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THE DEATH OF A CHILD IN OLD POLISH CULTURE

The inspiration for the article was the coffin portrait of the seven-month old Dorota Sabina Unrużanka displayed at the Vanitas Exhibition in the National Museum in Poznań, November 1996. It represented a big-eyed girl holding a feather in her hand, a symbol of the evanescent nature and fragility of life, being bidden farewell by her mother with the words of a dramatic inscription¹. Was there room for such a manifestation of emotions in a culture that, many researchers claim, was indifferent to the death of a child? Was it that in the societies in which every child died before reaching its first birthday and every second child did not live to the age of five the indifference was “an inevitable direct consequence of demographic situation of that time?”²

The cultural aspects of a child's death in early Poland were not subject to separate studies although the statements of scholars of various specialities scattered in publications form a rather sizeable bibliography. Their attitudes are described in the section devoted to the place of the child in a old Polish family. The research given below focuses on the following issues: the death of a child in religious concepts of life and death, the idea of a child's innocence and affirmation of an early death, patterns of behavior in the case

¹ J. Dziubkowska, *Vanitas. Portret trumienny na tle sarmackich obyczajów pogrzebowych (Vanitas. The Coffin Portrait against the Background of Sarmatian Funeral Customs)*. Catalogue of the exhibition, the National Museum in Poznań, November 1996 – February 1997, pp. 165–166, no. 182.

² P. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Paris 1973, pp. 57, 178. For mortality of children in the demographic aspect see I. Gieysztorowa, *Wstęp do demografii staropolskiej (Introduction to Old Polish Demography)*, Warszawa 1973, p. 257; eadem, *Rodzina staropolska w świetle badań demograficznych. Zarys problematyki (Old Polish Family in the Light of Demographic Studies. An Outline of the Problem)*, in: *Spółczesność staropolska. Studia i szkice*, ed. A. Wycański, vol. II, Warszawa 1970, p. 169.

of a child's death contained in pastoral and oratorical instructions, declarations of fathers preserved in poetic inscriptions³, memoirs and annals.

The term "child" used in the title has an ineluctable double meaning. It refers to the descendent — hence also to an adult. In the second meaning it defines a human being in an early phase of life. That duality of meaning was even more pronounced in the writing of the 16th–18th centuries, a period when the belief of human life being divided into three stages: youth, middle age, old age brought about the obscurity of the semantic difference between children and young people⁴. In consequence a certain ambiguity was an impediment in the analyses, especially of the oratorical material which, while dealing with instructions regarding parent–children relations dealt in generalities.

The Place of a Child in the Family

The classics of the subject including, among others, Jan Stanisław Bystroń, had no clear concept of the old Polish family, upbringing and education of children and the nature of parent–children ties. Bystroń ascribed two parental attitudes toward children: indifference on the one hand, and pampering on the other. Indifference because in the descriptions by Garczyński and Kitowicz he noted neglect of hygienic rules, unconcern in the choice of caretakers, nursemaids and nannies. Superficial devotion was to provide a facile justification for a child's death, that "God gave, God took it away", and a shallow joy at the certainty of salvation. The second, equally reprehensible attitude was the ostentatious manifestation of the attachment to children. Bystroń accepted the authoritative opinion of the Poznań voivode Stefan Garczyński: "Children here in our Poland (Lord knows) are disdained and treated with contempt, and are not properly cared for"⁵. Z. Kuchowicz followed the same tradition. He noted in the patriarchal structure of the family ties based on respect and fear. He saw the source of the strict treatment and lack of care for the children in the high

³ These problem are the object of my interests in its extraliterary aspect, as approached by A. Vincenz in *Treny jako pomnik życia rodzinnego — próba reinterpretacji* (*The Threnodies as a Monument of Family Life — a Tentative Reinterpretation*), in: Jan Kochanowski. *Interpretacje*, ed. J. Błoński, Kraków 1989, pp. 200–201.

⁴ A. Vincenz presents these issues in two articles analyzing the lexical problems encountered by 16th century writers in establishing a child's age. See A. Vincenz, *Treny jako pomnik*, pp. 200–201; *idem*, *O przemianach "modelu" dzieciństwa w literaturze wieku XVI w Małopolsce* (*Changes in the "Model" of Childhood in 16th Century Literature of Little Poland*), in: *Cracovia litterarum. Kultura umysłowa i literacka Krakowa i Małopolski w dobie Renesansu*, ed. T. Ulewicz, Kraków 1991, pp. 373–377.

⁵ J. S. Bystroń, *Dzieje obyczajów w dawnej Polsce* (*History of Customs in Old Poland*), vol. 2, *Wiek XVI–XVIII (16th–18th Centuries)*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 148–149.

natural increase (*sic!*). A child's death was treated with indifference, at times with a sigh of relief. The author did admit that the old Polish sources did report cases of concern for children's health, or of deep grief upon their loss, but in his attempt to give a "generalized picture" he rejected these as not typical⁶. However, it should be noted, that some works of literary and art historians searching for non-literary and non-artistic contexts of such works as Kochanowski's *Treny* (*Threnodies*) or of early tombstones for children, had no doubt that these could exist only in a society in which strong emotional ties united the family⁷.

The family model described by J. Bystroń and Z. Kuchowicz correspond with the model of a family constructed by P. Ariès. He described the typical traditional family as a group organized to amass wealth and preserve it, to safeguard life and honour. Emotional ties were unnessential for it to function. The children grew up outside the family, consequently it did not participate in the effort to socialize them and transmit values to them. The child remained anonymous within family, its death did not evoke deeper emotions, "because it was quickly replaced by another offspring". P. Ariès believes that this family model became obsolete at the close of the 17th century, and was replaced by a family organized around a child which could not be lost "unmourned and replaced by another". Ariès did not make the task easy for the critics and apologists by dispersing throughout his work information about the transitional period of the 16th–17th centuries, when the two models functioned side by side⁸. It seems paradoxical that P. Ariès' thoses, as the ones being capable of describing also the family model in Poland, were accepted by literary historians⁹ but criticized by historians. They were rejected e.g. by S. Grzybowski who studied children's gravestones and epitaphs and expressed the opinion that "the old Polish society had reached emotional maturity earlier than Western societies"¹⁰.

