

## *Adam Mickiewicz in Search of Lithuanian National Identity*

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**Abstract.** Adam Mickiewicz's multicultural national identity, based on his claim *Sum gente lituanus, natione autem polonus*, was created over the several centuries that followed the Lithuanian Grand Duchy's formation of the union with the Polish kingdom. Thus, it is no surprise that his reception in the literatures of these respective countries became so complicated. It was not only the Lithuanians and Poles who strayed into fruitless arguments as to which country could lay more claim to him, but disputes also constantly arose even within the relevant societies: did he belong to their national literature or was he foreign to it? In Lithuania two alternative traditions of reception formed: one faction (Jonas Basanavičius, Jonas Aistis, Faustas Kirša) erased him from Lithuanian culture and national identity, the same way as it treated all of the Polonised Lithuanian nobility; while others (Antanas Baranauskas, Maironis, Motiejus Gustaitis, Sofija Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė, Vincas Krėvė, Stasys Šalkauskis, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas, Julijonas Lindė-Dobilas, Antanas Maceina, Petras Juodelis, Justinas Marcinkevičius, Vytautas Kubilius, etc.), supported a positive reception, honouring him as "a genius of the Lithuanian spirit". The article will demonstrate the impact of Mickiewicz's poetry on the conceptions of Lithuanian national identity presented by two Lithuanian cultural philosophers, Šalkauskis and Maceina, and will briefly discuss its more significant variations in Lithuanian romantic and neo-romantic literature. Referencing Mickiewicz's work reveals qualities of mysticism, syntheticism and Prometheanism in Lithuanian literature and in the concept of national identity itself. The problem of Mickiewicz as foreign to Lithuanians (being foreign in some aspects to Poles as well) and his incompatibility with any notions of 'purity' of national identity at this time encourages one to delve into varied regional cultural relationships and the openness and complications of national identity more deeply.

**Keywords:** national identity; neo-romanticism; cultural philosophy; the concept of Promethean culture; the conception of an East–West synthesis

*Mickiewicz's work is the source of our national idea  
(Herbačiauskas 1930: 335).*

*If Mickiewicz hadn't existed, perhaps our literature  
would have developed somewhat differently?  
(Martinaitis 1978: 133).*

The influence of the European Romantic, Polish and Lithuanian poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) on the formation of Lithuanian national identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is enormous. Mickiewicz's poems were recited during the joint uprisings of Lithuanians and Poles in 1831 and 1863 against the oppression of Tsarist Russia;<sup>1</sup> they became the most important poetic school for Polish and Lithuanian poets alike. Mickiewicz's significance was also confirmed by the fact that in 1987 Lithuanian dissidents held the first open meeting to protest against the Soviet occupation and to commemorate the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact at the Mickiewicz monument in Vilnius. The poet's homeland, the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth, which was established by the Union of Lublin in 1569 between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, was destroyed when the territory was divided by Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1795. Like most Lithuanian nobility, Mickiewicz understood his national identity heterogeneously (*sum gente lithuanus nationa autem polonus*), using the Polish language to glorify the pre-Christian past of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), to describe the beauty of its nature, and to express love for his homeland. Studying at Vilnius University, he became a famous poet and a leader of the Vilnius school of romanticism. In his article "O poezji romantycznej" (About Romantic Poetry, 1922) and in later texts, he described this school thus: it was the first to introduce the world of spirits into literature; in the works of its writers, the most important action takes place in the spirit world, while the visualised physical world and people are only their instruments. Thus, this school emerged as the opposite of the old Warsaw literary school.

Not only was the transcendence of the world important to the Romantics of the Vilnius school, but also the freedom of the country. Mickiewicz interpreted his homeland – the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth – as an inseparable marriage of the Lithuanian and the Polish nations (its beginning was symbolised by the marriage of Lithuanian Duke Jogaila and Polish Queen Jadvyga, and the powerful Jagiellonian dynasty that followed) and as the ideal of a union of nations to be pursued by warring countries in Europe in the future. He understood the history of the Great Duchy of Lithuania (uniting

<sup>1</sup> He was imprisoned by the tsarist government, exiled to Russia, and later escaped to Europe and lived in Paris like many of his contemporaries.

the powers of several nations) as similar to the past glory of Rome and Greece.<sup>2</sup> Realistically, and with great love and longing, the poet described the vanity and decline of the presently occupied nation in his poem “Pan Tadeusz” (1834),<sup>3</sup> written in emigration in Paris. In all his poetic works he also cherished the patriotic and even messianic hope that his multicultural country, which had suffered so much, would in the future be resurrected as Christ had been and could be an ideal for other conflicting European nations.

