmem..., differs in some details from the titles known from manuscripts. A manuscript held at the Biblioteka Książąt Czartoryskich (No. 1250), which is the first known draft of the poem, bears the title: *Nowy zaciąg Jezusa, Syna Bożego, nad światem, śmiercią i piekłem, gdzie traktamentem doczesne błogosławieństwo, żoldem wesole sumnienie, wysługą korona królewska, która już niezliczonemu tego towarzystwu znaku na wieki wieczne kwitnącym okryła laurem skronie. Krzyż albo historyja krwawej męki i niewinnej śmierci Chrystusa Pana, Zbawiciela świata, naprzód z świętych, a potem z poważnych Kościoła Bożego kaznodziejskich pism ... ojczystym wyrażona rymem ...* (I would like to thank Patrycja Głuszak for providing me with scans of this manuscript). A manuscript in the collection of the Biblioteka Ossolineum in Wrocław (No. 2077/1) evincing the second draft of the work is titled: *Nowy zaciąg pod starą chorągiew albo Krzyż Chrystusów, to jest historyja męki i śmierci Pana i Zbawiciela naszego rytmem polskim ... opisana.*

² For more on the structure and rhetorical distinctiveness of such sermons, see W. Pawlak, *Koncept w polskich kazaniach barokowych* (Lublin, 2005), pp. 268–308. Inspiration with the poetics of sermon conceits in Potocki's epigrams is discussed in W. Pawlak, “*Paradoxa theologica* Wacława Potockiego wobec kaznodziejskich ‘nowin,’” *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, 50/1 (2002), pp. 161–186.

³ Czesław Hernas saw the lost *Arfa* as “an exposition of connections between the two Testaments.” See Cz. Hernas, *Barok* (Warszawa, 2002), p. 462.

Nowy zaciąg belongs to a substantial group of passion poems of the seventeenth century. Even though the poet did not apply to his expansive poetic meditation the epic conventions (either Virgilian or Tassean) that he had been well aware of, nor did he infuse the history of the Lord's Passion with classical features, the work has been erroneously classified as a passion "messiad"⁴ regardless of the fact that it lacks distinguishing features of the biblical epic whose models for early modern culture, albeit differing in some respects, had been devised by Jacopo Sannazaro as the author of *De partu Virginis* (1526) and by Marco Girolamo Vida in *Christiados libri sex* (1535).⁵ Nevertheless, the fact that the poet composed his work in verse has tempted some scholars to further develop associations with the epic genre, even though this inexorably led to ranking the poem as subpar. As an example, we can cite a comprehensive introduction preceding a discussion of *Nowy zaciąg* which can be found in a monograph on Potocki's creative work by Adam Bełcikowski, one of the first scholars to appraise the poem, almost one and a half century ago. Bełcikowski in staunchly unfavorable terms described the most distinctive, in his opinion, traits of the religious literary works of the seventeenth century that constitute the original context for the epic endeavor of the Łużna poet. Factually correct when noting a tendency of Baroque poets to compose lengthy descriptive poems, Bełcikowski went on to ascribe to them completely false beliefs not only about the worthiness of their work but also about the works' generic classification. Thus, allegedly, in the eyes of not only the authors but also the readers, they had been epic poems and "veritable epopees," while in reality they were "futile miscarriages," where prosaic storytelling prevailed over poetry.⁶

Undoubtedly, much like *Christias* by Vida and *Paradise Lost* by Milton, Potocki's poem presents the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a new model of heroism; by no means, however, does it seek to ground itself in the tradition of the epopee—not in its lexical, stylistic, or rhetorical paradigms, not in the epic *decorum*, not in the creation of characters and relationships between