⁶ Z. Kuchowicz, *Obyczaje staropolskie XVII–XVIII wieku* (*Old Polish 17th–18th Century Customs*), Łódź 1977, pp. 156–161.

⁷ *Sprawozdanie Komisji do badania historii sztuki w Polsce PAU* (*Report of the Polish Learned Academy Commission for Research on the History of Art in Poland*), vol. 7, 1906, column CCCXIX; M. Kołakowska, *Nagrobki dziecięce w Polsce XVI i pierwszej połowy XVII wieku* (*Children's Gravestones in Poland of the 16th and the First Half of the 17th Centuries*), "Studia renesansowe", vol. 1, Wrocław 1956, pp. 235–236; S. Windakiewicz, *Jan Kochanowski*, Warszawa 1947, pp. 130–132; J. Pelc, *Jan Kochanowski. Szczyt Renesansu w literaturze polskiej* (*Jan Kochanowski. The High Renaissance in Polish Literature*), Warszawa 1980, pp. 96, 458; A. Nowicka-Jeżowa, *Sarmaci i śmierć. O staropolskiej poezji żałobnej* (*The Sarmatians and Death. Old Polish Funeral Poems*), Warszawa 1992, pp. 133–134.

⁸ P. Ariès, *L'enfant*, pp. 7–8, 29–53, 217–252, 308–311.

⁹ A. Vincenz, *Treny jako pomnik*, pp. 200–201, 209; idem, *O przemianach "modelu" dzieciństwa*, pp. 373–376; J. Partyka, *Rękopisy dworu szlacheckiego doby staropolskiej* (*Manuscripts from a Noble Manor of the Old Polish Days*), Warszawa 1995, pp. 88–90.

J. Tazbir and M. Bogucka have in their latest works abandoned the traditional view of the old Polish family and at the same time criticized the theses put forth by P. Ariès. J. Tazbir noted that sources also give reliable information regarding a family model in which one could find room for emotions, attachment, tenderness, joy at having a child. "It seems incredible that the centuries from the 16th to the 18th represented a period of exceptional indifference of mothers to their offspring". J. Tazbir is skeptical regarding the theses about the complete indifference of parents to the early death of children pointing to the evidence that refutes this thesis, namely the testimonies written in *miracula*, prayers for the children, poems devoted to the dead children (Twardowski, Miaskowski), the early appearance of gravestones for children in Poland¹¹. M. Bogucka is equally skeptical about the absence of emotional ties between parents and their offspring, noting that Polish children were not handed over to peasant wet nurses, but brought up at home, which must have created emotional family ties in a natural manner. Reconciling oneself with the death of a child did not indicate that pain was not felt. Bogucka quotes the questions posed by confessors to women's excessive revolt at a child's death, the epitaphs commemorating the children, the popularity of child portraits¹².

Concepts of Life and Death in the Religious Culture of the 16th–18th Centuries

Władysław Czaplński believed that the sense of death threatening all values of human life, the sense of the fragility and transience of human existence were one of the main factors that determined human awareness and behaviour in the period of the Polish baroque¹³. Death was deeply rooted

¹⁰ S. Grzybowski, *Skamieniałe żale. Staropolskie inskrypcje nagrobne (Petrieved Grief. Old Polish Gravestone Inscriptions)*, "Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce", vol. 35, 1990, p. 87. See J. Kolbuszewski, *Wiersze z cmentarza. O współczesnej epigrafice wierszowanej (Poems from the Cemetery. Contemporary Versified Epigraphs)*, Wrocław 1985, pp. 26–27. The remarks of the authors mentioned here also refer to another work of P. Ariès, *L'homme devant la mort*, Paris 1977 most specifically to the concept of "your death" presented therein.

¹¹ J. Tazbir, *Okrucieństwo w nowożytnej Europie (Cruelty in Modern Europe)*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 120–125.

¹² M. Bogucka, *The Lost World of the "Sarmatians". Custom as Regulator of Polish Social Life in Early Modern Times*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 63–65. For detailed works on the question of emotional ties in the family see M. Bogucka, *Rodzina w polskim mieście XVI–XVII wieku: wprowadzenie w problematykę (The Family in 16th–17th century Polish Towns: Introduction to the Subject)*, "Przegląd Historyczny", vol. 74, 1983, p. 3, pp. 495–509; S. Hołdys, *Więzi rodzinne w świetle miejskich testamentów z pierwszej połowy XVII wieku (Family Ties in the Light of Urban Testaments of the First Half of the 17th Century)*, "Studia Historyczne", vol. 29, 1986, pp. 347–359; K. Bartnicka, *Dziecko w świetle pamiętników i powieści polskiego Oświecenia (Child in the Light of Memoirs and Novels of the Polish Enlightenment)*, "Rozprawy z dziejów oświaty", vol. 25, 1992, pp. 37–86.

in the very essence of human life, it accompanied man everywhere and at all times. The experience of life in the shadow of death is documented in countless poems, homilies and moral teachings. "Death follows man closely at all times", wrote Jan Kochanowski in his *Epitafium Kosowi (Epitaph to Kos)*¹⁴. "Death takes great strides close behind us", affirmed Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński¹⁵. Human's way to death began at birth. "Soon as we are born on this earth/ We race each other to our death", wrote Klemens Bolesławiusz in his *Przeraźliwe echo trąby ostatecznej (The Terrible Echo of the Last Judgment Trumpet)*¹⁶. Similar sentiments were expressed by Wacław Potocki, "Today you are born, today death knows of you"¹⁷.

Life and death were just stages in human journey through space and time. In this journey death was not the end of existence but a transition to eternity. Hence, the frequent motif of a door in the symbolism of death and the motif of a road in the symbolism of life. Man living here and now has always been on the road. Fabian Birkowski called in one of his homilies — "This world is a track for us, not a home!". The profuse homiletic topic used a number of mild and soft metaphors which were intended to reconcile humans to their morality. For good men death would be the beginning of a new life: "the end of every misery and the beginning of all eternal comfort and happiness"¹⁸. In the work of the bishop of Łuck, Stanisław Witwicki we read, that death is the end "of our pilgrimage" and "the gate to happy eternity"¹⁹.