Nevertheless, his homeland was not destined to be resurrected. The patriotic intentions of Mickiewicz’s work paradoxically raised not only the Poles’ national consciousness, but also gave birth to a separatist Lithuanian patriotism (*litvomania*) that led both countries into military conflict for possession of Vilnius in 1919, when both sides were thinking in the same categories of nationalistic romanticism proposed by Mickiewicz (Kubilius 1993: 32). The unionistic national ideology that Mickiewicz expressed conformed less and less to historical reality and prompted constant disputes among his interpreters, allowing neither Lithuanians nor Poles to understand him completely. He was not only glorified as the greatest national poet of Poland or Lithuania, sometimes he was also interpreted as a stranger to their national literature. For example, Andrzej Niemojewski, in his book *Dawność a Mickiewicz* (Ancient Times and Mickiewicz, 1921), found Mickiewicz’s intellect utterly alien to Polish nature. According to Niemojewski, the original qualities of the Polish character find their adequate expression in the rationalism of Sniadecki’s philosophy, while Mickiewicz with his poem “Dziady” (All Souls’ Day) represents an entirely different, Lithuanian, way of thinking, because Lithuania is a country totally submerged in mysticism.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In his texts the uniqueness of the Lithuanian–Polish Commonwealth was determined by its geopolitical situation on the border between Western and Eastern worlds. It resulted, on the one hand, in the double historical experience of both the Polish *liberum veto* with Western tradition behind it, and Russian despotism, deriving from Eastern origins.

<sup>3</sup> Petras Juodelis described this poem of his as belonging to the genre of the burlesque, which spread in the 17th and 18th centuries as a parody of high-style heroic poems and expressed the triumph of poor society (Juodelis 1990: 70–102).

<sup>4</sup> Today this concept of a homogeneous national identity is subject to the criticism voiced by Czesław Miłosz (a descendant of GDL nobility such as Mickiewicz): “It seems that the contradiction between rational Poland and mystical Lithuania has been invented merely to do away with the phenomenon of Mickiewicz. Polish literature revealed incompetence to deal with it, so it became a burden to everybody and engendered a series of rebellions against that literature, starting from Slowacki up to Gombrowicz” (Miłosz 1996: 98).

In literature, the war of two countries for Vilnius became a war over Mickiewicz. It gave an impulse to the debates around Mickiewicz's national identity and various conceptions of his 'congeniality' or 'strangeness' in Lithuanian culture. The extreme view could be represented by Julijonas Lindė-Dobilas and Jonas Aistis. The former author overestimated the Lithuanian element in Mickiewicz at the cost of the multinational nature of his thought: "In spite of some Polish traces in the work of the greatest bard of our country, the Lithuanian element remains predominant." (Lindė-Dobilas 1996: 56) While the latter writer, hurt when Poland occupied Vilnius, underestimated the Lithuanian element in Mickiewicz as well as in the Lithuanian nobility in general: "As concerns Mickiewicz, we have been misled by his words *Litwa, ojczyzna moja* [Lithuania, my homeland]. We did not realise that it meant nothing more than a mere rhetorical figure. We lack the cultural tradition of our own nobility... they lived in a foreign culture and therefore were totally alien to Lithuanians" (Kossu-Aleksandravičius 1934: 3).

Despite their opposite assessments, Mickiewicz's worshippers dominated. His poetry written in Polish was admired by the greatest Lithuanian authors: "I like and adore our Mickiewicz. I just get a toothache, when I read his translations" (Vaižgantas 1924: 238). Mykolas Biržiška, who took the initiative in translating and publishing Mickiewicz's works, confessed that the Polish works of the poet became dear to him due to the particular "Lithuanian atmosphere" around them. Marija Pečkauskaitė's novel "Sename dvare" (On the Old Estate, 1922) can be considered a kind of cultural paraphrase of Pan Tadeusz, that is, as a poetic farewell to the Lithuanian estate. In the article "Mintys apie dailę" (Reflections on Art, 1910) she emphasises Mickiewicz's closeness to Lithuanian culture:

