

APOLLO NAŁĘCZ-KORZENIOWSKI AS A PLAYWRIGHT

Grzegorz Zych

The Jagiellonian University, Cracow

1. THE PLAYWRIGHT'S REAPPRAISAL OF HIS TIMES IN THE PLAYS HE WROTE IN THE 1850'S

Even those critics and literary historians who were Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's contemporaries often remarked on the unfriendly picture of the world that is painted in two of his comedies written in the 1850's: *Komedia (A Comedy)* [1855]¹ and *Dla milego grosza (For Dear Money's Sake)* [1859].²

In 1855 the critic Leopold Jakubowski – reviewing *Komedia (A Comedy)* – characterized Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's approach thus:

... why on earth does the dust of passion and time blind him to the majesty of beauty? Why on earth does a mind which approaches the world with scepticism [proceed to] stigmatize it with sarcasm and contempt? Although the title *A Comedy* neither announces nor promises anything great, is there anything that conveys human life more succinctly than the word "comedy"? Life that consists of actions inspired by greed, sensual cravings, impulses of pride and hubris – all of which are thwarted by the frailty of human existence. And is it not true that our noblest feelings, our dearest desires and our loftiest thoughts perish in our own hands before they can see the light of day? We mock ourselves, we ridicule ourselves and [we ridicule] our spirit in the never-ending comedy of life! Comedy! Comedy!³

In other words, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's play shows us "real comedy"⁴ – i.e. "the comedy of human existence"⁵ – which is a game of appearances and a conflict of interests that takes place in an atmosphere of gravity. Jakubowski rightly remarks that

¹ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski, *Komedia. Dramat we trzech aktach*. Ed. Tadeusz Mikulski. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1st ed., 1954.

² Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Dla milego grosza. Komedia w trzech aktach*. Ed. Roman Taborski, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964.

³ Leopold Jakubowski, "Komedia. Dramat przez Apollona Korzeniowskiego (drukowany w 'Bibliotece Warszawskiej' na rok 1855)". *Dziennik Warszawski* 1855, № 120, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, № 129, p. 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*

the sarcastic use of the word “comedy” in the title of the play serves to further heighten the uncongenial emotional atmosphere of this “drama”.⁶

The meaning of the title *Komedia. Dramat w trzech aktach* (*A Comedy. A drama in three acts*) was also called into question by the critic Fryderyk Henryk Lewestam, whose review in 1855 was not favourable towards Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. Lewestam found the title absurd and the play itself a disaster.⁷ He did not (or was unable to) distinguish Nałęcz-Korzeniowski’s “comedy” – which is not a traditional comedy of types or stock characters – from the plethora of contemporary comedies of manners (which all had a happy ending)⁸ and therefore refused to acknowledge it as a “high comedy” (*wysoka towarzyska komedia*),⁹ as in his opinion it is neither a comedy, nor a pure drama, but a mixture of various genres with a good measure of “tragedy of intrigue”, seasoned with pungent sarcasm.¹⁰ As we can see, Lewestam’s main problem was that he was unable to classify this unusual play as one that belonged to an established theatrical genre.

Some nineteenth-century literary historians also remarked on the vaguely disturbing emotional atmosphere that pervades both of these plays by Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. Leonard Sowiński, who was aware of the fact that they could by no means be classified as traditional comedies with stock characters, was the first to describe them as “dramas”. He also comments on the author’s mordant wit and “deadly” sarcasm:

His laughter is like a snarl which is followed by a vicious bite. He does not know how to deliver a mild rebuke, nor does he wish to. Human weaknesses, faults and crimes are all pilloried and condemned as being equally disgraceful.¹¹

For many decades textbooks on the history of Polish literature made very little mention of the plays written by Nałęcz-Korzeniowski and it was not until the 1950’s that anything changed in this regard. In 1956 Czesław Miłosz published an essay entitled *Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski* that praised *Komedia* (*A Comedy*) and *Dla milego grosza* (*For Dear Money’s Sake*) for their “violent invective in verse” and their “razor-sharp dialogues”.¹² Miłosz also remarks that the unhappy endings of both plays was a reflection of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski’s pessimistic outlook on life.¹³

In his study of 1957 entitled *Apollo Korzeniowski. Ostatni dramatopisarz romantyczny* (*Apollo Korzeniowski. The Last Romantic Dramatist*) Roman Taborski – who

⁶ *Ibid.*, № 127, p. 4.

⁷ Fryderyk Henryk Lewestam. “*Komedia, dramat w trzech aktach i strofy oderwane przez Apolla Nałęcz Korzeniowskiego*. Wilno. Nakładem Maurycego Orgelbranda. 1856”. *Gazeta Codzienna* 1855, № 315, p. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, № 315, pp. 1–2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, № 315, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, № 316, p. 2.

¹¹ *Rys dziejów literatury polskiej, podług notat Aleksandra Zdanowicza oraz innych źródeł*, opracował i do ostatnich czasów doprowadził Leonard Sowiński, Vol. IV: *Okres piąty, od czasów Mickiewicza do dni dzisiejszych*. Wilno: Józef Zawadzki, 1877, pp. 83–84.

¹² Czesław Miłosz. *Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski*. [In:] *idem. Prywatne obowiązki*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1st ed., 2001, p. 265.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

examined the ideological content of both plays – judged them to be socially very progressive.¹⁴

In a study entitled *Conrad's Polish Literary Background and some Illustrations of the Influence of Polish Literature on his Work* (published in 1966) Andrzej Busza writes that Nałęcz-Korzeniowski had no desire to create a “pleasant comedy of manners”, which is why his plays are full of sarcasm, bitter satire, “cynical resignation” and rebellion – none of which are mitigated even in the final scenes.¹⁵

Zdzisław Najder makes the following remark about Nałęcz-Korzeniowski in his biography of Joseph Conrad (published in 1980):

As an artist Apollo was an epigone of Romanticism; as a man of action he was very brave in word and deed. Both traits are borne out by his earliest play, *Komedia* (1854). The first half is based on a well-known comedy by A.S. Griboedov, *The Woes of Wit / Wit Works Woe* (1824); the other, original half, though theatrically less skilful, is astonishingly sharp in its presentation of social problems.¹⁶

Dobrochna Ratajczakowa – a specialist in nineteenth-century drama – writes in her study entitled *Obrazy narodowe w dramacie i teatrze (Patriotic scenes in plays and on the stage)* [1994] that both *Komedia (A Comedy)* and *Dla milego grosza (For Dear Money's Sake)* by Nałęcz-Korzeniowski belong to a whole group of plays that depict the “extinction of the [Polish] manor-house Arcadia”.¹⁷ Given the blunt manner in which Nałęcz-Korzeniowski illustrates the decline of the ethos of the Polish nobility, it is no wonder that his contemporaries were outraged.¹⁸ Ratajczakowa gives the following description of the “represented world” of these two plays:

Here all that is sacred is tainted, downtrodden and destroyed. In the absence of money, love means absolutely nothing and the good of the nation is merely a nice-sounding pretext for the ruthless acquisition of wealth. Being a member of the nobility no longer implies having any values and the [Polish nobleman's] manor house is both a hotbed of boredom and a school of duplicity.¹⁹

¹⁴ Roman Taborski. *Apollo Korzeniowski. Ostatni dramaturg romantyczny*. Wrocław: Zakład im. Ossolińskich – Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1957, pp. 45–72.

¹⁵ Andrzej Busza gives the following assessment of Apollo Korzeniowski's play: “Korzeniowski is not merely writing a pleasant comedy of manners. [...] *Komedia* ends on a note of rebellion. [...] *Dla milego grosza* [...] is a more pessimistic work. The social satire has become more bitter; there is more irony; and we even find hints of cynical resignation. All the characters in *Dla milego grosza* [...] are presented with ironic detachment.” See: Andrzej Busza. “Conrad's Polish Literary Background and Some Illustrations of the Influence of Polish Literature on his Work”. *Antemurale (Romae–Londinii)* 1966, Vol. X, pp. 122–123.

¹⁶ Zdzisław Najder. *Joseph Conrad: A Life*. Rochester–New York: Camden House, 2007, p. 8; Zdzisław Najder. *Życie Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, Vol. I. Lublin: Gaudium, 6th ed. (3rd Polish ed.), 2006, p. 26.