⁴ See A. Brückner, "Spuścizna rękopiśmienna po Wacławie Potockim," *Rozprawy Akademii Umiejętności. Wydział Filologiczny*, 27 (1898), pp. 306, 348–355; Hernas, *Barok*, p. 463; A. Glazer, "Nowy zaciąg Wacława Potockiego na tle wybranych mesjad staropolskich," *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, Prace Literackie*, 22 (1981), pp. 62, 72; J. Stręciwilk, "Męka Pańska w polskiej literaturze barokowej," in H.D. Wojtyśka and J.J. Kopeć (eds), *Męka Chrystusa wczoraj i dziś* (Lublin, 1981), pp. 102–119; J. Gruchała, "Wstęp," in W. Potocki, *Wiersze wybrane*, ed. S. Grzeszczuk, (Wrocław, 1992), p. XXL; H. Kasprzak-Obrębska, "Dwie późnobarokowe mesjady," in J. Okoń with M. Kwiek and M. Wichowa (eds), *Literatura a liturgia. Księga referatów międzynarodowej sesji naukowej Łódź, 14–17 maja 1996* (Łódź, 1998), pp. 251–252; L. Teusz, *Bolesna Muza nie Parnasu Góry, ale Golgoty... Mesjady polskie XVII stulecia* (Warszawa, 2002), pp. 228–229.

⁵ Epic conventions of the two poems have been analyzed by Janina Gajda in "Dwie epopeje humanistyczne. *De partu Virginis* Sannazara i *Christias* Vidy," *Classica Wratislaviensia*, 3 (1968), pp. 23–39.

⁶ A. Bełcikowski, *Wacław z Potoka Potocki (Studium literackie)* (Kraków, 1868), p. 26.

them, not in the temporal modeling of narration, and not in the structuring of the plot itself. Theologically mature and imbued with an authentic piety that demands that an individual experience of faith be examined in light of the paradigm of the holy history, *Nowy zaciąg* did not gain recognition in the eyes of its first critic largely because he assessed it according to the standard of the classical epic to which it simply does not conform. It is this generic misclassification that accounts for statements about a “corruption of content and debasement of the subject matter” in Potocki’s poem, as well as for ranking it as artistically inferior to all other works by the Łużna poet.⁷

Seventeenth-century Polish authors of passion literature representing as diverse generic conventions as the epigram, allegorical dialogue, or mystery forms avoided repeating the literary experiment of Renaissance authors whereby the truths of the Christian faith would be conveyed in the epic idiom of rhetorically elevated style. *Nowy zaciąg*, though composed in Polish alexandrines, is much more reminiscent of a specifically poetic *meditatio* on the history of salvation, culminating in Christ’s sacrifice of the Cross. It is a meditation of vast proportions, since it comprises some fifty-five hundred verses.⁸ And it is specifically poetic because it is simultaneously apologetic, polemical, satirical, and lyrical, unified with a deep biblical foundation and the dignity of religious experience that has been expressed with a number of self-reflective prayers that accompany particular scenes of the Passion. The dynamics of the poem’s narrative spill over, or even tear asunder, the constraints of definitional formulas, as capacious as they are, which define meditation as an inner activity of the mind “in a particular way bearing on a chosen object and aimed at examining it from all angles to grasp its internal principle.”⁹ Thematic meditation, understood as the definition proposes, is by no means tantamount to intellectual immobility, but the type of focus on an object that it presumes does not go well with the kind of rhythm that is set for the reader’s attention by Potocki’s passion for observation, his synchronic imagination and inclination for thinking analogically, or figuratively, which provides the poem with long and branching strings of connotations intertwined with multi-layered visual and thematic associations. After all, the meditation principally aims not at perceiving the world in its multifaceted complexity but rather at a disciplined apprehension of “God and the soul,” that is, the mysteries of salvation and the person’s inner truth. In consequence, the complex imaginative, didactic, and rhetorical architecture

⁷ Bełcikowski, *Wacław z Potoka*, pp. 26, 30.

⁸ Brückner, “Spuścizna,” p. 355.

⁹ T. Kostkiewiczowa, “Medytacja – wstępne spostrzeżenia i uwagi,” in T. Kostkiewiczowa and M. Sagoniak (eds), *Medytacja. Postawa intelektualna – sposób poznania – gatunek dyskursu* (Warszawa, 2010), p. 10.

of *Nowy zaciąg* exposes the inadequacy of generic qualifications and distinctions with which it is measured.