Such a concept of death gave rise to the teaching that there were two kinds of death — a good death of the virtuous, which opened the way to a

¹³ W. Czaplinski, *Kultura baroku w Polsce (Baroque Culture in Poland)*, in: *Pamiętnik X Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich w Lublinie. Referaty*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1968, pp. 203–211.

¹⁴ Quoted after J. Kochanowski, *Dziela polskie (Polish Works)*, ed. J. Krzyżanowski, vol. 1, Warszawa 1957, p. 149.

¹⁵ Fragment of the sonnet, *O krótkości i niepewności na świecie człowieka żywo* (*On the Brevity and Uncertainty of Man's Existence in this World*) quoted after M. Sęp Szarzyński, *Poezje (Poetry)*, ed. J.S. Gruchała, Kraków 1997, p. 69.

¹⁶ Quoted after *Poeci polskiego Baroku (Poets of the Polish Baroque)*, ed. J. Sokołowska, K. Żukowska, vol. 2, Warszawa 1968, p. 144. These convictions were expressed by parents who erected gravestones for their dead children. The gravestone erected for Sebastian, Teodor and Andrzej Janikowski who had died within three months in 1784, bore the inscription: "Death comes after those born, and a snake follows death even faster", *Corpus Inscriptionum Poloniae*, vol. 1, p. 4, Kielce 1983, ed. B. Trelińska, no. 236, p. 176.

¹⁷ W. Potocki, *Pieśni XXXV, O śmierci (Song 35, On Death)*, in: *Dziela*, ed. L. Kukulski, vol. 1, Warszawa 1987, p. 467.

¹⁸ P. Skarga, *Kazania przygodne y inne drobniejsze prace (Occasional Sermons and Other Shorter Works)*, 4th edition, Vilnius 1738, p. 115.

¹⁹ S. Witwicki, *O szczęśliwości doczesnej (On Happiness in Earthly Life)*, Warszawa 1779, p. 167 ff. First edition in 1685 entitled *Abrys szczęśliwości doczesnej (Outline of Happiness in Earthly Life)*.

better life in eternity, put an end to the misery of life on earth (P. Skarga), and “gave repose and joy after a long pilgrimage” (M. Jaśkiewicz). Preachers and priests also taught of the second death, the death of sinners, a death that comes suddenly and is the road leading to hell, punishment and damnation²⁰.

The Death of a Child

In the concept of two deaths, the child’s reiterated death occurred if the child died before being baptized. “No one without being baptized can be redeemed”, Skarga admonished and the infants threatened by death “have no other medicine but baptism” to attain redemption²¹. Basing himself on the decrees of the Council of Florence and the Council of Trent, Skarga described under what conditions a baptism is valid when performed by a layman on a child in danger of dying. The fact that, if no other person was available, one would allow for the rite of baptism to be performed by Jews and heretics (these were frequently doctors) “if only they were willing to do what the universal church does in administering the sacrament”, shows what great importance was attached to the early baptism of children²². Failure to baptize a child would make the parents culpable of a grave sin. For should the child die in the first days of life without being baptized or should the baptism be invalidated, “the child would not see God for all eternity”²³.

²⁰ P. Skarga, *Kazania przygodne*, pp. 114–115; M. Jaśkiewicz, *Polityk chrześcijański (The Christian Politician)*, Warszawa 1757, pp. 173–175. These questions were taken up by A. Nowicka-Jeżowa in: *Homo viator — mundus — mors. Medytacja eschatologiczna w literaturze XVI–XVIII wieku (Homo Viator — Mundus — Mors. Eschatological Meditations in 16th–18th Century Literature)*, Warszawa 1988, part 1–3; B. Rok, *Człowiek wobec śmierci w kulturze staropolskiej (Man in the Presence of Death in Old Polish Culture)*, Wrocław 1995; D. Künnstler-Langner, *Idea “Vanitas”, jej tradycje i toposy w poezji polskiego baroku (The Concept of “Vanitas” Its Traditions and Topos in the Poetry of the Polish Baroque)*, Toruń 1996; M. Wichowa, *Idea pogardy świata i nędzy człowieka w literaturze polskiego baroku (The Idea of the Scorn of the World and of Man’s Miserable Lot in the Literature of the Polish Baroque)*, in: *Literatura polskiego Baroku w kręgu idei*, ed. A. Nowicka-Jeżowa, M. Hanusiewicz, A. Karpiński, Lublin 1995, pp. 209–237.

²¹ P. Skarga, *Kazania o siedmiu sakramentach (Sermons on the Seven Sacraments)*, Vilnius 1737, pp. 593–600. First edition — Kraków 1618. E. Gliczner, *Książki o wychowaniu dzieci (Books on Child Upbringing)*, Kraków 1876, p. 26. See also *Katechizm rzymski z dekretu S. Konsilium Trydentyńskiego za rozkazem S. Piusa V papieża... wydany (Roman Catechism from the S. Decree of the Council of Trent issued by the order of Pope Pius V)*, Vilnius 1762, pp. 82–104 — first edition at the initiative of Primate S. Karnkowski in 1603.

²² M. Kurzeniecki, *Rozmowy kapelana abo teologa nadwornego z ojczytym panem chrześcijańskim (Conversation of the Chaplain or the Court Theologian with the Native Christian Lord)*, Vilnius 1752, pp. 202–210.

²³ *Nauka o spowiedzi i pokucie prawdziwej (Teaching about Confession and True Penitence)*, Lvov 1761, p. 75, first published in 1667.

Sanctuaries, specializing in the miracle of the resurrection of dead infants so that they could be baptized described by P. Ariès were unknown in Poland. However, fear of a child being doomed to eternal damnation dictated specific behaviour during birth if the experience of the present indicated that the child's life was in danger. Marcin Nowakowski, the vicar of Jasło, instructed peasants that any "part of the little body" should be sprinkled with water during the birth. Should the mother die in childbirth the newborn child should be freed by cutting the umbilical cord and baptized. The vicar went even further in his instructions, recommending that "if it [the birth — H. Ż.—K.] be premature, a hog must be slaughtered and the infant placed in its warm bowels until the proper time comes". If a countryman doubted that this practice would work, Nowakowski affirmed that it had been effective for a long time saving "the soul and life"²⁴.