¹⁷ Dobrochna Ratajczakowa. *Obrazy narodowe w dramacie i teatrze*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo “Wiedza o Kulturze”, 1994, p. 114.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

Ratajczakowa therefore describes Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's *Komedia (A Comedy)* as a "social and moral drama of protest against the life of the nobility".²⁰ The same could easily be said of *Dla milego grosza (For Dear Money's Sake)*.

Reassessing these two plays in 1996, Zdzisław Najder wrote:

In his satirical comedies [...] [Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's] style was freer and more economical. Here the pressures of convention were weaker and did not blunt the sharpness of his scathing wit.²¹

Something to which scholars have hitherto not paid sufficient attention are the ambiguous aesthetic and ethical overtones of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's plays. The "represented world" of *Komedia (A Comedy)* and *Dla milego grosza (For Dear Money's Sake)* is suffused with an atmosphere of mixed emotions which serves not only to convey the author's radically democratic social and political views – i.e. his conviction that all people are born free and equal, his demand for the abolition of serfdom and his proposal that all the nations of the former Polish Commonwealth should enjoy political freedom – but also to convey his conviction of the necessity to fight Russian tyranny. The pungent social satire that usually accompanies Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's propagation of these views is also present in his plays.

Though written in verse, both plays paint a very plain picture of the world. The main characters were modelled on contemporary Polish landowners living in Ruthenia (the Ukraine / Ukraine) and the interpersonal relations reflect the actual social relations that were prevalent in that area of the former Polish Commonwealth in the 1840's and 1850's.

The "represented world" in both these plays is ambiguous in three respects: the style of the utterances made by the characters, the construction of the characters and the construction of the plot. The two plays are linked by the character of Henryk and should be treated as the first two parts of a cycle of three plays.²² The first play of the cycle is *Komedia (A Comedy)* – which, as we know, is not a pure comedy. Its title is tinged with sarcasm, as the play contains a good deal of scathing criticism and mockery of the customs and mind-set of the Polish nobility living in the eastern borderland regions of the old Polish Commonwealth.²³ The only traditional element of comedy which is present in the play is that of comic situations, which go some way towards

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 233–234.

²¹ Zdzisław Najder. *Wstęp* (1996). [In:] *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego. Dokumenty rodzinne, listy, wspomnienia*, Vol. I, ed. Zdzisław Najder and Joanna Skolik. Lublin: Gaudium, 2006, p. 21.

²² In the 1860's Apollo Korzeniowski began to write *Koniec pana Henryka (Henryk's Demise)*, which was to have been the third play of this trilogy. He did not finish it, however. The manuscript is extant.

²³ Apollo Korzeniowski's *Komedia* deeply divided critical opinion. Only a minority of reviews were favourable, e.g. Adam Pług. "Korespondencja 'Gazety Warszawskiej'. Dźuryn, 2 (14) stycznia 1856 r." [o *Komedii* Apolla Korzeniowskiego]. *Gazeta Warszawska* 1856, № 90, p. 4; № 91, pp. 5–6; № 93, pp. 4–5; № 97, pp. 4–5. The predominant reaction was negative, e.g. Leopold Jakubowski. "*Komedia*. Dramat przez Apollona Korzeniowskiego (drukowany w 'Bibliotece Warszawskiej' na rok 1855)". *Dziennik Warszawski* 1855, № 120, p. 4; № 122, p. 4; № 125, p. 4; № 127, p. 4; № 129, pp. 4–5; Tadeusz Padalica (Zenon Fisz). "Przegląd literatury krajowej. *Komedia, dramat w trzech aktach i Strofy oderwane* Apolla Nałęcz-Korzeniowskiego". *Kronika Wiadomości Krajowych i Zagranicznych* 1856, № 62, p. 4; № 63, p. 4.

alleviating the disturbing picture that is painted of reality – including the amorality of the characters (i.e. the rich Chairman and his niece Basia) – and also to make the scathing satire somewhat gentler, giving it a bittersweet flavour.

The play, which brims with sarcasm, is set in the year 1847,²⁴ first in a country manor house in Ruthenia and then in the Chairman's house in Odessa. There is a continual play of contrasts between the sublime and the humorous – between solemnity and a lightness of tone. This highly affected style is particularly in evidence when Henryk declares his love for the Chairman's niece Lidia:

HENRYK Ja życia połową
Zapłaciłbym za szczytną chwilę rozrzewnienia,
W której wszystko tak piękne, tak pełne natchnienia,
W której ludziom i światu wszystko się przebacza,
Za to szczęście, co duszę nam w dobroć otacza.²⁵

HENRYK I would pay with half my life for that sublime moment of tenderness, during which everything is so beautiful and so full of inspiration – during which people and the whole world are forgiven everything – for that happiness which coats the soul in kindness.

However, in the Secretary's remarks about his employer – the Chairman – and in Henryk's highly critical final tirade against bogus aristocrats, there are elements of everyday speech – ellipses, exclamations, colloquialisms, words expressing violent emotions and even invectives (something that was unheard of in the comedies of manners of that time) – which violate the then prevailing principle that in such comedies extreme emotions ought to be subdued:

SEKRETARZ Za ten kawałek chleba gorzki wiele, wiele
Wymagał pan podłości. A sam pan prowadził
Za rękę w każde błoto! Sam uczył i radził,
Sam psuł, sam toczył zdrowie i serce, i duszę,
Jak robak! Za to wszystko podziękować muszę!
I dziękuję, dziękuję, dziękuję – przeklinam!

[...]

HENRYK Dosyć! Was nie poprawią nawet plagi boże!
Cóż więc słowo biednego w duszach waszych może?
Niezachmurzonym życiem jak ślimaki żyjcie!
Frymarzcie i handlujcie! Jedzcie! Pijcie! Gnijcie!
Płaszczcie się przed możniejszym, a depezcicie nędzarze!
Złotu wznóście świątynie, rublowi ołtarze!
Uczcie dzieci i młodszych, że tylko blask zimny
Jest wszystkim – reszta w życiu tylko przesąd gminny!
Kupujcie! Sprzedawajcie! I wznóście fabryki!
Od spółczesnych wam sława, oklaski, okrzyki!²⁶

²⁴ Taborski. *Apollo Korzeniowski. Ostatni dramaturg romantyczny*, ed. cit., p. 48.

²⁵ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Komedia. Dramat we trzech aktach*. Ed. Tadeusz Mikulski. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1st ed., 1954, p. 47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 175.

SECRETARY My master has demanded many, many wicked things from me in exchange for this sorry livelihood. He has taken me by the hand and he himself has led me into all manner of filth! He himself has given me instructions and advice. He himself has corrupted me. He himself has eaten away my health, my heart and my soul – like a worm! And I have to thank him for all that! And [so] I thank him, I thank him, I thank him – and I curse [him]!

[...]

HENRYK Enough! Even the plagues of Egypt would not correct you! What, then, can the words of a poor person [achieve] in your souls? Live the sunny existence of snails! Wheel and deal! Trade! Eat! Drink! Rot! Grovel before those that are more powerful! Oppress those who are paupers! Build temples to gold and raise altars to the rouble! Teach children and young people that all that counts in life is the cold glint [of coins] – the rest is just common superstition! Buy! Sell! Build factories! Your fellow citizens will reward you with fame, cheers and applause!

The language of everyday life – spoken in verse that at times approaches prose – is predominant in much of the play. Colloquialisms are particularly in evidence in Basia’s utterances on the subject of the power of money:

BASIA A rada bym też wiedzieć, co by pozostało
Ze stryja bez majątku? Człowiek – wielkie zero!
Urzędnik – pośmiewisko!²⁷

BASIA And what *I* would also like to know is what would be left of you without your fortune. As a man – one big nothing! As an official – a laughing stock!

As we can see, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski makes his characters talk to each other not only in lofty phrases, but also in everyday speech.

At the level of language, the element of tragicomedy that is present in the play manifests itself in utterances containing paradoxes and contradictions. An example is a negative utterance made by Basia, who mimics the way in which her cousin Lidia complains about the boredom at the manor house and ridicules her dreams of an exceptional lover:

BASIA Tamto był rys ponury, a ten – sarkastyczny.
Ten – dosyć śmiesznie brzydki, tamten – straszno-śliczny. (...)
Straszne często bawi.
O, z ponurym uśmiechem wyszydzać wszak można?²⁸

BASIA That one was the gloomy sort and this one was sarcastic. That one was ugly in quite a funny way, this one was frightening and gorgeous. [...] What’s frightening is often amusing. Hey, can one really jibe at people with a gloomy smile?