Our art is yet too immature to encourage predictions about future forms of expression of the national spirit in art. Nevertheless, we have a pattern for the expression of this Lithuanian spirit... in Mickiewicz. His work is Lithuanian in its very essence, and it does not matter whether the adopted material is Lithuanian, as in Valenrod, Gražyna, and the poem Pan Tadeusz, or altogether foreign, as in Farys or his lyrical poems. Earlier I've referred to some specific features, pertaining to the Lithuanian soul; all those are present in the absolute majority of his works. There is not the slightest trace of idle effects, pretentious looks or verbal noise; the expression seems to be extremely unsophisticated and laconic. Yet it strikes us with unusual power and emotional depth. It is charged with true resignation, submission to fate and to the will of our Lord (Pečkauskaitė 1910: 3).

Although educated Lithuanian people read Polish and Russian and although Mickiewicz's work was banned by tsarist censorship, he was mainly translated into Lithuanian by some 50 authors<sup>5</sup> (Kubilius 1983: 49–50). The earlier translations were weak; the best ones were published only in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by Mykolaitis-Putinas and Justinas Marcinkevičius.

What kind of poetry school formed after Mickiewicz and what was its impact on Lithuanian literature and culture? Two volumes of his *Poezje* were published, the first containing romances, ballads and other poems and published in 1922, the second a year later with the poem "Grażyna" and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> parts of "Dziady" (All Souls' Day) in 1923). "Sonety Krymskie" (Crimean Sonnets (1826), "Konrad Wallenrod" (1826) and "Pan Tadeusz" (1834) came later and had the greatest impact on the development of Lithuanian national consciousness and the culture. Mickiewicz stood against the tradition of classical genres and legitimised romanticist writing, where lyricism dominated or was mixed with improvisation, fantasy, prosaic historic storytelling, and drama. A liberal vision of a strong and free individual in a free country dominated in his poetry. For a long time, his lyrical poems consolidated an intimate and emotional-confessional speaking style of "look only with your heart into the heart of the other", as he put it in the poem *Romantyczność*. He gave the language of poetry an unprecedented musicality and visuality. His poems also mythologised the strong relation between man and his native land. He also presented pantheistic and idealistic philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Mickiewicz's works were meant not only for the individual's emancipation (or Prometheanism) or for philosophical sophistication, but for expressing man's service to the homeland and to God.

For Mickiewicz, absolute beauty was the homeland. A previously unseen address emerged in his poem "Pan Tadeusz": "Litwo, ojczyzna moja! ty jesteś jak zdrowie;/Ile cię trzeba cenić, ten tylko się dowie, // Kto cię stracił. Dziś piękność twą w całej ozdobie/Widzę i opisuję, bo tęsknię po Tobie"

<sup>5</sup> His first translator was by S. Daukantas, who translated fragments of the poem "Živilė" in 1822. "Konrad Wallenrod" was the most translated work (Ažukalnis-Zagurskis, M. Godlwwskis, J. Žilius-Jonija, M. Dagilis, Marcinkevičius). His poems were also translated by L. Jucevičius, E. Daukša, J. Anusevičius. Grażyna was translated by Žilius-Jonila, Marcinkevičius, fragments of "Dziady" by Kudirka and Marcinkevičius, "Crimean Sonnets" by Gustaitis, the poem "Pan Tadeusz" by Mykolaitis-Putinas, and Marcinkevičius.

<sup>6</sup> Mickiewicz's poetic school was itself based on M. Strykowski's *Chronicle*, consisting of folk songs and poetry by Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Friedrich Schiller and George Byron, as well as classical poetry written in Latin.