And yet we do not want to do without them. Terminology is important, and generic designations should not be misleading, although they cannot always be precise.¹⁰ Sometimes the only way of achieving terminological precision in identifying formal characteristics of a literary work is to coin a new generic name for it. This, however, comes with a risk that the proposed term will turn out to be a quasi-term (or an "impressionistic" qualification, in the words of Stefania Skwarczyńska)¹¹ that labels a one-element set which has been distinguished from all others for purely negative reasons, with nothing positive to offer. And then the distinctive features that have prompted setting the literary work apart as embodying a new genre, instead of showing norm-generating qualities, or, in other words, constituting a solid foundation for distinguishing the work as unique—based on a set of generic characteristics—may, on the contrary, turn out to be not compelling enough to meet the requirements of regular genre poetics or simply fail to conform to it. The genre that *Nowy zaciąg* has the closest links with, let us reiterate, is not the biblical epic. Potocki as the author of the work in question has almost completely eschewed epic imitational techniques, clearly not wanting to fashion the history of Christ's Passion after classical models adapted by the humanists who wished to embellish mysteries of the Christian faith with the art gleaned from pagan masters.¹²

Yet it is precisely this affinity that is suggested by the terminology applied by the scholars, from Aleksander Brückner to Leszek Teusz, who define *Nowy zaciąg* as a "messiad" or "passion epic," even though Potocki has not taken up the tradition of either the biblical epics or of the epic poem in general, and neither of them constitutes the original context for his poem. The fact that a literary work can be classified as a narrative poem due to its formal characteristics, that is, being a story in verse, does not suffice to warrant perceiving it through the conventions of the *poesis perfecta*, which is a particular and special kind of the epic genre. It is, indeed, so special that

¹⁰ Janusz Gruchała has called for precision in genre names applied to the 17th-century biblical narratives. See J. Gruchała, "Wprowadzenie do lektury," in A. Roźniatowski, *Pamiętka krwawej ofiary Pana Zbawiciela naszego Jezusa Chrystusa*, ed. J. Gruchała (Warszawa, 2003), p. 23.

¹¹ S. Skwarczyńska, "Genologia literacka w świetle zadań nauki o literaturze," in E. Miodońska-Brookes, A. Kulawik, and M. Tatara (eds), *Genologia polska. Wybór tekstów* (Warszawa, 1983), p. 24.

¹² For a discussion of the humanist creative model, which takes into account the work of Juvenius, Sedulius, and Venantius Fortunatus, see M. Roberts, "The Last Epic of Antiquity: Generic Continuity and Innovation in the *Vita Sancti Martini* of Venantius Fortunatus," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 131 (2001), pp. 257–285. Analogical practice in the Renaissance, based on the epic poem by Vida, is discussed by M.A. Di Cesare, *Vida's Christiad and Vergilian Epic* (New York, 1964).

even when some authors had chosen its conventions as their inspiration and point of reference but adapted the epic idiom to new cultural circumstances (e.g. Juvencus in *Evangeliorum libri quattuor*, Sannazar in *De partu Virginis*, or Torquato Tasso in the no longer evangelical, but secular, *La Gerusalemme liberata*), their poems could still be identified correctly as belonging to the genre. We should not, however, overlook the fact that the epic that would treat of evangelical events as its subject matter is an impossible genre insofar as we wish to retain the meaning that “epic” has acquired in the classical tradition. It is so, because the work of salvation thereby recounted would have to change beyond recognition—much like the Passion of Christ presented in the oration by a certain Roman preacher, as relayed by Bulephorus in Erasmus’ *Ciceronianus*: “When he was struggling to transport us with joy, I wished rather to weep upon hearing the triumphs of Scipio, of Paulus Aemilius, of Caius Caesar and of the deified Emperors compared with the triumph of the cross.”¹³