Expressions such as “ugly in quite a funny way”, “frightening and gorgeous” and “gloomy smile” show how Nałęcz-Korzeniowski likes to combine contradictory

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

emotional qualities in his plays, which thereby become more expressive and more outspoken, in accordance with Basia's dictum that "what's frightening is often amusing".

In this play the author also uses the convention (from Plautian tragicomedy) in which a person of high birth is accompanied by a person of low social standing who, being very active, becomes the mastermind behind the events of the play instead of merely carrying out the orders of his superiors.

As a critic, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski expressed the view that the characters of Polish comedies of manners ought to be "livened up" and criticised those that were "colourless and run-of-the-mill".²⁹ He argued that their attitudes and behaviour ought to be true to life. The solution he proposed in order to solve the theatrical crisis of his day was to make comedy portray real life, without any simplifications. Comedy, he maintained, should not shy away from forbidden or "awkward" subjects, but should rather deal with them in a fearless, uncompromising and convincing manner. Comedy must keep up with the times and not run away from them – or from its duty to boldly convey the truth.³⁰

In Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's "comedy" the person of low social standing who is nevertheless capable of behaving in a courageous way is the Secretary, who does not shrink from exposing his employer – the Chairman – in the presence of Henryk. At an appropriate moment he reveals the trick that the Chairman has devised (together with Basia) to prevent Henryk – who is a democrat and a veteran of the battles for Polish independence – from marrying his niece Lidia. The Secretary's unmasking of his employer may be interpreted as a roundabout way of meting out justice to a hated representative of the hypocritical upper classes, which he accuses of being morally unscrupulous and hostile to social reform. His words would seem to echo those of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski himself – a landless borderland nobleman who did not entirely identify himself with the nobility's overriding quest for wealth and who fiercely criticised its opposition to the idea of abolishing serfdom. He condemned its greed, selfishness, exploitation, self-interest, hypocrisy and contempt for those of low birth.³¹

In *Komedia (A Comedy)* these views are echoed by Henryk, who would seem to be speaking for the author himself.³² After an absence of several years, Henryk – a thirty-year-old Romantic poet, social reformer, democrat, veteran of Szymon Konarski's national liberation movement of 1838³³ and former political prisoner – ar-

²⁹ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. "Porządni ludzie, komedia J. Chęcińskiego". *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1863, № 179, p. 85.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 85.

³¹ See: Zdzisław Najder. *Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Fidelity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, ch. 3, pp. 25–29; Zdzisław Najder. *Sztuka i wierność. Szkice o twórczości Josepha Conrada*. Trans. Halina Najder. Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2000, pp. 28–29, 33–34.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³³ Najder. *Życie Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, Vol. I, ed. cit., p. 26.

rives at the Chairman's house as an old acquaintance.³⁴ Because of his experiences and the price he has had to pay for taking part in the fight for Poland's freedom – i.e. the confiscation of his property and his imprisonment by the tsarist authorities – he can no longer fully identify himself with his own social class. In the Chairman's home he is seen as an outsider who is not tainted by the self-interested morality of his fellow noblemen. Together with the Secretary, he is the opposite of the other characters. By this polarization within the world of the play's characters – where Henryk and the Secretary are portrayed as advocates of social change, while the Chairman, Basia (Barbara), Dudkiewicz and Lidia are portrayed as morally suspect supporters of the status quo – the author has found the essence of tragicomedy – a mixed aesthetic quality which here serves to reflect conflicting social forces.

In drawing his characters, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski took care to make them either tragic or comic, regardless of their social background. Giving tragic traits to those characters whose current social status is low (i.e. to Henryk as a nobleman who has come down in the world and to the Secretary as a poor commoner) while giving comic traits to those characters who are higher up the social ladder (i.e. bogus aristocrats such as the Chairman and Dudkiewicz) is a technique of tragicomedy which ensures that the characters of low social standing are treated more seriously by the audience, who can see that their problems are both real and insoluble.

The characters who are higher up the social scale – and who as well as being comic pose a threat to their opponents at the lower end of the scale – are an easy target for the author's jibes and scathing criticism, all the more so for being shown to be totally unscrupulous. The funny behaviour of the Chairman – who keeps repeating a meaningless phrase (*to tego*) and gives the impression of being a genial, caring and rather slow-witted person – belies his true nature. In reality he is a grasping schemer – a perverse, self-centred hedonist who inspires fear. His funny sayings and feigned ineptitude merely serve to highlight his corrupt character. He is a tyrant and a boor. He continually insults his employees and has no respect for their human dignity. He calls his servants "baptized animals".³⁵ Bullying has become his second nature:

PREZES (*zrywa się, do Służącego*) Osiół! Każe czekać? Komu?!
Prosić, przyjąć, powiedzieć, że ja jestem w domu,
Żem rad bardzo! No, ruszaj! A tylko nogami!³⁶

CHAIRMAN (*springing up from his chair, to the Servant*) You ass! Make him wait? Who?!
Ask him in, welcome him, say that I'm at home and that I'll be delighted to see
him! Well then, move! With your legs, I mean!

An additional complication introduced by Nałęcz-Korzeniowski is the fact that the positive characters – notwithstanding their uncompromising views – are not without their own human weaknesses: self-doubt, naivety and at times even fatuousness.

³⁴ The play is set in the 1840's, just before the 1848 Spring of Nations – most probably in 1847. See: Taborski. *Apollo Korzeniowski. Ostatni dramaturg romantyczny*, ed. cit., pp. 46–48.

³⁵ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Komedia*, ed. cit., p. 65.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

The not-too-bright and poorly educated Secretary, for example, initially appears to be a comic character, especially in the scene where he has problems understanding his employer's instructions regarding various matters he is supposed to deal with.³⁷ He is so neurotic and intimidated that he has even begun to repeat the same meaningless phrase (*tego to*) that is continually used by the Chairman. He does not have an easy life. He cannot find his place in the world. He cannot meet his employer's expectations of him. He lives in poverty. He has a sick mother to care for. And to top it all he is continually humiliated by the Chairman – that “darling of an uncle”, as Basia sarcastically calls him³⁸ – who is so despicable and pitiless that he threatens to dismiss him – despite his difficult family circumstances – in order to depress him further and thus make him more amenable to manipulation.

In short, the Secretary's life is one long ordeal. It is only towards the end of the play that he plucks up enough courage and determination to reveal the truth about his employer's schemes. We learn that the Chairman, who is very anxious that his niece Lidia should marry the rich, poorly educated and totally conceited provincial dignitary Dudkiewicz (who is described in the stage directions as a “nonentity”)³⁹ – together with Basia,⁴⁰ who wishes to avenge herself on Henryk for not having reciprocated her love in the past – has made him forge a letter – supposedly written by Henryk – in which the latter declares his love for Basia. It is the Chairman who has the idea of forging the letter, while Basia informs Lidia of its existence, adding that it is in the possession of her uncle.

Before refusing to go along with the Chairman's plans, the impecunious Secretary has to make a difficult choice – not between abstract ideas, but between practical values that have a direct bearing on his everyday family circumstances. As a result of his decision he loses his job. Henryk comes to his aid, inviting him to stay at his flat.

After his departure an ominous silence descends on the drawing room. The Chairman and Basia do not know how Lidia will react to the Secretary's revelations. Henryk, for his part, smiles contemptuously.⁴¹ This sudden moment of suspense creates a tense expectation of the inevitable break-up of this apparently close-knit family. Nothing in Lidia's life will be as it was before. She herself has been terribly hurt and will never trust anyone again. And it is her uncle and her cousin, she says, who are to blame for this state of affairs:

Struliście moją przeszłość i me życie całe!⁴²

You have cast a shadow on my past and on my entire life!

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁰ By using the diminutive form of the Christian name “Barbara” Nałęcz-Korzeniowski accentuates the rapaciousness of the character.

⁴¹ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Komedia*, ed. cit., p. 156.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 159.