(Mickiewicz 1925: 7).<sup>7</sup> These words were repeated as a motto in Baranauskas, Vaičaitis, Maironis and many other Lithuanian writers' poems. Mickiewicz created a great history of the heroic Lithuanian pagan dukes, whom the bards glorified in old castles while priestesses kept fire for the gods in sacred forests. Old songs, fairy tales and legends that have survived in Lithuanian villages were revived in his poetry. The large forest, castle ruins and mounds emerge in it as witnesses of the nation's glorious past and symbols of its lost freedom. Readers of such poetry learned the history of their nation, experienced it sensitively, and began to be proud of it. Maironis, who created a foundation for Lithuanian lyrical poetry in his *Pavasario balsai* (The Voices of Spring, 1885) collection and became an icon of the Lithuanian national revival, as well as other poets, learned from Mickiewicz's poetry that literature can turn a voiceless nation into a historical subject. These poets also learned that the main purpose of this poetry was to describe the psychological identity of the national character and the ancient spirit of the Lithuanian. Vaižgantas called this simply "searching for diamonds". According to Vytautas Kubilius, "Until the end of the 19th century Mickiewicz's poetic works meant to Lithuanian literary consciousness approximately what the Bible meant to Protestant-born literature" (Kubilius 1999: 53). I think, that a similar role persisted into the 20th century, too, especially during the period of Soviet occupation.<sup>8</sup> In summary, it can be said that Mickiewicz initiated a deep tradition of national romanticism in both Polish and Lithuanian literature. However, this also had its limits, since according to critics the romantic idealism that came to Lithuanian poetry from Mickiewicz taught the homeland to poeticise, but not to analyse, Lithuanian literature. We have also noticed that his messianism appeared in his later books and was strictly rejected by all later Lithuanian interpreters.<sup>9</sup>

In this paper, I want to place greater focus on how much Mickiewicz meant for Lithuanian writers and their interpreters during the Neo-romantic period

<sup>7</sup> *Lithuania, my country! You are as good health: / How much one should prize you, he only can tell/ Who has lost you. Your beauty and splendour I view/And describe here today, for I long after you.* – trans. Marcel Weyland <https://www.scribd.com/document/254672488/Pan-Tadeusz-Po-Angielsku>

<sup>8</sup> "It is impossible to fully assess the role and impact of Adam Mickiewicz on our literature, and even more so on the Lithuanian mentality and national character. Until now, there is no Lithuanian prose writer and poet who has given as much to Lithuania as Mickiewicz" (Marcinkevičius: 1977.02.13).

<sup>9</sup> "The Messianic attitude reveals a truly terrifying aspect in the dialectics of religious and national ideas. Religious enthusiasm, merging with nationalist convictions, leads the nation directly to a dead end; that is, national oppression of all other nations by a single one" (Maceina 1994: 381).

of 1904–1940. Lithuanians, as was common for the majority of Central East European cultures at the start of modernism, tried to combine the styles of Modernism (symbolism, avant-garde) with folklore (in the Soviet period this tradition was extended). In this case the works of Mickiewicz helped Lithuanian writers and cultural theorists form their ideas of a modern Lithuanian style, or even a national identity.

Particularly attractive for Lithuanian writers seemed to be Mickiewicz's vision of a mythological Lithuania, "Mythologie lituanienne", as he named one chapter of *Les Slaves*, his book of lectures in French. In this book and poem "Dziady" ("All Souls' Day") he opened a mysterious archaic Lithuanian world in which spirits make appearances: exotic deities protect woods and rivers (all registered in Vilnius University history professor Lelewel's comprehensive lists), and human life is involved in a close pantheistic relationship with nature, permeated by the cosmic cycle, so that ancient songs and legends express intimate contact with the metaphysical origins of being.

Under the influence of Mickiewicz Lithuanian Neo-romantics (S. Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė, M. K. Čiurlionis, A. J. Herbačiauskas, S. Šalkauskis, V. Mykolaitis-Putinas, V. Krėvė, M. Pečkauskaitė, J. Tumas-Vaižgantas, B. Sruoga, V. Mačernis) and even the not quite 'true' Lithuanians, such as the French Symbolist Oscar Miłosz and his relative the Polish poet Czesław Miłosz, who was born in Lithuania and also studied at Vilnius University, revived the vision of "Mythologie lituanienne" in their works. According to these men, the mystical element prevails both in the Lithuanian national character, and in the culture, ancient beliefs and folk songs. For this reason Lithuanians have no epic, and a strong lyrical expression is characteristic of Lithuanian culture: "Lithuanians are a nation, doomed to lyricism", as summarised by Balys Sruoga. And he was not completely wrong, because even now Lithuanian poetry is better than the prose.