Grappling with problems generated by the term “messiad” that was proposed by Brückner (and taken up by others) and has strong ties with the epic tradition, Leszek Teusz proposes a number of genre-related designations meant to organize the qualifying criteria for particular Sarmatian biblical poems. As a result of these efforts, the pertinent list of generic names now includes: “full messiads,” “messiad epics,” “passion-messiads,” and “passion poems.” Moreover, it needs to be stressed that the process of distinguishing them involves, among other things, deciding in what way the literary works at hand refer to conventions of the classical epic narrative.¹⁴ It seems, however, that the propositions put forth by Teusz manifest a need to reopen the issue rather than to resolve it, since the characteristics of “messiad” referred to—for example, “ostentatious assertion of [the author’s] worldview,” “tendency to maximally amplify the expressiveness of representation,” “stirring the addressee emotionally as an assumption built into the text,” or “activating the process of identification, of co-experiencing”¹⁵—hardly belong to the repertoire of qualities unique to the epic idiom.

There seems to be some evidence of a tendency to back out of applying the term “messiad” to Potocki’s poem: Janusz Gruchała, who used to employ it in reference to the work, has since revised his terminology and replaced “messiad” with a neutral term of “passion poem.”¹⁶

¹³ Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Ciceronianus, or a Dialog on the Best Style of Speaking*, trans. I. Scott (New York, 1908), p. 64. On the impossibility of a Christian epic in the traditional sense of the word, see M.A. Di Cesare, “‘Not Less but More Heroic’: The Epic Task and the Renaissance Hero,” *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 12 (1982), p. 71.

¹⁴ Teusz, *Bolesna Muza*, pp. 228–234.

¹⁵ Teusz, *Bolesna Muza*, p. 232.

¹⁶ Gruchała, “Wprowadzenie,” p. 24.

The author of this paper does not wish to replace that name with any other. Due to a distance separating it from classical regularity, the creative writing of the Łuzna poet does not yield easily to taxonomic labels proposed by scholars, and *Krzyż albo żaloszna historyja krawej męki i niewinnej śmierci Chrystusa Pana* does seem to be a particularly complicated case in point. Instead, the proposed way to shed light on the nature of this complicatedness and restore the work to its original context of literary references will be to point to the area of literature which had a substantial impact on Potocki's poetic meditation about the Lord's Passion. The literature in question comprises texts representing church oratory.

The sequential method chosen by the poet for unfolding the narrative about the redeeming Sacrifice, which resembles summoning up of images of particular stations from the Way of Sorrows, is clearly set in the context of seventeenth-century devotional practices that had been flourishing and gaining popularity since the beginning of the century.¹⁷ Thus, the story begins with Judas' betrayal preceding the Last Supper and then proceeds to the scenes from the Cenacle, the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the arrest, the examinations, the way of the cross, the Crucifixion and death, and concludes with the entombment of Christ. But this linear scheme, dictated by successive events of the Passion, hardly does justice to the complexity of the work, since the chronological continuity is just a thread that supports the whole discursive and persuasive structure of *Nowy zaciąg* composed of units that constitute poetic adaptations of principles of sermonic *dispositio*. The units are built of recurring micro-structures constructed with constant elements which often recognizably, if not strictly, resemble the scheme of the thematic sermon (with frequent references to its six-fold division into *exordium*, *narratio*, *propositio*, *confirmatio*, *peroratio*, and *epilogus*) and, in broader terms, to the strong tradition of biblical meditation.¹⁸ The units are made up of four parts. The first introduces an evangelical Passion scene as a starting point for the narration. Next, the scene is presented in the context of Old Testament motifs and imagery (sometimes analogy is the organizing principle here, while at other times it is opposition; and occasionally the contextualization turns into an elaborate prayer). The third part brings a narrative that could be characterized as "satirical" (in a "clear-cut" meditational text

¹⁷ For more on the subject, see A. Nowicka-Jeżowa, *Barok polski między Europą i Sarmacją*, part I: *Profile i zarysy całości* (Warszawa, 2011), pp. 174–175; W. Pawlak, "Bł. Stanisław Papczyński wśród barokowych kaznodziejów," in S. Papczyński, *Pisma pasyjne*, pref. W. Pawlak and M. Miotk, trans. R.R. Piętka (Warszawa, 2008), pp. 21–24.