In a desperate attempt to keep up the pretence that family ties are still exemplary, Basia makes the following remark in French:

C'est très pathétique!
On lave son linge sale, mais pas en public.
Cela n'est pas convenable!⁴³

How very moving! One does wash one's dirty linen, but not in public. It's just not done!

Let us note that these words appear in Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's play more than fifty years before the famous lines in Gabriela Zapolska's tragicomedy entitled *Moralność pani Dulskiej* (*The Morality of Mrs. Dulska*) [1906]. They express an attitude that is rooted in hypocrisy and dual morality – later referred to by the terms *dulszczyzna* or *moralność kołtuńska*. It is symptomatic that Basia uses drawing-room French to mask this two-faced attitude. It is as if she is oblivious to what has just happened or to Lidia's announcement that she will be leaving because she can no longer bear the sight of her hypocritical relatives.

Henryk – the man Lidia has set her heart upon – is described in the stage directions at the beginning of the play as a *proletariusz*, i.e. a proletarian activist – a man “with a soul, but without souls” (i.e. without subjects of his own), as Nałęcz-Korzeniowski explains in his 1856 translator's preface to Alfred de Vigny's drama entitled *Chatterton*.⁴⁴ The character of Henryk is without any doubt modelled on that of Chatsky in Aleksander Griboedov's comedy entitled *The Woes of Wit* (*Tope om yma / Bieda z rozumem / Mądremu biada*; written in 1823 and published in 1833).⁴⁵ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's Henryk, however, is more naive than Chatsky, as – for much of the time during the play – he remains an incorrigible dreamer who makes plans for social reform without noticing the web of intrigue that has been spun around him by people he thought were his friends. It would therefore seem that in creating this character, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski – between the lines, as it were – was also poking fun at his own naive and – given the circumstances – unrealistic slogans concerning the radical social reforms that he was wont to propagate.⁴⁶

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁴⁴ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Od tłumacza*. [In:] de Vigny. *Chatterton*, ed. cit., p. XIII. The word “soul” is used in a similar way in the 1840's in Karol Drzewiecki's play entitled *Kontrakty* (1842). See: Karol Drzewiecki. *Kontrakty. Dramat w pięciu aktach*. Wilno: Nakładem i drukiem Józefa Zawadzkiego, 1842.

⁴⁵ In 1856 Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's *Komedia* was described as a plagiarized version of Griboedov's play by the critic Tadeusz Padalica (real name Zenon Fisz). See: Tadeusz Padalica (Zenon Fisz). “Przegląd literatury krajowej. *Komedia, dramat w trzech aktach i Strofy oderwane Apolla Nałęcza Korzeniowskiego*”. *Kronika Wiadomości Krajowych i Zagranicznych* 1856, № 62, p. 4; № 63, p. 4. Roman Taborski also discusses this question. See: Taborski. *Apollo Korzeniowski. Ostatni dramtopisarz romantyczny*, ed. cit., pp. 45–59.

⁴⁶ Apollo Korzeniowski was interested in the burning issues of day-to-day life in Ruthenia (the Ukraine), as we can see from the numerous reports that he penned as a newspaper correspondent. He dealt with such topical issues as the problems engendered by the sugar industry (of which he disapproved) and Polish Society's indiscriminate pursuit of wealth. For these see: Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. “Czasopiśmiennictwo nasze”. *Słowo* (Petersburg) 1859, fasc. 1, p. 173; *idem*. “Korespondencja ‘Gazety

One novelty concerning the character of Henryk is that – although he is a positive character – he is neither a “paper” nor a “schmaltzy” character, but one who is active, as was pointed out by the contemporary critic Tadeusz Padalica (whose real name was Zenon Fisz).⁴⁷

Henryk also gives discreet financial assistance to the Secretary’s sick mother by paying her medical expenses – supposedly on the instructions of Lidia, who actually knows nothing of the matter. He does this so that everyone will respect the woman he has set his heart upon. When he has been humiliated, however, he can be extremely spiteful and malicious – something which is resented by the other characters. In one scene the Chairman angrily puts his hands over his ears and closes his eyes so as not to hear the biting remarks with which Henryk reacts to human stupidity and immorality, which – after his term of exile – he can no longer bear. Derision and mockery have become his only protective shield. His behaviour is unconventional and – as Lidia, who understands him best, remarks – there are lights and shades in his character.

In *Dla milego grosza* (*For Dear Money’s Sake*) [1859] – the second part of the trilogy – we shall see that after a period of ten years – like many a Romantic idealist – Henryk has become a cynic and a lover of the good life, whose only weapon against hypocrisy and avarice is still derision. Unlike his own character, however, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski himself remained very much a social and political activist for the rest of his life.

In *Komedia* (*A Comedy*) Henryk – though critical of the vices of his social class – turns out to be quite naive in his personal life, allowing himself to be manipulated for quite a time – until the moment comes when he sees through the people he is living with and becomes totally disillusioned with them. His abandonment of Lidia at the end of the play may be interpreted not so much as a refusal to live with her alongside depraved members of the nobility,⁴⁸ as a loss of his naive faith in human altruism and in true love, i.e. love that is impervious to gossip, slander and greed.

A conspicuous motif in the play is that of money. Even young ladies talk about it – an example being Basia, who perfidiously warns Lidia that Henryk is after her money:

Codziennej’. Zza Buga, dnia 27 lipca 1860 r.”. *Gazeta Codzienna* 1860, № 203, p. 2; № 204, pp. 2–3; № 205, p. 2; *idem*. “Korespondencja ‘Gazety Codziennej’. Zza Buga w końcu listopada. *Gazeta Codzienna*” 1860, № 335, p. 2; № 338, p. 2; № 339, p. 2; № 341, p. 2; № 343, pp. 2–3; № 344, p. 2.

For his views on transport in Wołyń (Volhynia) and the postal service in Ruthenia (the Ukraine) see: *idem*. “Korespondencja ‘Gazety Codziennej’. Zza Buga, dnia 20 stycznia 1860 r.”. *Gazeta Codzienna* 1860, № 50, p. 2.

For his views on the creation and functioning of the Medical Society in Żytomierz (Zhitomir) see: *idem*. “Korespondencja ‘Gazety Codziennej’. Zza Buga, dnia 17 maja 1860 r.”. *Gazeta Codzienna* 1860, № 151, p. 2; № 152, p. 2.

For his views on the mercantile role of Polish and Ruthenian (Ukrainian) rivers see: *idem*. “Korespondencja ‘Gazety Codziennej’. Zza Buga w czerwcu”. *Gazeta Codzienna* 1860, № 176, p. 2; № 177, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁷ Tadeusz Padalica (Zenon Fisz). “Przegląd literatury krajowej. *Komedia, dramat w trzech aktach i Strofy oderwane* Apolla Nałęcza Korzeniowskiego”. *Kronika Wiadomości Krajowych i Zagranicznych* 1856, № 62, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Taborski. *Apollo Korzeniowski. Ostatni dramaturg romantyczny*, ed. cit., p. 54.

BASIA Jak siostra przywiązana, wyraźnie i jaśnie
Musiałam ostrzec ciebie, że twoje pieniądze
Jedynym celem jego!⁴⁹

BASIA Like a devoted sister, I had to warn you very clearly that your money was his
only goal!

Elsewhere, as we have already seen, the same Basia reminds the Chairman that were Lidia to marry Henryk, he would have to give her the dowry to which she is entitled, and would thus have very little income left.⁵⁰

The Chairman haggles with Dudkiewicz over Lidia as if she were a piece of merchandise, forcing him to forego part of the dowry that is due to her by agreeing that it be transferred to him as her uncle.