Herbačiauskas, Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė and other artists who studied in Krakow at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were affected by the *Młoda Polska* (Young Poland) movement. As Czesław Miłosz explains in support of Julian Krzyżanowski and other researchers, *Młoda Polska* was not only a modernist literature fashion, it was also a strong resistance to the domination of a scientific worldview (Positivism), which enclosed the individual in a circle of determinism and the darkness of reality. According to him, this is because the modernistic worldview and various imported elements were filled with the spirit of Polish romanticism (Miłosz 1996: 235). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Polish and Lithuanian modernists were working, wishing to give the Mickiewicz type of romanticism a new form. By taking part in a conflict between science and religion and looking for a place for the human being in them, in their own way the poets filled modernism with a spirit of romanticism

that was taken from Mickiewicz's vision of a mythical Lithuanian soul. "We are all called to serve only one idea – the revival of spirit... for the honour of the Creator" was what Herbačiauskas, the initiator of Lithuanian modernism and the editor of the first Lithuanian modernist journal *Gabija* (1907), claimed by using Mickiewicz as an example (Herbačiauskas 1992: 59).

This kind of spirit also filled Sofija Kymantaitė's book *Lietuvoje* (In Lithuania, 1910) as well as the majority of her husband M. K. Čiurlionis's paintings, which were presented in the first Lithuanian art exhibition in Vilnius in 1907. The creative genius of Mickiewicz was among the arguments for an uncompromising revision, to which Sofija Kymantaite-Čiurlionienė subjected national literature, selecting the most valuable works. In her book *In Lithuania* she advocates mystical symbolism as a method, which grants the most adequate expression of the soul of the nation and therefore is a model for modern Lithuanian literature; while realism is rejected as imitation of foreign tendencies. Mickiewicz's influence on this concept is indisputable. Her husband Čiurlionis, who while studying in Warsaw and Leipzig was influenced by Slovacky and Mickiewicz, after his return to Lithuania became preoccupied with the mystical and archaic as specific to his native country. Stasys Šalkauskis has noted a close connection between Čiurlionis's diary and the "The Great Improvisation" from Mickiewicz's "Dziady". The opposition, in which Mickiewicz set faith and feeling against reading glasses as the symbol of mind and rationalism, inspired Lithuanian neo-romantics to deify the spiritual origin of, and lyricism in, literature as manifested in folk songs. At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Lithuanian writers, approaching modernism as a revival of romanticism, elaborated the neo-romantic conception of artistic creation according to which mystical and romantic tendencies are responsible for the uniqueness of Lithuanian culture; thus national character is rather of a mystical, than a pragmatic or rational, nature. Mickiewicz was considered an authority by nearly all of the most eminent pioneers of Lithuanian modernism of that period (such as Motiejus Gustaitis, Vincas Krėvė, Vaižgantas, Pranas Augustaitis, J. A. Herbačiauskas, Mykolaitis-Putinas, Marija Pečkauskaitė, Lindė-Dobilas, Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Lithuanian literature and art the romantic idea dominated to bring art and religion together, comparing art to a sacred ritual or a sanctuary, and the character's internal conflict between personal freedom and servitude to God leading to Mickiewicz's "Dziady", and others of his works.<sup>10</sup> Mickiewicz inspired Lithuanian writers and intellectuals

<sup>10</sup> Oscar Miłosz and his relative Czesław Miłosz considered themselves to be the conscious successors of this tradition: "Unorthodox, sometimes even heretic



of the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to reflect on the transcendental origin of creative power. The transcendental imagination and symbolic style were considered an essential attribute of national identity. Such an approach prevailed in the romantic and neo-romantic tradition, which begins with Mickiewicz, and later on is powerfully expressed by Čiurlionis.<sup>11</sup> In this context the works of two philosophers of culture, Stasys Šalkauskis (1889–1941) and Antanas Maceina (1908–1987), were especially important.

The adept of the neo-Thomistic school, Stasys Šalkauskis, who received his degree in philosophy with a doctoral thesis on Vladimir Solovjov's notion of the World's soul at Freiburg University and who became the pioneer of Lithuanian philosophy of culture in his books *Sur le confins de deux mondes* (At the Crossroads of Two Worlds, Genève, 1919) and *Lietuvių tauta ir jos ugdymas* (The Lithuanian Nation and its Nurture, 1933).<sup>12</sup> Taking arguments from Mickiewicz's works (poetry, poems and the "Mythologie lituanienne" chapter in *Les Slaves, cours professé au Collège de France (1842–1844)*, etc.) he elaborated the conception of Lithuanian identity based on a synthesis of Western and Eastern cultures: "The ethnical core of Mickiewicz always remained unchangeable, that is, Lithuanian" (Šalkauskis 1924: 37). In Mickiewicz's work he found "the man of the West meets the man of the East" (in "Dziady" represented similarly to Konrad (the active Western Prometheus) and the priest Piotr (embodying the submissiveness of the Eastern Job)). For him Mickiewicz himself was the best example of such a synthesis: as "the successor of Western