Parents were also concerned that their newborn be absolved of the original sin by an early baptism. Waiting for a happy outcome of his wife's successive pregnancy, the Polish King John III Sobieski wrote in a letter dated July 30, 1667 from Lvov: "Now bless him and offer him to the Holy Virgin and the two St. Johns, St. Joseph, St. Jacques and other patrons and the Lord's saints, praying that God will allow him to be washed of the original sin"²⁵. Jan Poczobut Odlanicki lamented over the prematurely born daughter, "who without being baptized had to descend to the under world dungeon"²⁶.

Preachers and moralists related the reiterated death to the problem of abuse of pregnant women. In a sermon delivered on Annunciation Day, Szymon Starowolski called for special protection and respect for pregnant women. Any behaviour that could cause a miscarriage or a still birth lay a heavy sin upon the conscience of husbands' and fathers' — "for sending innocent souls to eternal damnation". His list of reprehensible misdeeds included beatings of pregnant women as well as exceedingly heavy housework and "unbecoming dancing"²⁷. Starowolski forewarned the

²⁴ M. Nowakowski, *Koleđa duchowna parafianom od pasterzów dla wygody wszystkich od jednego odprawiona* (A Spiritual Carol Performed by Shepherds to Comfort All for the One), Kraków 1753, p. 112. These methods, used to protect and increase the survival of premature babies, are found in the life of Agnieszka Wężykówna, born circa 1621, who died at the age of 22 as a Carmelite nun. F. Jaroszewicz, *Matka świętych Polska* (Mother of Saints — Poland), Kraków 1767, p. 173. Adam Matuszewicz, son of Marcin, who was born prematurely, was also wrapped in pork fat, see M. Matuszewicz, *Diariusz życia mego* (A Diary of My Life), ed. B. Królikowski, vol. 2, Warszawa 1986, p. 21.

²⁵ J. Sobieski, *Listy do Marysienki* (Letters to Marysienka), ed. L. Kukulski, Warszawa 1970, p. 203.

²⁶ J.W. Poczobut Odlanicki, *Pamiętnik 1640–1684* (Memoirs, 1640–1684), ed. A. Rachuba, Warszawa 1987, p. 320.

women who caused abortions and persons assisting them of the awaiting Judgment of the Lord and torments of hell that would be more severe “than if they had killed an adult. For in that case only the body would perish while the soul could be saved. But after they destroyed the soul how would they dare to stand before the Just Judge”²⁸. The *summae* of confessions, these exceptionally detailed and casuistic, never failed to speak of the beating of a woman and of excessive hard labor imposed upon her that caused the child’s death “in body and soul”. The anonymous work of a Jesuit, *Nauka o spowiedzi i pokucie prawdziwej* (*Teaching about Confession and True Repentance*) listed as sins against the fifth commandments “the effort to lose children, or to injure the foetus, or contaminate the birth by using drugs or magic or by hitting and pushing the pregnant woman or by taking other measures”²⁹.

The Idea of a Child’s Innocence and the Affirmation of an Early Death

A child absolved of the stigma of original sin entered a period of innocence. A. Vincenz expressed the view that the idea of a child’s innocence first emerged at the close of the 16th century as a result of the Holy Innocents cult³⁰. This opinion does not seem correct. The oldest source known to me where this idea was put forth was the treatise by Erazm Gliczner which appeared in 1558³¹. The passage that spoke of the fact that baptism heals the infant of all marks of the original sin was clearly polemical in nature and directed against the “drollery of anabaptists”. This idea was developed by scores of sermons delivered by preachers in the 17th and 18th centuries. Szymon Starowolski instructed that “new born children have no bodily desires and have no knowledge of a sin”. That is why, he believed, angels were given the form of children in the tradition of Christian iconography³². One hundred years later Rev. Józef Legowicz wrote that children “are like a young scion grafted upon Jesus Christ by baptism”, untainted by

²⁷ Jan Poczobut Odlanicki considered the “unnecessary” dance the cause of the premature birth of his stillborn son. This was the sixth death of a child in his experience, J. Poczobut Odlanicki, *op. cit.*, p. 322, dated August 29, 1677.

²⁸ S. Starowolski, *Wieniec niewiedniejący Przczystej P. Maryjej zamykający w sobie kazania na wszystkie jej święta doroczne* (*The Unwithered Wreath of the Pure Virgin Mary that Contains Sermons on All Her Annual Holidays*), Kraków 1649, p. 96; E. Gliczner, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

²⁹ *Nauka o Spowiedzi* (*Lesson about Confession*), p. 40; M. Nowakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 562.

³⁰ A. Vincenz, *Trety jako pomnik*, p. 205.

³¹ E. Gliczner, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

³² S. Starowolski, *Świątnica pańska zamykająca w sobie kazania na uroczystości świąt całego roku* (*Book of the Holy Days of Our Lord Containing Sermons for Holiday Festivities for the Entire Year*), Kraków 1682, p. 564.

sin³³. Thus, if a child died in a state of innocence in the first months or years of life, it was certain that it attained salvation.

The idea of a child's innocence, not without Kochanowski's influence, became a part of *consolatio*—consolation that flowed from the inscriptions on gravestones devoted to children. Kochanowski's couplet from his *Epitafium dziecięciu (An Epitaph for a Child)* "Father, no need for you to cry/ My innocence raised me to heaven so high" appears in various forms on gravestones devoted to children to this day³⁴. The conviction that a dead child attains salvation was not an empty expression of solicitude masking a lack of emotion toward the offspring as J. S. Bystron would have it³⁵. Belief in salvation had a profound psychological significance in a period when eschatological fears and belief in the omnipresence of Satan formed the consciousness and were an essential element of the emotional culture. It was not merely a trivialized crumb of theological science as it seemed to be during the de-Christianization of the 20th century³⁶.