The destructive power of money is also mentioned when Henryk accuses the Chairman and Dudkiewicz of attempting to “wipe away the filth that covers them” with outward appearances of refined urbanity,⁵¹ adding that their god is Mammon. Their only real passion is not the New Jerusalem – i.e. Poland’s restoration as a free country – but money:

HENRYK (*do Dudkiewicza*) Wszakże mama
I papa pański pewno uczyli go przecie:
Wierz, lube dziecko, w rubla! On wszystkim na świecie!
Nie trzeba go wydawać, dość go mieć w kieszeni,
A każdy ci się sprzeda, wzniesie cię, oceni.
[...]
(*do Dudkiewicza i Prezesa*) Wy – zgalwanizowane trupy od chciwości;
Nie dziw, że społeczeństwo, co was w sobie mieści,
Będzie mydlaną bańką i formą bez treści!
Wiecznie będzie ochrzczona ta Jerozolima,
Dla której prócz zarobku nic na świecie nie ma!⁵²

HENRYK (*to Dudkiewicz*) But then it was your mummy and daddy, no doubt, who taught
you as a child to believe in the rouble – which, they said, is everything in the
world! There’s no need to spend it. It’s enough to have one in your pocket and
people will sell themselves, exalt you and value you.
[...]
(*to Dudkiewicz and the Chairman*) You are [nothing but] corpses that have
been galvanized by greed! Small wonder, then, that the Society you are mem-
bers of will end up as a soap bubble – form without content! A Jerusalem in
which income is all that matters will never be effectively baptized!

⁴⁹ Natęcz-Korzeniowski. *Komedia, ed. cit.*, pp. 85–86.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 174–175.

Henryk's reference to Jerusalem may also suggest that the Chairman and Dudkiewicz are reminiscent of the hypocritical Pharisees.⁵³

Although at the end of *Komedia (A Comedy)* Henryk declares that he will sever his ties with the social class he so despises, his subsequent life belies his uncompromisingly Romantic attitude, for which there was no place in the reality of the 1840's and 1850's. We can therefore see that Nałęcz-Korzeniowski was not only a master of sarcasm, but was also capable of making a realistic assessment of the world in which he lived. The vicissitudes of many members of the second generation of Romantics (who were born around 1820 and who included both himself and his character Henryk) and their frequent abandonment of the ideals of their youth are constant motifs which give his plays an extra air of authenticity shot through with scathing sarcasm.

A distinctive feature of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's *Komedia (A Comedy)* and *Dla milego grosza (For Dear Money's Sake)* are the negative female characters, whom Czesław Miłosz describes as monsters:

[...] takich kobiet-monstrów jak u Korzeniowskiego nie spodziewalibyśmy się znaleźć w sztukach pisanych wierszem w połowie dziewiętnastego wieku. Monstra są piękne, pełne powabu i inteligentne. Nie cofają się jednak przed niczym tam, gdzie chodzi o zapewnienie sobie wygody przez kontrakt ślubny: ulegalizowana prostytucja.⁵⁴

In comedies of the middle of the nineteenth century written in verse one would not have expected to find such women monsters as one does in Korzeniowski's plays. These monsters are beautiful, quite enchanting and intelligent. They will stop at nothing, however, to provide themselves with a comfortable existence by means of a marriage contract. In short, legalized prostitution.

Lidia is morally untainted, though she is fairly naive and easily manipulated by the cunning Basia, under whose influence she begins to doubt the honesty of the man she loves. Basia herself is clearly a villain who has been brought up in the morally corrupt world of manor-house drawing rooms and is prepared to use immoral means in order to achieve her ends. Her warped character, her negative emotions and her fondness for intrigue are as it were the diabolical expression of her innate inability to share other people's happiness:

LIDIA Lecz nie! Ja kocham jego!
(*pogardliwie*) A tobie nie wierzę!

BASIA (*na stronie*) Gniewa się, ale nie wie, że i mnie złość bierze!
Gdym zła, wszystkiego dopnę!⁵⁵

⁵³ Apollo's namesake Józef Korzeniowski paints a similar picture of the Polish nobility in his play entitled *Żydzi (The Jews – 1843)*. Cf. Józef Korzeniowski. *Żydzi. Komedia w czterech aktach*. [In:] *idem. Dzieła wybrane*, Vol. VIII: *Komedia*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1954.

⁵⁴ Czesław Miłosz. *Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski* (1956). [In:] *idem. Prywatne obowiązki* (1972). Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001, p. 267.

⁵⁵ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Komedia, ed. cit.*, p. 88.

- LIDIA No! I love him!
 (*disdainfully*) And I don't believe you!
- BASIA (*aside*) She's angry, but she doesn't know that I'm getting angry too! And when
 I'm angry I [can] achieve anything I want!

Basia is one of several negative heroines in Polish comedies of manners of the 1840's and 1850's. Her psychological make-up, however, is more complex than that of her fellow villains, as her motives are not quite clear. Her aggression may be explained as the result of loneliness, unrequited love (on the part of Henryk) or jealousy. She seems to be cold-hearted, unfeeling and rotten to the core. Nałęcz-Korzeniowski no doubt wished to create a controversial heroine who was simply bad by nature, as is shown by Basia's frequent utterances, most of which are venomous. Anger clouds her vision, though she is able to contain her emotion when the occasion demands it. There is even anger in her voice when she speaks to her uncle the Chairman.⁵⁶

Basia is aware of her immoral behaviour and is proud of it. Perversely, she uses French to boast about her attitude in an attempt to give it the status of a drawing-room convention and thus keep at bay any feelings of guilt or shame. Mocking Lidia and Henryk, she speaks about herself in a foreign language as if she were speaking about a total stranger:

- BASIA (*to Lidia, sneeringly*)
 Brisons là-dessus.
 L'oncle est un tyran. C'est connu. C'est reçu!
 Moi, je suis – eh! bien! Un démon perfide.
 (*looking at Dudkiewicz*)
 Monsieur est un Judas – horrible, mais timide.
 And you've descended on us – par un hasard étrange,
 (*looking at Henryk*)
 Monsieur, qui est sublime!
 (*to Lidia*)
 Vous – qui êtes un ange!⁵⁷

Tired of hearing Lidia's reproaches, Basia leaves the room in anger. Her behaviour cannot be interpreted as being simply the result of her erstwhile unrequited love for Henryk. Her evil nature is eventually discovered by her hitherto close friend Lidia, who – even before Basia is exposed – notices several times that her cousin's intentions in accusing Henryk of being unfaithful are all but innocent and that evil energy emanates from her. Basia is therefore a woman who is "in no way psychologically implausible."⁵⁸ She may be seen as a forerunner of the *femme fatale* of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Other negative heroines created by Nałęcz-Korzeniowski include Anna in *Dla miłego grosza (For Dear Money's Sake)* [1859],

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁵⁸ Cf. Adam Pług. "Korespondencja 'Gazety Warszawskiej'. Dżuryn, 2 (14) stycznia 1856 r. [o Komedii Apolla Korzeniowskiego]". *Gazeta Warszawska* 1856, № 97, p. 4.

the controversial character Adela in the drama *Akt pierwszy* (*Act One*) [probably written in 1865; staged in 1868], the Mother in the drama *Ojciec* (*The Father*) [probably written in 1865; staged in 1868] and several other heroines in unfinished plays started in the 1860's.

The Chairman and Basia have cunningly sown the seeds of doubt in Lidia's mind with regard to Henryk's credibility and the sincerity of his feelings for her. This uncertainty proves to be Lidia's undoing, as she loses her peace of mind and Henryk's respect for her. In the end – wishing to appease Henryk for having doubted him – she herself offers him her hand in marriage. Henryk rejects her, however, saying that he no longer trusts her and that she only wishes to marry him out of pity and in order to appease her pangs of conscience. He also has no doubt that the noble “voice of the heart”⁵⁹ which Lidia now listens to will ultimately be drowned out by “life”⁶⁰ – i.e. by other people within her family circle who are just like Basia and the Chairman.

Finding themselves alone after the departure of Lidia and Henryk, the Chairman and Dudkiewicz are not at all disconcerted by the fact that they have been exposed and humiliated by the Secretary. They have such a high opinion of themselves that they consider that nothing and no one can endanger their reputations in high society. The Chairman cynically invites Dudkiewicz to dinner at a little restaurant-cum-patisserie, where they can sweeten the bitter after-taste of the unpleasantness that has been visited on them by the Secretary and Henryk. Such is the burlesque note on which the play ends.

The above analysis of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's *Komedia* (*A Comedy*) shows the complexity of the construction of some of its characters and also of the play's emotional atmosphere, which is one of unease and foreboding rather than mirth (although both elements coexist), especially in Henryk's harsh words of criticism at the end of the play, which – though directed at the upper classes of the time – express his bitter disappointment with the people around him, who have fallen far short of his own Romantic ideals.