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religious thinking can become very lively, speaking to the imagination... perhaps 'reaching for unorthodox writings' would help reach the gates of Ulro?" (Miłosz 1996: 171–172).

<sup>11</sup> In the article, written as late as 1948, Julius Greimas, a Lithuanian émigré who has contributed a great deal to the establishment of the Paris school of semiotics and published the book *Lietuvių mitologijos studijos* (Lithuanian Mythology Studies), also drew attention to the fact that Mickiewicz could serve for a particularly plausible approach to Lithuanian ethnic origins: "Wouldn't it make more sense to concentrate on the specific origins behind Lithuanian mysticism, as well as behind their natural and pantheistic perception of the world, instead of worrying about the Lithuanian origins of Mickiewicz and Miłosz or trying to find evidence for their love for Lithuania" (Greimas 1991: 226).

<sup>12</sup> A few of his articles were devoted to Mickiewicz in particular, such as "Adomo Mickevičiaus sielos drama gyvenimo filosofijos šviesoje" (The Spiritual Drama of Mickiewicz in Light of his Philosophy of Life) in *Pergalė*, 1990. No. 11) and "Poeto prometėjizmas ir istorinis Lietuvos likimas" (The Poet's Prometheism and the Historical Fate of Lithuania) in *Sietynas*, 1990, No.8, 57–70. However, in general his later studies merely elaborate the ideas of *Sur le confins de deux mondes*.

culture”, he bases his value on himself, although, on the other hand, being a son of the East “he reaches the most distant limits of an endless Universe and seeks to melt into infinity” (Šalkauskis 1995: 130). He considered the greatest value of Mickiewicz’s work to be the fact that in it Western man meets Eastern man. From all this, Šalkauskis created a future project for the Lithuanian nation: “He [Mickiewicz] had a natural instinct at the very core of his soul, which made him seek equilibrium between Eastern and Western elements and the synthesis of those two civilisations; and the inner self told him that Lithuanians are the people entrusted with that mission” (Šalkauskis 1995: 248). He linked this mission to the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.<sup>13</sup> According to Šalkauskis (1995), now the small modern nation of Lithuanian should have a special aptitude for cultural integration on the grounds of its national individuality.

Šalkauskis (1995) also declared “the aesthetic ideal of art in the service of beauty, beauty in the service of perfection of life”, which reminds us of Schiller’s claim that beauty will save the world. This idealistic theory declared beauty to be the absolute core of the entire being, not as the main aesthetic task of art: the writer is a medium who prophesies the spiritual beauty of human beings on the edge between the material and the transcendental worlds. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, “in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the consciousness of the artist is clearly messianic in its nature”; addressing himself to people he feels like “a new Redeemer” (Immermann), who brings them good News of reconciliation and has to pay for his own inadequacy” (Gadamer 1997: 10). The tradition of aesthetic messianism links Mickiewicz with Lithuanian neo-romantic literature, and also with Šalkauskis’s aesthetic theory, which still kept declaring eternal beauty and integration of culture and Christianity, as well as with Antanas Maceina’s conception of Promethean culture.

Antanas Maceina, who continued Šalkauskis’s neo-Thomistic tradition in the philosophy of culture, can be called a philosopher of Promethean culture. He found the best example of it in Mickiewicz’s “Dziady”: “The idea of Prometheus, which has persisted in human consciousness through the ages, found its proper and adequate expression in Mickiewicz’s works” (Maceina 1938: 666). According to Maceina, two features are characteristic

<sup>13</sup> “At that period of its history, pagan Lithuania became a safeguard both for the Christian West against the Golden Horde, on the one hand, and for the Christian East against the Teutonic Order, on the other hand. ... Fate summoned pagan Lithuanians to the avant-scène of history, and in return for their contribution assigned them a noble mission to synthesise those two civilisations they have so faithfully defended” (Šalkauskis 1995: 230).

of Promethean culture. First, it is aware of the ontological participation of the human being in a world created by God, and second, the natural human sense of pride that provokes rebellion against God. According to Maceina, the nature of Promethean culture is at its clearest in the scene of Konrad's 'Great Improvisation' in the poem "Dziady": rebellious Konrad is redeemed in the prayer of the priest Piotr, exemplifying the proper way to overcome the crisis in modern culture.