¹⁸ On the composition of thematic sermons, see Pawlak, *Koncept*, pp. 229–247; M. Brzozowski, "Teoria kaznodziejstwa (wiek XVI–XVIII)," in M. Rechowicz (ed.), *Dzieje teologii katolickiej w Polsce*, vol. II: *Od odrodzenia do oświecenia*, part I: "Teologia humanistyczna" (Lublin, 1975), pp. 363–428.

this would be an anomaly, but the context of church rhetoric sanctions considerable leeway for moral discourse, including its satirical variety). Potocki creates these parts of text by referring a spiritual model discovered in the Passion scene (or other biblical image) to Christian life in general (sometimes also to the religious frigidity of his contemporaries, theological questions, or social issues; and it regularly features bitter analyses of the Jews' breaking away from the Covenant). Finally, the fourth part features a fervent act of contrite prayer whereby the narrator confesses his sin that has led Christ to His death and begs the Savior for His mercy. The scheme allows for minor alterations from time to time, the most notable of them being an incidental insertion of a description of nature (in spring) which is seemingly close to the epic convention and opens the part of the poem titled "Czas śmierci Pańskiej – wiosna" (pp. 156–161).¹⁹

Making subsequent stations of the Lord's Passion the subject matter of his poetic meditation, Potocki has used material appropriated arbitrarily and liberally from all kinds of church oratory sources,²⁰ just as the form of thematic sermon allows, with a special emphasis on tools developed by the tradition of allegorical and typological biblical hermeneutics whose artistic merit he demonstrates by creating a compelling vision of the complementary relation of the Old and New Covenants, and of unfaithfulness of the Israelites and the frigidity of Christians (his contemporaries). These analytical threads of thought, weaved into the meditation on Christ's sacrifice, do in fact constitute a broad digression,²¹ which expands the structure of the poetic meditation. They resemble seams of intellectual diversion running through the mindfulness of prayer, but their paths simultaneously trace a method of recognizing and apprehending the very object of the meditation, that is, the God incarnate, the Lamb that bleeds "to the drop" to redeem the sinner.

Potocki knew both ancient histories, holy and classical, thoroughly, but he used each of them differently in his creative endeavor, and they in turn influenced different areas of his poetics with different intensity. The pagan antiquity is, on the one hand, the domain of Potocki the satirist and

¹⁹ I use the first edition of the poem, viz. W. Potocki, *Nowy zaciąg pod chorągiew starą tryumfującego Jezusa Syna Bożego. ... Krzyż albo żalosna historyja krwawej męki i niewinnej śmierci Chrystusa Pana, Zbawiciela świata, z Pism świętych ... ojczystym wyrażona rytmem* (Warszawa, 1698). I am talking about a seeming realization of the epic convention, because in reality the passage is a reference to the descriptiveness and content of the diptych by the young Potocki, *Tydzień stworzenia świata. Pan Bóg dobry, człowiek zły*, which is a biblical descriptive poem, a synopsis of the history of salvation composed by the then Arian author.

²⁰ See Pawlak, *Koncept*, p. 229.

²¹ The digressiveness of *Nowy zaciąg* has been noted in Aleksandra Glazer, "Nowy zaciąg Wacława Potockiego," pp. 68–69; see also M. Hanusiewicz, *Święte i zmysłowe w poezji religijnej polskiego baroku* (Lublin, 1998), p. 190, and Kasprzak-Obrębska, "Dwie późnobarokowe mesjady," pp. 248–249.

moralist. But also, from the point of view of artistic execution, Potocki, as an excellent imitator and adaptor, invests ancient anecdotes with domestic features that are so compelling that at times one is having doubts whether the story being told is really a literary domestication of an antique narrative, or maybe it does have some local source and is just parallel to the ancient story. In his other works, the poet is more apt to use moral examples provided by pagan antiquity, although he still frequently employs biblical examples in his moral teachings as well. The Bible, on the other hand, holds absolute sway over the creative imagination of the Łużna poet, and *Nowy zaciąg* is a text in which his receptivity to scriptural inspiration manifests itself in a wide range of effects.²² From imagery of the Scriptures, Potocki weaves a rich and lively fabric of his own analogies, similes, conceits, allegorical images, and metaphors. The biblical word penetrates those areas of Potocki's poetic invention and inspires his *ingenium* in places that remain inaccessible even to the moral beauty of classical antiquity.