By leaving the family circle of the cynical Chairman, Henryk – whose behaviour is initially irreproachable – chooses to live a lonely, though morally upstanding life. Although his decision is an ethical one, his final monologue does not end in a moral punchline. Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's comedy would not, therefore, seem to fulfil the requirements of a didactic play – and, in any event, no moral admonition would suffice to change the world that it portrays. Although the play contains a harsh critique of the attitudes of the upper classes of the author's day, it offers no positive or realistic programme that could change this state of affairs. *Komedia* (*A Comedy*) deals not only with manners and social reform,⁶¹ but (and perhaps above all) with the particular choices made by a lone individual who finds himself in a world that is devoid of moral sense – a frightening world of people wearing “masks”. In such a world, where certain people are continually acting out a comedy for the “benefit” of others and

⁵⁹ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Komedia*, ed. cit., p. 172.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Such is Roman Taborski's interpretation of this play. See: Taborski. *Apollo Korzeniowski. Ostatni dramaturg romantyczny*, ed. cit., pp. 45–59.

where positive values have been tainted, even one's faith in oneself is at risk and one can no longer feel safe. The world in which the characters of the play live is hollow and spiritually corrupt – something that is highlighted by key expressions used by Lidia to describe the spiritual state of contemporary Society: “rubble”, “rotten fibre”, “mud”, “filth” and “winter”.⁶² Hence Henryk's spectacular refusal to be part of a Society run by the likes of Dudkiewicz and the Chairman. In the long run, however, his escapist decision proves to be unrealistic.

The ambiguous ending of the play leaves the story unfinished, thus calling for a continuation in the form of another play (or plays).⁶³ However, in *Dla milego grosza* (*For Dear Money's Sake*), which is the next play in the cycle, there is still no “on-stage catharsis,”⁶⁴ as most of the painful problems which the characters have to deal with remain unsolved. We hear no more of Lidia, Basia or the Chairman. In *Dla milego grosza* (*For Dear Money's Sake*) we see only Henryk, who now behaves like the people he used to despise, although the memory of his hurt feelings continues to be a thorn in his side. Not surprisingly, then, in the second play of the trilogy he tries to help the impoverished yet noble Józef Staropolski – who reminds him of his younger self – in his efforts to win the hand of a girl from a rich family.

The teasing title *Komedia* (*A Comedy*) which Nałęcz-Korzeniowski chose for the first play of the trilogy is significant in that it illustrates the progress of the gradual blurring of the distinction between comedy and tragedy that had been a growing phenomenon in Polish comedies of manners since the times of King Stanislaus Poniatowski. In the middle of the 19th century comedy in the proper sense of the word was a thing of the past, which is why the comic in Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's play is shot through with scathing sarcasm and the gravity of the choices made by the characters. The evident attempt to expose social and spiritual evils and the Romantic solitude of the main character give the play certain attributes of tragedy. The word “comedy” used as the play's subtitle is purely conventional and signals the clear and definite departure of Polish comedies of manners from the paradigm of pseudoclassical aesthetics, which insisted on the separation of genres. The uneven emotional tonality of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's *Komedia* (*A Comedy*) has a direct bearing on the chain of events and breaks through the seemingly coherent reality of drawing-room convention.

In this supposedly serious world the cynical Chairman sees several serious things that he finds quite amusing. These include the traditional values of knighthood that were once cherished by his social class, i.e. honour and keeping one's word. The Chairman's apparently serious world is therefore a topsy-turvy world shot through with sarcasm, laughter, pretence and play-acting. This is confirmed by the Secretary when – hidden behind a curtain – he becomes a silent witness to the Chairman's intrigue:

⁶² Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Komedia*, ed. cit., pp. 126–127.

⁶³ In the subsequent parts of the trilogy, however, neither Henryk nor any of the other characters is pleased with his lot.

⁶⁴ Jan Zieliński. “Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski (1820–1869)”. *Teatr* 1986, № 10, p. 29.

SEKRETARZ No, komediant walny!
No, tragediant! No, pajac!⁶⁵

SEKRETARZ Well, well, a fine actor we've got here! A true actor of tragedies! Harlequin himself!

The Secretary thinks that the Chairman is able to be sad or joyful at will, thus provoking sympathy or laughter. Play-acting comes easily to him and he is willing to play any part in order to further his own ends. His whole life would seem to be the tragicomic act of a drawing-room clown.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the play's motto is taken from the preface to a story entitled *Chien-Caillou* (1847)⁶⁶ by the French writer, critic and literary historian Jules Husson, known as Champfleury (1821–1889) – who, it might be added, was a contemporary of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski and was an advocate of realism in literature; indeed, his writing is considered to be a forerunner of naturalism. Champfleury expounded his theoretical views on the subject of realism in a collection of articles entitled *Le Réalisme* (1857). He maintained that Man's reproduction of nature was never simply a matter of imitation, but that it always involved interpretation.⁶⁷ The quotation which Nałęcz-Korzeniowski took from the *avis au lecteur* to Champfleury's story is as follows:

Ne dites jamais que vous savez *ce que vaut l'aune* de telle histoire. Souvent cette histoire si gaie, si folle, si amusante, aura germé toute gonflée de larmes, de faim, de misère, dans l'esprit de celui qui l'écrira plus tard.⁶⁸

Never say that you know the true measure of such and such a story, for quite often that incredibly light-hearted, wildly fantastic and hilarious tale has been nurtured by tears, hunger and abject poverty until it has matured in the mind of the person who writes it down.

Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's use of this quotation as the motto to his play *Komedia* (*A Comedy*) has often been interpreted as an indication that the events in the play had a basis in real life and were connected either with the personal experiences of the author – who had sought the hand of Ewa Bobrowska over a period of several years⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Komedia*, ed. cit., p. 136.

⁶⁶ Chien-Caillou, a tanner's son, is a self-taught engraver who falls in with a group of bohemian artists. Being naive, young and innocent and without anyone to turn to for advice, he is easily cheated by a picture dealer. This story dispels any illusions as to the conditions in which most artists then had to live and work. Champfleury shows us the dirty, dark and stuffy garrets that were inhabited by members of the bohemian artistic community. The story of Chien-Caillou has a sad ending. Amourette, in whom he has fallen in love, is evicted together with her sister for not paying the rent. Chien-Caillou never sees her again and – heartbroken – decides to die of hunger.

⁶⁷ I quote from: *Literatura francuska*, Vol. II. Ed. Antoine Adam, Georges Lerminier, Édouard Morot-Sir (several translators). Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1st ed., 1980, p. 238.

⁶⁸ Jules Champfleury. *Chien-Caillou*. Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1860, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Her father Józef Bobrowski was against the marriage on the grounds that Apollo Korzeniowski was a spendthrift and the couple were married only after his death. For an autobiographical explanation of the motto to *Komedia* see: Rafał M. Blüth. "Dwie rodziny kresowe (Z kroniki rodzinnej Josepha Conrada)". *Ateneum* 1939, № 1, pp. 15–18.

– or with the books and plays that he had read or seen, for instance Aleksander Griboedov’s comedy entitled *The Woes of Wit* (*Gope om yma / Bieda z rozumem / Mądrému biada*; written in 1823 and published in 1833).⁷⁰ It would seem, however, that this motto is well suited to the nature of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski’s play, which is announced as a comic work but exhibits a complex emotional tonality that verges on sadness, bitter reflections and even the tragic. This can be seen in the opening scene of the play, where we are shown the deadly silence, boredom and dreariness of a country manor house in the borderlands of the old Polish Commonwealth in the first half of the 19th century. The author’s repeated use of the words *szary* (grey, dull, dreary) and *szarzyzna* (dullness, dreariness) conjures up an atmosphere of apathy and general weariness:

- LIDIA (*budząc się z zamyślenia*) Jak cicho. – Pewno anioł przeleciał nad nami.
- BASIA Musiał ziewać biedaczek. Takimi nudami
Nie każda okolica poszczycić się może.
Pusto jakby na stepie; deszcz leje na dworze;
W pokoju – szare światło; ociężała głowa.⁷¹
- LIDIA (*waking up after daydreaming*) How quiet it is! An angel must have flown over us.
- BASIA The poor thing must have been yawning. Not every region can boast of being so boring. It’s as deserted as the steppe. Outside it’s pouring with rain and indoors the light’s grey. My head’s so heavy!