Maceina renewed Mickiewicz's rather complicated religious attitude. According to Maceina, the strong personality inevitably experiences two contrary feelings of equal strength: the human being is a lord on earth, though just a beggar in the eyes of God. Maceina claims that the Promethean kind of culture, which reached its peak from the Renaissance to Decadence, should return to the Christian tradition, which is able to inspire metaphysical hope and happiness for modern man on the journey into the night of history. The tragedy of Promethean culture springs from its pretence to be the final destination, instead of being the medium for man in the search for his happiness:

This renders man into an instrument of cultural production. Earlier the final destination of life coincided with the very human being, while the modern person is a mere instrument... Culture takes the place of man at the core of life... Promethean man repeats the fate of the real Prometheus. Having blocked his way to religion by his modern attitude, he chains himself to a Caucasus of his own imperfect culture... and finally becomes subjected to the irrevocable law of nature (Maceina 1938: 794).

Claiming the distinctive character of Lithuanian religious feeling, Maceina took his arguments from Mickiewicz's poetry:

Our religious feeling is not based on any philosophical conception of God. Like Mickiewicz's Konrad, we are deprived of an encounter with God through logical reasoning... as Mickiewicz says to us, real communication springs exclusively from our *encounter and natural feeling* of God... This God, directly perceived in experience, becomes *our God, a living God, a personal God*, whom we can worship (Maceina 1990: 562).

We arrive at the final conclusion that during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Mickiewicz functioned in Lithuanian literature and theoretical reflections on cultural uniqueness and national identity as an important argument. Thanks to his work, conceptions of mystical, synthetic and Promethean Lithuanian identity and culture exist. Thanks to Mickiewicz and his followers, whom we discussed, for a very long time Lithuanian artists realised that they live "on the

boundary of two worlds and are steadily affected by draughts from the East and from the West” (Kubilius 1983: 67). The romanticised ethnocentric stereotype of Lithuanian culture as the synthesis of Eastern and Western culture created by Šalkauskis, Juozas Girnius, and other writers was most influential and topical, but now is generally interpreted critically, for example Šalkauskis’s conception of the uniqueness of Lithuanian culture was criticised as being just another modification of Slavic messianism (Berenis 1993: 97). It received the harshest criticism from the Lithuanian exile, Yale University professor and poet, Tomas Venclova, because it creates a national anachronistic mythology lacking self-criticism:

Every nation, according to him [Juozas Girnius], has some defects, but it has virtues as well. However, the Lithuanians, living in a dangerous zone where the world of the Slavs confronts the German world, is the real golden mean: they don’t have their neighbour’s defects, only their virtues... Thus, the opposition raised by Juozas Girnius is essentially a simple one. The world of the Slavs is a kingdom of entropy; the German world is inhuman *Ordnung*, a sphere of lifeless automatism; the small Baltic world is rather the only piece of the Earth where there is still *anima naturaliter christianina*, which has basically been unchanged from the pagan times onwards. The human here creates good and only good, as naturally as a silkworm making silk (Venclova 2007: 291).

Mickiewicz is at the same time a national genius and a stranger showing us best how national culture can be expressed in different languages, and how the work of the individual writer does not affect national homogeneity. Mickiewicz’s poetry absorbed several national cultures and played an important role in the struggle of these cultures for freedom and national identity for about two hundred years. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mickiewicz’s as well as Miłosz’s books became very important again, since they helped create a new connection between the liberated peoples of Lithuania and Poland. Scholars started to discuss the common cultural history of both countries without nationalistic confrontation, seeking to understand better the complications of national identity. The history of the reception of Mickiewicz in Lithuanian culture is not only complicated but also very dynamic: romantic poetics and the tradition of mystic mythology, Western and Eastern cultural synthesis, and Prometheanism, which he inspired above all, are now being replaced by other themes, emphasising the openness of identity and the inseparability of links between different cultures.

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