This impact can be illustrated by how heavily metaphorized the narration of *Nowy zaciąg* is. The poet's imagination, so receptive to biblical imagery, is particularly active here, which manifests itself in the exceptional liveliness of his similes and dynamism of his metaphors. In Potocki's poetry, metaphor is the most telling test for existential intimacy, so to speak, of the poet with the tradition that inspires him. It is also the most adequate indication that lets us gauge the substantial dynamic of creative interaction in the process in which the poetic thought, filled with discursive content, permeates the sphere of sensual intuition, imbues it with its own cognition and then, using particular threads and layers of images that have already been interpreted, creates a language evoking the truth of the intellectual experience.

The narrator of *Nowy zaciąg* engages in dialogue with historical characters from both Testaments, but it is clearly the chronology of the evangelical account that constitutes the meditational center of the poem. It presents vividly the prophetic quality of events in the lives of patriarchs and prophets and construes the biblical history as being a universal paradigm of experiencing faith, at the same time—in the way of sermonic *moralisatio*—serving as a mirror that shows the true state of the conscience and heart of contemporary man.²³

Using a Christological key, Potocki interprets specific Old Testament episodes, events in the lives of historical figures of the chosen people as well as their relations with their families, friends, adversaries, or persecutors. It is

²² For more on Potocki's biblical imagination, see M. Hanusiewicz, "Bóg w świecie z ciała i krwi. Słowo biblijne w *Pieśniach nabożnych* Wacława Potockiego," *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, 49/1 (2001), pp. 33–48.

²³ The narration of *Nowy zaciąg* as dominated by *narratio* and *moralisatio* is discussed in Teusz, *Bolesna Muza*, p. 201.

worth noting that the order of his meditation follows the exegetic fourfold division of meanings in the Scriptures into historical (literal), moral, typological (allegorical), and anagogical. The constant movement of the poetic imagination that metaphorizes the exegesis breathes life into the biblical images, infusing them with realistic contemporary detail and expressing the author's apologetic, polemical, and didactic commitment. What makes *Nowy zaciąg* unique is that it creatively combines the rhetorical art with the poet's impressive biblical erudition, his profound spiritual formation, and his allegorical-figurative sensitivity.

Sarmatian authors of religious poetry represented a high level of religious culture, much higher than it is usually granted based on superficial observations and hasty judgments that all-too quickly solidify into popular, rather than scholarly, dogmas. Their reading of the Holy Scripture and their knowledge of how it was construed by the Church was mostly—to the exclusion of authors belonging to the clergy—amateur and not necessarily systematic, but compensated by the intellectual consistency and intensity with which they comprehended the truths of faith and experienced them existentially.

The context of the thematic sermon and its conventions leaning towards conceitism but employing the model of homiletic presentation of the Word of God, a context that has replaced the Virgilian model in Potocki's retelling of the Passion, reconciles all stylistic and emotional registers of *Nowy zaciąg* and justifies the diversity of generic inspiration that has left its mark on the artistic shape of the work. The poet's literary gestures show just how unusual forms the practical dimension of the dispute between the ancients and the moderns may take: the famous literary conservatism of the Łużna poet manifests itself in his refusal to cast the Gospels in the mold of the classical epic, and the non-classical genres of homiletics with their fast-flowing *flumina orationis* become the source of his poetic inspiration. The source Potocki draws from, therefore, is not the Hippocrene. It is the Jordan River.

Translated by Jan Hensel