Affirmation of an early death rose from the conviction of the innocence of a child. We discover it in the Old Polish texts of a wide range of provenience and in a twofold aspect. On the one hand, it coincided with the attitude of contempt for life and existence as a chain of hardship, toil, suffering and insecurity. An early death was a reward without deserts. Prince Jan Kazimierz who died in his "first diapers" speaks of liberation from life on earth in a poem by Grochowski: liberation "from the body's weak tempers/ from tears and near constant whimpers"³⁷. A Jesuit Marcin Kurzeniecki, spoke in a similar spirit. The Lord takes children away to protect them from the hardships of life, though "He is not beholden to such compassion"³⁸. The second aspect of the affirmation of an early death was

³³ J. Legowicz, *Obowiązki człowieka chrześcijanina i obywatela (Duties of a Christian and a Citizen)*, Vilnius 1781, p. 33.

³⁴ J. Kochanowski, *Dzieła polskie*, vol. 2, p. 163; J. Kobuszeński, *op. cit.*, pp. 113–114; Stanisław Grochowski quoted these lines almost literally as a consolation to the parents, putting them in the mouth of Jan Kazimierz. Vasa who died in infancy in 1608, see S. Grochowski, *Cień królewiców. Jana Kazimierza syna Króla j.m. w pierwszych pieluszkach zmarłego na wrychlonej śmierci i pogrzeb tegoż dziecięcia (The Shade of the Prince John Casimir, Son of the King, His Royal Highness, Who Died in His First Diapers, on His Hasty Death and the Funeral of the Child)*, K.J. Turowski, Kraków 1859, p. 56.

³⁵ J. S. Bystron, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

³⁶ See K. Górski, *Religijność sarmatyzmu a kwietyzm (Religiousness of the Sarmatians and Quietism)*, "Teksty" 1974, no. 4, pp. 66; C. Hernas, *Barok (The Baroque)*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 16–22; S. Grzybowski, *Strach w XVI w.: nowe wzorce osobowe (Fear in the 16th Century: New Personality Traits)*, "Społeczeństwo staropolskie", vol. 1, Warszawa 1976, pp. 128, 139; J. Delumeau, *La peur dans l'Occident, XVI–XVIII ss.*, Paris 1978.

³⁷ S. Grochowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 54–55.

³⁸ M. Kurzeniecki, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

derived from an attitude closely related to the Manichean concept of the world. An early death protected one from falling into sin. In many examples, a desire for the death of a child before it sins and commits a transgression against God, was placed in the mouths of pious mothers. A Jesuit, Stefan Wielowiejski, quotes a parable as “spiritual fodder” in his 1735 *Nowe żywoty świętych* (*New Lives of the Saints*) taken from the life of St. Louis. “This is what the pious Mother used to say to the little St. Louis, king of France: I would rather see thou on a bier, my son, than I should watch thou offend God with some mortal transgression”³⁹. There is an evidence from domestic tradition about Elżbieta Sieniawska (née Gostomska) who offered her daughter Zofia, later a Benedictine nun) before the painting of the Virgin Mary in Sierpc, famous for its miracles. The mother’s prayer contained the supplication: “Were this child to be evil in the eyes of God, may God take it from this world in its young age”⁴⁰.

In the context of these convictions, Idzi Madejski, a prolific preacher of the Saxon period, was able to formulate a radical view that justified the death of a child: a child dies “to prevent the spread of evil”⁴¹. Mikołaj Jaśkiewicz, a missionary of the St. John’s Collegiate in Warsaw asked Christian parents to reflect on the attitude he had discovered in the ancient tradition: “the greatest gift of gods is when they mete out death to children”⁴².

Standards of Conduct toward a Child’s Death in the Teachings of Preachers

Piotr Skarga included in his *Kazania przygodne* (*Occasional Sermons*) examples of funeral orations whose aim was to disseminate good standards of behaviour at funerals. Skarga taught that weeping for the dead was a duty

³⁹ S. Wielowiejski, *Nowe żywoty świętych* (*New Lives of Saints*), Kalisz 1738, part III, p. 162.

⁴⁰ F. Jaroszewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 531. More about this in the Benedictine tradition see: *Świątobliwe życie przewielebnej Jej Mści Panny Zofiej z Granowa Sieniawskiej* (*The Sainly Life of the Most Reverend Honourable Maiden Zofia of Granowo Sieniawska*), ed. J. Gajkowski, Kraków 1911, p. 9. That was the sense of the apocryphal story about the alleged wish expressed by Queen Cecylia Renata in a conversation with Jerzy Ossoliński, that her son, Prince Sigismund Casimir “would better leave this world in an early death”, before he finds himself in the care of Adam Kazanowski. See A. J. Radziwiłł, *Pamiętnik o dziejach w Polsce* (*Memoir on Events in Poland*), translated by A. Przyboś, R. Żelewski, vol. 3, Warszawa 1980, p. 49. Affirmation of an early death is also to be found in many gravestone inscriptions, as well as on the grave tablet in the parochial church of Żydaczów (engraved about 1581), commemorating the three little Daniłowicz children: “It is now ours the heaven we sought let those desire worldly life who are condemned to hell”, *Sprawozdania Komisji do badania historii sztuki w Polsce PAU* (*Report of the Polish Learned Academy Commission for Research on the History of Art in Poland*), column CCCXIC.

⁴¹ I. Madejski, *Kazania na niedziele całego roku* (*Sermons for Sundays of the Whole Year*), Warszawa 1758, pp. 398–400.

⁴² M. Jaśkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

of every Christian. He held weeping and grief to be natural, particularly when caused by death of a relative. "By weeping we give evidence and thankfulness that the deceased was useful, good and necessary to us". However, the mourners should display a certain moderation, for death is inescapable and irreversible and making one's peace with it reconciles us with God — "it is useless to grieve over what cannot come back". By moderating our mourning and grief we express the hope that the deceased "lives a better life than before". Skarga pointed to the uncalled-for lack of restraint in the families as in the case of "some parents when their child dies or wives grieving beyond measure for their husbands and husbands for their wives". To parents lamenting over the death of their child he surprisingly quoted the *Book of Samuel II* (12, 15–23) on the behaviour of King David in reaction to the illness and death of his son born of Bathsheba. "David therefore besought God for the child: and David fasted and went in, and lay all night upon the earth... neither did he eat bread..." But when David learned that his son was dead, he "arose from the earth... and required, they (his servants) set bread before him and he did eat... While the child lived I fasted and wept for I thought, who can tell, perhaps God will give him to me, and the child may live?"⁴³ The dissonance between the teaching and the example illustrating it will appear in the writings of many authors.

Skarga's description of the standard behaviour in the event of death of a relative respecting the basic rules of psychology were recommended by the successive generations of preachers. Writing in the 18th century, M. Jaśkiewicz advised his readers, "I don't claim that you should look with a dry eye upon the loss death of children, but I do disapprove of constant complaints and weeping, for that is not human behaviour". Grief and pain are suitable for parents, but it is the duty of Christians to moderate their emotions. Parents err when they consider the death of a child as grave injury. Uncontrolled grief disguised objectionable attachment to created objects and unawareness of one's own mortality. "Mortal children must be born" of mortal parents⁴⁴.

The teachings of preachers must have, by their very nature, put forth generalized standards of behaviour. However standards of behaviour concerning specific parents are found in biographic texts written for parentic reasons, to teach and moralize. They were remote from the reasoned reticence of Skarga whose purpose was to reconcile nature with a certain cultural standard. The tradition of Old Polish religious biography is com-

⁴³ P. Skarga, *Kazania przygodne*, pp. 109–111.

⁴⁴ M. Jaśkiewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–28.

prised in the work *Matka świętych Polska (Mother of Saints — Poland)* by Florian Jaroszewicz; the author describes reactions to the death of children in lives of the saintly women — Katarzyna (née Maciejowska) Wapowska, Elżbieta (née Gastomska) Sieniawska and Zofia Tomicka from Tylice. It did not however, constitute the element of a model of a saintly mother, for it is not found in the life of Zofia (née Kostka) Ostrogska, wife of the voivode of Volhynia. The object of praise of biographers, for Jaroszewicz was only a compiler, was the attitude arising from religious motives as exemplified by Job, that is the acceptance of a child's death as the will of God and coming to terms with it. Yet always at the price of "taming the nature" which is inclined to give into despair.

In the life of Zofia Tomicka Jaroszewicz devoted the greatest amount of space to the reaction of a mother to her child's death, for he had at his disposal Zofia's extensive biography set down by the Jesuit, Stanisław Brzechwa, and published in 1644⁴⁵. Zofia Tomicka lost four of her five children. Most poignant was the death of Alojzy, described as a child of the "finest qualities, beautiful manners, pleasing and witty", as well as innocent and saintly. "Overcoming her nature" the mother accompanied her son in his agony, saying prayers that were rather more suitable for a dying adult. When he died "she closed his eyes herself". The hysterical fear of guilt and damnation found expression in a strange story about how the child's soul went to heaven after having undergone three weeks of punishment in purgatory. Katarzyna Wapowska, wife of a castellan of Przemyśl, took an attitude of reconciliation with God's will upon the death of her husband and children. "The Lord gave, the Lord took at his will, blessed be his name". Elżbieta Sieniawska, though "a grieving mother" had "subdued her sorrow with an exceptional fortitude" after the death of her daughter Elżbieta, who died shortly after taking vows as a Benedictine nun in Chełmno. The next deaths of her children Anna and Hieronim she faced with "a brave heart and a cheerful face before God". This was not a typical reaction for the remark was accompanied with the observation: "with admiration of truly everyone", as if the reader could have doubted the veracity of the account⁴⁶. One could, however, quote Kochanowski's words from *Threnody XVII*, "Whoever laughs in pain/ has to be insane".

⁴⁵ S. Brzechwa, *Wzór i wizerunek świętej i dziwnej pobożności to jest życie i śmierć Zofii z Tylic Tomickiej (An Example and Picture of an Uncommon Piety, that is the Life and Death of Zofia of Tylice Tomicka)*, Toruń 1644.

⁴⁶ F. Jaroszewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 83, 452, 525.

“The Laws... Full of Spite” — the Fathers Declarations on the Subject of a Child’s Death

People were reconciled with their mortality. One expected however, a certain order in nature, expected that death would come after full life, comprising childhood, maturity and old age. A child, descendant and heir, was expected to be a link in the repeating chain of generations, while inheriting the virtues and the fame of his ancestors, as well as their wealth, and having reached maturity it should pass these values on to descendants. In this established order, the death of an offspring should occur after the death of its parents. Maciej Vorbek Lettow furnished every birth of his child with the silent prayer, “May the Lord in heaven bestow liberal blessing on him, that he may grow for the glory in His holy service to the fatherland, for our joy and when the Lord lets us live to an old age, for our support”⁴⁷. J. Poczobut Odlanicki did likewise, “May the Lord bestow His blessing increasing him [the child — H. Ż.-K.] in all things, preserving him in good health for His glory, support of the fatherland and our joy”⁴⁸.

This repeated and foreseen order of the world imparted a sense of security. Death violated the order of nature by taking away the child during the life of its parents. For a poet Waław Potocki, who survived all his children, this was the legacy of Adam and Eve who had to “whine over their sons’ rather than their own death”. But it is “the universal privilege of nature, that usually must die first who was first born”⁴⁹.

Everything that could be said in a dialogue between the father and the spiritual authorities at the grave of a child was essentially said by Jan Kochanowski. In his *Przy pogrzebie rzecz (An Oration at a Funeral)* written about 1577 on the death of his elder brother Kacper, which S. Grzeszczuk considers to be an intellectual conspectus to the *Threnodies*, Kochanowski rejected the idea of rationalizing pain and despair upon the death of a dear person. “It is difficult to fight one’s nature, for a human heart is not made of stone or iron that affliction and sorrow cannot touch, but it is of the same blood as man and of the same flesh that is created to feel joy and cheer in the same way as misfortune and misadventure must

⁴⁷ M. Vorbek Lettow, *Skarbnica pamięci. Pamiętnik lekarza króla Władysława IV (A Treasury of Remembrance. Memoir of the Physician of King Ladislaus IV Vasa)*, ed. E. Galos, F. Mincer, Wrocław 1968, pp. 62, 64, 67.

⁴⁸ J. Poczobut Odlanicki, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁴⁹ W. Potocki, *Dzieła (Works)*, pp. 450–451. On one of the gravestones devoted to his son Stefan who died at the age of 22.

cause him distress"⁵⁰. The orators of the next century, who introduced these words into funeral orations, did not realize that they were aimed against the rationalization of behaviour that stemmed from the stoic and not from the Christian tradition⁵¹. In the *Threnodies* Kochanowski created a memorial for his dead daughter and breaking with the convention of his times gave vent to his love to the child and to his despair at its loss. This manifestation of emotions for the child established a literary and cultural model. The readers and imitators of the *Threnodies* also in this case failed to notice their complexity; the poet's philosophical and aesthetic dilemmas were unknown to them. These "noble rustics", as W. Hartlieb called the first generation of readers of the *Threnodies*, followed Jan Januszowski, who wrote, "I discover the father's emotion toward children in a measure which I find no one could or would express better". The lines from the *Threnodies* began soon to adorn the gravestones of children in the form of unscribed quotations and paraphrases⁵².

In his *Epitafium dziecięciu* (*An Epitaph to a Child*) Jan Kochanowski expressed yet another sentiment related to the death of a child, "A father recently, now there is no one to call/ me that name. I am bereft, death has devoured all". The epigram is probably, unrelated to the poet's personal experience. It is rather a generalized observation on the experience of men deprived of the attribute of fatherhood who are only left with a memory of their dead children⁵³. We may add to the dispute between literary historians whether Kochanowski was a codifier of family tradition (S. Winda-kiewicz) or whether he created it (A. Vincenz). The opinion put forth by

⁵⁰ J. Kochanowski, *Dzieła polskie*, vol. 2, p. 245; J. Pełc, *Jan Kochanowski*, pp. 443–444, 477; S. Grzeszczuk, "Przy pogrzebie rzecz" — konspekt intelektualny "Trenów" ("Funeral Oration" — An Intellectual Conspectus of the "Threnodies"), in: *Jan Kochanowski. Interpretacje*, pp. 130–145.

⁵¹ J. Tyszkiewicz, *Mowa... na żałobnym akcie J.W. JMści Pana Krzysztofa Sapiehy wojewodzica wileńskiego* (*Oration... at the Funeral Service of His Lordship Krzysztof Sapieha, son of the Voivode of Vilnius*), in: J. Danajkiewicz–Ostrowski, *Swada polska*, part IV, Lublin 1745, pp. 40–42.

⁵² F. Faleński, *Treny Jana Kochanowskiego* (*Jan Kochanowski, Threnodies*), Warszawa 1867, pp. 22–46; M. Hartlieb, *Nagrobek Urszulki. Studium o genezie i budowie "Trenów" Jana Kochanowskiego* (*Urszulka's Gravestone. A Study of the Genesis and structure of Jan Kochanowski, Threnodies*), Kraków 1927, pp. 3–54; J. Pełc, *Jan Kochanowski w tradycjach literatury polskiej od XVI do połowy XVIII w.* (*Jan Kochanowski in the Traditions of Polish Literature, from the 16th to the mid 18th Centuries*), Warszawa 1965, pp. 177–186; *Jan Kochanowski. Szczyt Renesansu*, pp. 434–458. The cycle of compositions commemorating the death of Maryanna Twardowska represents an example of the literary tradition of *Threnodies* by Jan Kochanowski. It was written by Samuel of Skrzypna Twardowski, *Maryannie Twardowskiej, wdzięcznej dziecinie, jedyńacze swojej ojciec napisał* (*To Maryanna Twardowska, the Sweet and Only Child, written by Her Father*), see M. Włodarski, *Barokowa poezja epicedialna. Analizy* (*Baroque Epicedial Poetry. Analyses*), Kraków 1993, pp. 51–90, 226–227.

⁵³ J. Kochanowski, *Dzieła*, vol. 1, p. 166.

S. Grzybowski contended quite forcefully that the *Threnodies* were preceded by the longlasting tradition of preserving a child's memory in gravestones and epitaphs⁵⁴.

The death of a child attracted the attention of authors who came after Kochanowski. They were not by any means reticent in their expressions as recommended by preachers. Writing in his *Czwartak* (*Quartet*), a piece on the four misfortunes that affect man most painfully, Daniel Naborowski names a child's death in the first place: "Burying one's child, this of the four, is most distressing on that score"⁵⁵. Just as in the 16th century Kochanowski manifested in the *Threnodies* the right of a father to mourn his lost child, so was he echoed in the centuries that followed by others who understood it as a natural human response; the greater the love of a child the stronger the reaction. Jan Tyszkiewicz, voievode of Troki, said in an oration delivered at the funeral of Krzysztof Sapieha, son of the Vilnius voievode, who though as an adult nevertheless died before his father: "At whatever age and no matter how, our dear friends depart, they cannot pass without grief, without compassion". Love of children is *amor amorum* and thus greater the pain and despair upon their loss⁵⁶. Stanisław Morsztyn, voievode of Sandomierz who lost two grown children — Teresa and Jan — in 1698, admitted, everything loses its sense "when love suffers, when our children are taken from us". Not much, or absolutely nothing can compare with the strength and power of love "which nature has molded toward children"⁵⁷. Tormented with personal tragedies, finding no consolation, Waław Potocki defied God with this rebellious challenge, "Save, or first close the parent's eyes"⁵⁸.

Family sources dealing with the death of a child are mostly memoirs and annals written for private, family purposes. Deaths of children were recorded on the pages of memoirs by, among others, M. Vorbek Lettow, Jan Cedrowski (both Protestants), J. Poczobut Odlanicki, Stanisław Wierzbowski, starost of Łęczycza, M. Matuszewicz,

⁵⁴ S. Grzybowski, *Skamieniałe zale*, p. 84.

⁵⁵ D. Naborowski, *Czwartak* (*Quartet*), in: *Poeci polskiego baroku*, vol. 2, p. 186.

⁵⁶ J. Tyszkiewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 40–42.

⁵⁷ S. Morsztyn, *Smutne zale po utraczonych dzieciach* (*Sad Grief at the Loss of Children*), in: *Poeci polskiego baroku*, vol. 2, pp. 114–115.

⁵⁸ W. Potocki, *Pieśń albo tren XLIII* (*A Song or Threnody XLIII*), in: *Dziela*, vol. 1, p. 531.

Tomasz Krzyżanowski, a burgher of Kraków⁵⁹. These sources are of immense significance for the present study, but not easy to interpret. The cool, objective, unemotional records of the death of relatives led to the supposition that a child's death evoked only indifference⁶⁰. M. Bogucka remarked that the accepted convention of keeping records did not indicate an absence of deeper emotions. The laconism of the records on the death of children, she believed, stemmed from "inexperience in expressing personal emotions" as well as from material circumstances in which the form of keeping records developed.

They were originally kept on the last empty pages of prayer books and the Bible where the space for a more extensive account was limited⁶¹. One may add to these doubts the question whether we err while seeking marks of emotions in the records found in memoirs and annals. The form of these records indicates that they were made for the benefit of information about the event, for the preservation of memory and not for the expression of emotions. Nonetheless, they remain a symbol of a sensibility to a child's death, an event that deserved to be remembered. In the area of documents recording private events it had nearly the highest priority, equal to that of a birth of a child.

In the period of Enlightenment we find finally a sentimental account of death, among others a description of the circumstances of the passing away of the 15-year-old Teresa Czartoryska, who died of burns. The account was written by her brother, Adam Jerzy, who gave a full description of the emotional reactions of parents including those that were not meant for him. Does this account prove that in the second half of the 18th century, a change had occurred in the attitude toward children or does it rather document a large change in the civilization, which also included the language and form of

⁵⁹ M. Vorbek Lettow, *op. cit.*, p. 62 ff.; J. Cedrowski, *Pamiętnik (Memoir)*, in: *Dwa pamiętniki z XVII wieku*, ed. A. Przyboś, Wrocław 1954, pp. 9–14; J. Poczubot Odlanicki, *op. cit.*, pp. 320–323; S. Wierzbowski, *Konnotata wypadków w domu i kraju zaszych od 1634 do 1689 r. (Connotations of Events at Home and in the Country that Took Place from 1634 to 1689)*, ed. J.K. Załuski, Leipzig 1858, pp. 221–223. It should be noted that Wierzbowski considering it worthy of remembrance recorded from the family tradition the births and deaths of distant cousins who had died in childhood before he himself was born; M. Matuszewicz, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 400–402. (The chronicle of births and deaths of children set down in 1726 by the memoirist's father), 815 (death of Józefek, the memoirist's son); T. Krzyżanowski, *Wspomnienia mieszczanina krakowskiego z lat 1768–1807 (Memoirs of a Krakow Burgher, 1768–1807)*, ed. W. Prokesch, Kraków 1900, pp. 28–44. This aspect of the 17th century annals concerning the Szymas, Opalinskis, Andrzej Muszyński is also described by J. Partyka, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–115. For the annal-memoir of Walenty Klichowski, the inhabitant of Sieradz, see B. Rok, *op. cit.*, pp. 103–104.

⁶⁰ J. Partyka, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–89.

⁶¹ M. Bogucka, *The Lost World of the "Sarmatians"*, pp. 63–65.

expressing emotions? Asking about the beginning of paternal emotions that were so different from its earliest manifestations, J. DeLumeau found that he could not give a satisfactory answer⁶².

The family was the natural social environment for a child. That is why “not one’s own” children were seldom noticed by the authors of the Old Polish period. Perhaps the earliest example of sensitivity to the death “of your child” was penned by Mikołaj Sę p S z a r z y ń s k i. Sę p devoted two subtle, discreet poems to Marcin Starzechowski, his friend’s son who died an infant on the second day of his life⁶³. Kasper M i e s z k o w s k i wrote several funeral poems after the death of his child and the children of relatives and friends. One of these was *Tren pocieszny na śmierć Zygmunta Rybskiego dziecinki małej krzesnego swego (Elegy of Consolation on the Death of Zygmunt Rybski, Little Child of Its Godfather)*. The poem, a part of the solace, contained a description of children’s heaven, perhaps the only one in the literature and writings of the period. The little boy made his home in a “tent of silver cloth”, whose only furnishing was a golden stool. Honey-bearing oak-trees grew around it. Three virtues seated in a golden cloister wove wreaths for the “new guests”. An angel instructed the boy that heaven is a place from which death had been banished and where God himself keeps weeping away and “wiped away the tears with his own hand”. The child, decked out in a wreath of lilies, was included in one of the heavenly choirs where he prayed for his parents⁶⁴. Many authors showed a livelier reaction, besides to their immediate family and circle of friends, to the death of royal children, although it seems to have been restricted to the children of the Vasas⁶⁵.

Conclusions

There was no single consolidated attitude toward the death of a child in the Old Polish period just as most assuredly there was not one model of family ties. In view of the large number of scattered and widely diversified sources, it is not possible to arrive at any kind of generalization regarding a child’s

⁶² A.J. Czartoryski, *Pamiętniki i memoriały polityczne 1776–1809 (Political Memoirs and Journals, 1776–1809)*, ed. J. Skowronek, Warszawa 1986, pp. 82–83.

⁶³ *Nagrobek Marcinowi Starzechowskiemu, dziecięciu jeno 30 godzin żywemu (Gravestone for Marcin Starzechowski, a Child Who Lived Only 30 Hours)*, in: M. Sę p S z a r z y ń s k i, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁶⁴ K. Miaskowski, *Zbiór rytmów (Collection of Rhythms)*, ed. A. Nowicka-Jeżowa, Warszawa 1995, pp. 306–311.

⁶⁵ P. Skarga, *Kazania przygodne*, p. 134; S. Grochowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 43, 54–57, 209; A.S. Radziwiłł, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 197, 290, 399, vol. 3, pp. 46–53, 266, 311, 326, 336; S. O ś w i e c i m, *Diariusz 1643–1651 (Diary, 1643–1651)*, *Scriptores rerum polonicarum*, vol. XIX, ed. W. Czermak, Kraków 1907, pp. 206–207.

death. But they certainly make us reject the theses that a child's death evoked only indifference, and cause us to be cautious and to seek wider contexts for the event. The death of a child gave rise to serious tension between nature and culture. In the statements presented above we can distinguish three ways of alleviating these tensions: reconciliation of nature and culture (S k a r - g a), repression of nature in conformity with the ascetic ideal (J a r o s z e - w i c z), respect of nature — the attitude of fathers and their parental disobedience to the teachings of the spiritual authorities.

(Translated by Krystyna Cękałska)