This monotonous setting is conducive to dreams of social events such as parties and masked balls – and also to manoeuvres aimed at complicating other people’s lives by means of intrigues and generally stirring up bad emotions. Lidia’s boredom with the dreary reality of everyday life and her obsessive thoughts about “dreariness” have become so overpowering that she dreams of experiencing love that is exceptional and “out of the ordinary.”⁷² She is afraid of having to lead an insipid, colourless life by being wedded to a dull husband. As we see at the end of the play, however, her dreams are not fulfilled.

In the second play of the trilogy – *Dla miłego grosza* (*For Dear Money’s Sake*) [staged and published in 1859], which deals with the everyday life of wealthy Polish noblemen who congregated in Kiev (Kijów / Kyiv) for an annual fair – Nałęcz-Korzeniowski shares an even more pessimistic vision of reality. The play is set in Kiev, ten years after the events of the first play of the trilogy (i.e. in 1857)⁷³ and has even stronger anti-heroic overtones, painting the grim picture of a Society that is bereft of ethical principles – a Society in which the main motive and goal of most of its leading members is financial gain.

⁷⁰ Cf. Jan Zieliński. “Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski (1820–1869)”. *Teatr* 1986, № 10, pp. 29–30.

⁷¹ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Komedia*, ed. cit., p. 19.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.

⁷³ Cf. Taborski. *Apollo Korzeniowski. Ostatni dramaturg romantyczny*, ed. cit., pp. 46–48.

It was the contemporary critic Adam Pług who in 1860 first drew attention to the unfriendliness of this play's "represented world". He defended the author's dark and almost naturalist portrayal of reality by invoking the principle of verisimilitude:

Those who [...] are offended by most of the negative characters in Korzeniowski's comedy and by the fact that they are given more prominence than the positive characters should bear in mind that in real life these characters are also much more conspicuous. There is nothing more erroneous than the idea that there is more good than evil in the world, whose existence would otherwise cease to be tolerated by God. The number of evil people is greater, but good people have more vital energy and many a time one just man has saved entire nations. In Korzeniowski's play we see not one, but three just men: the nobleman, Joseph and Henryk [...] ⁷⁴

In his book entitled *Conrad in Perspective. Essays on Art and Fidelity* (1997) Zdzisław Najder also highlights the play's "bitterly satirical" ⁷⁵ overtones:

Again the edge of his sardonic wit is directed against the wealthy members of his own social class, the *szlachta*. He derides them for their failure to live up to their professed ideals and noble traditions, for crass materialism, snobbery and political opportunism, and he contrasts them with principled representatives of the budding intelligentsia. With both traditional feudalism and nascent capitalism condemned, the implicit positive vision is one of an agrarian community of interests. ⁷⁶

In this play there can be no question of an idealistic approach to life. The only visionary is Henryk's young friend Józef Staropolski – a veteran of the struggle for freedom during the Spring of Nations (the Revolutions of 1848) who has returned home after a six-year term of exile. Staropolski's illusions concerning the principles held by the nobility are gradually dispelled. Henryk sees his friend's naivety as mirroring his own naivety of ten years ago. Both have fought for the cause of Polish independence and both have loved a woman without being able to marry her. Having been rejected by his unfeeling and self-seeking fiancée Anna because he is no longer wealthy, Józef decides to leave the world of the nobility, just as Henryk does in the first play of the trilogy.

Such an ending to the play was only to be expected, as from the very beginning Henryk had warned Józef that Anna was a self-respecting and rather self-seeking young lady who could accept him as a friend, but not as a future husband. His fears eventually turn out to be well founded:

HENRYK A w końcu nie będzie nic z tego. [...]

 Świat prędko złudzenie ukróci! ⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Adam Pług. "Pierwsze przedstawienie na Żytomierskim teatrze komedii Apolla Korzeniowskiego pod tytułem: *Dla milego grosza*". *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1860, № 28, p. 250.

⁷⁵ Zdzisław Najder. *Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Fidelity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 25; Najder. *Sztuka i wierność. Szkice o twórczości Josepha Conrada*, ed. cit., p. 32.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Dla milego grosza. Komedia w trzech aktach*. Ed. Roman Taborski. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964, pp. 53, 55.

HENRYK Nothing will come of it in the end. [...] The world will soon put an end to [your] illusions!

The Henryk of *Dla milego grosza* (*For Dear Money's Sake*) is not reminiscent of the Henryk of *Komedia* (*A Comedy*), however, because for the past three or four years he has worn the mask of a cynic. His declaration concerning the symbolic donning of the mask is an allusion to a remark made by Lidia in *Komedia* (*A Comedy*) to the effect that the world is full of masks.⁷⁸ His drawing-room mask has not deprived him of his critical stance vis-à-vis the privileged classes, however. He is still aware of their callous outlook on life and warns Józef appropriately:

HENRYK Tu trza śmiać się z wszystkiego albo być w rozpacz: Wzięć się śmieje.⁷⁹

HENRYK Here one has to laugh at everything or be driven to despair, so I laugh.

This mask of wittiness hides the wounded and confused soul of a man who realizes that he has to some extent betrayed his ideals. As Stefan Buszczyński observed in 1870, Henryk wears a “smile of bitterness.”⁸⁰ He is at one and the same time sweet and bitter towards the world and towards people, who continue to disappoint him and dispel any illusions that he may still entertain. That is why his preferred weapons of defence against the world are still – as in the previous play of the trilogy – mockery, derision and “downright slander.”⁸¹ These weapons are now used against bogus Polish aristocrats who – in defiance of the code of the true Polish nobility – have accepted titles from foreign powers. Their guiding principle is to act in accordance with what they understand to be their “family pride” and to shun any kind of work whatsoever (*The Prince*). Their exclusive recipe for making money is to take part in all manner of financial machinations (*The Count*, *the Master* and *Anna's father*, *Karol*). In order to modernize their estates by developing trade and industry (especially sugar refining), they lease their land to others (*the Master*). Henryk is particularly scornful of a certain Adam Mucha – otherwise known as *Count Muchowski* – the son of a newly-rich ox dealer who poses as an anglomaniac.

The picture of those who come to Kiev for the annual fair has, of course, been painted in accordance with the author's own views, and so is a distorted one. An example of this deliberate distortion is the way in which Nałęcz-Korzeniowski describes the mentality of the bogus aristocrats and the nouveaux riches of his day. The description – given by Henryk and Józef – uses the concept of ugliness to ram the message home:

⁷⁸ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Komedia*, ed. cit., pp. 126–127.

⁷⁹ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Dla milego grosza*, ed. cit., p. 30.

⁸⁰ Stefan Buszczyński. *Mało znany poeta – stanowisko jego przed ostatnim powstaniem, wygnanie i śmierć. Ustęp z dziejów społecznych południowej Polski*. Kraków: w Drukarni “Czasu” W. Kirchmayera, 1870, p. 26.

⁸¹ Adam Pług. “Pierwsze przedstawienie na Żytomierskim teatrze komedii Apolla Korzeniowskiego pod tytułem: *Dla milego grosza*”. *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1860, № 28, p. 250.

Cnota – oplwa! I rad swej zmyślności zwierzęcej,
Śmieje się głupim śmiechem – bo ma rubla więcej.⁸⁶

JÓZEF [...] this world, in which everyone is journeying, running, walking or even crawling to the new Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece! And on the way hearts are downtrodden, feelings are knocked down, sacrifice is ridiculed, faith is muddled with untruth and virtue is spat upon! Proud of their animal cunning, they give themselves up to inane laughter because they now have an extra rouble.

On the evidence of his *Enquiry into Shakespeare's Dramatic Art (Studia nad dramatycznością w utworach Szekspira)* [written in 1867; published in 1868], Shakespearian drama would seem to have been a key source of inspiration for Nałęcz-Korzeniowski, who not only borrowed various ideas from the Bard, but – with greater or lesser success – transferred what he saw as the Shakespearean vision of Man and the world to his own plays.⁸⁷ Shakespeare's influence can be seen in the ethical ambiguity of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's main characters,⁸⁸ who are constructed on Shakespearean lines. In *Dla miłego grosza (For Dear Money's Sake)* Henryk – like the characters of those Shakespearean comedies which were translated by Nałęcz-Korzeniowski⁸⁹ – still finds the world a terrifying place despite the fact that he has learnt to wear a protective mask. In his study on Shakespeare, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski writes about this comic escape from reality into the realm of delusion:

Nazwaliśmy systemat komiczny Szekspir'a, systematem urojenia. Mamy go za ucieczkę, za odosobnienie się utrudzonego wieszczą od przerażeń prawdy przeznaczeń ludzkich, odtworzonych w tragedyi i w dramacie historycznym.⁹⁰

We have said that Shakespeare's comic system is one of delusion. We see it as an escape – the exhausted Bard's respite from the terrifying truth of human destinies which are re-enacted in the tragedies and in the historical dramas.

Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's heroes are usually far from being stereotypes. A very good example is Anna in *Dla miłego grosza (For Dear Money's Sake)*. She is a *femme fatale* – a “fallen angel”⁹¹ who stops treating Józef as a potential husband as soon as she learns that he is penniless. Although she hides the real reason for her change of heart from the other characters, she has no intention of remaining faithful to Józef. What is more, she declares somewhat perversely that even the breaking of her promise to Józef ought to be done in a way that does not detract from her beauty:

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 145–146.

⁸⁷ Cf. Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. “Studia nad dramatycznością w utworach Szekspira”. *Biblioteka Warszawska. Pismo Poświęcone Naukom, Sztukom i Przemysłowi* 1868, Vol. II, pp. 1–17, 219–232.

⁸⁸ As far as irregularity of genre is concerned Apollo Korzeniowski would also seem to have taken his inspiration from the plays of Victor Hugo and Alfred de Vigny (which he translated).

⁸⁹ An example being Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*.

⁹⁰ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. “Studia nad dramatycznością w utworach Szekspira”, *ed. cit.*, p. 227.

⁹¹ Adam Pług. “Pierwsze przedstawienie na Żytomierskim teatrze komedii Apolla Korzeniowskiego pod tytułem: *Dla miłego grosza*”. *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1860, № 28, p. 250.

- ANNA (sama) Spełnię niesmaczny kielich, inaczej nie można.
Wykręcę się z przyrzeczeń; byłam nieostrożna.
Jak to udatnie zrobić? kobieta niegminna
Nawet łamiąc przysięgi piękną być powinna.⁹²
- ANNA (alone) There's nothing for it – I'll have to drain the bitter cup. I was imprudent.
I'll get out of keeping my promises, but how can I do it in a clever and elegant way? A woman of good birth must look beautiful even when she breaks her word.

Anna is a vain drawing-room doll who reacts with hysterical incredulity to the news that the Count's ball has been cancelled, shouting out her disappointment:

Nie będzie?!⁹³

There won't be a ball?!

Anna does not lack common sense: she simply cannot understand that the ball has been cancelled only because the count's servants have forgotten to bring their drawing-room livery with them to Kiev. Empathy is not her forte, however. Like many of her acquaintances and relatives – whose opinions she takes very seriously – she is quite incapable of helping the poor. For quite a long time she succeeds in fooling Józef and Henryk – and with them the audience. It is only towards the end of Act II that Henryk – by observing her eyes and her body language – comes to the conclusion that she is both despotic and vain. She skilfully manages to avoid giving a direct answer when Henryk asks her what she thinks of the prospect of marrying Józef. Also towards the end of Act II Anna – alone in her study – reveals her true intentions in a monologue. She is proud of the fact that she has many suitors, including Józef, who is closest to her heart. Although she yearns for true love, which only Józef can give her, she is a realist. She knows that she would not be able to cope with the hardships of living on a modest scale – even with the man she loved. She is afraid of leading an existence beset with everyday cares that she has never known.

Her main transgression is that for a certain time she leads Józef on until she becomes absolutely sure that he is penniless. Having overheard Karol's conversation with Henryk and having questioned the Nobleman about Józef's income, she is horrified by the prospect of living “in reduced circumstances.” Explaining that she must rescue the finances of her bankrupt father, she agrees to marry the freshly ennobled nouveau riche Adam Muchowski, who disdains his peasant roots and poses as a man of the world. He does not wish to be reminded of the fact that his father was an ox dealer who – on becoming a rich man – bought the title of count from a foreign court and changed his name from Mucha to Muchowski.

Anna's telling silences before and during her monologue in the final scene – after Józef's scornful repudiation of her – would seem to show that her conscience will not leave her in peace:

⁹² Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Dla milego grosza*, ed. cit., p. 135.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

ANNA (*sama – zamyślona – stoi czas niejaki milcząca*)
 Odszedł... Ale nade mną, we mnie – jego słowa!
 Ja jak ze snu! ja inna, ja młodsza – ja nowa!
 Nie – ja dawna, lecz wzięta z wytwornej mej nędzy!
 Więc jest jeszcze na świecie coś oprócz pieniędzy?
 Ach! jakie było piękne jego uniesienie,
 Jaki zacny i rzewny! – Teraz me istnienie
 Jemu... A mąż mój przyszły?!...
 (*milczy chwilę – z rozpaczą*)
 Jakże w duszy ciemno...
 Ja go kocham, mój Boże – zmiłuj się nade mną!⁹⁴

ANNA (*alone – lost in thought – stands silent for some time*) He's gone ... but I can hear his words – they're still ringing in my ears! It's as if I've been asleep! I'm different. I'm younger! I'm new! No – I'm still my old self, but I've been plucked from my exquisite poverty! There are other things in the world apart from money, then? Oh, what a fine display of sincere emotion! How morally upstanding! How moving he was! To him, I am now ... And my husband to be?! ... (*remains silent for a while – with despair in her voice*) My heart is filled with darkness ... I [still] love him. May God have mercy on me!

The end of this monologue further complicates the picture that we have of Anna and suggests that she is a person who is noble at heart, but has been depraved by the bad example given by members of the community in which she lives. We may conclude from the silence which follows the mention of her husband to be that she senses what the future has in store for her – an unhappy life with a man whom she does not love and whom she herself has chosen out of circumspection, i.e. the frivolous, greedy and foppish anglo-maniac Count Adam Muchowski.

Anna's nature – unlike that of Basia in the first play of the trilogy – is neither hurtful nor malicious. This “favourable” interpretation of her character is corroborated by remarks which the author himself makes in his own review of a performance of the play – given in 1860 at the theatre in Żytomierz (Zhitomir) – praising in particular the acting skills of Joanna Miłaszewska, who brought out all the positive traits in Anna's character. For this Nałęcz-Korzeniowski was most grateful:

Our thanks go to Miss Miłaszewska. Not for her talent – as that is a divine gift – but for her unstinting efforts and for her simply magnificent creation of the part of Anna. In Act II and throughout Act III Miss Miłaszewska was radiant with the affected, yet quite voluptuous grace of a lady of the world. In all manner of ways she was devilishly desirable in her external appearance, yet all the time – in her every word and in her every movement – the audience could tell that the sanctity of a woman's soul still glimmered within these ashes that shimmered with gold – within this rotten being clothed in charm. And so, when we come to the final scene, no one is surprised to see that – like a magician's wand – the impassioned declaration of an offended and downtrodden heart transforms this lady of the world into a humble penitent. No one can now doubt that such a woman is prepared to suffer with dignity for the rest of her life, making reparation with her wondrous feminine virtues for those innocent transgressions which

⁹⁴ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Dla milego grosza*, ed. cit., pp. 151–152.

she committed under the influence of her upbringing and the example given by the world in which she lived.⁹⁵

The behaviour of other women mentioned in *Dla milego grosza* (*For Dear Money's Sake*) is also somewhat ambiguous from a moral point of view. The greedy and cunning Karol ruthlessly exposes the false intentions of many women philanthropists of the day, who were once women of loose morals but who now pretend to be pious do-gooders.⁹⁶

Karol, who persuades his daughter to marry the rich Adam, knows what life is like and has both feet firmly on the ground. He knows the misery that poverty inflicts on people and has no illusions about human nature. In his view, people are for the most part primitive, self-seeking “animals” who have respect for no one but the rich.⁹⁷

In *Dla milego grosza* (*For Dear Money's Sake*) – as in *Komedia* (*A Comedy*) – Nałęcz-Korzeniowski constructs the “represented world” on two planes, in accordance with his own understanding of the “represented world” of Shakespeare’s plays. The first plane is the “collective reality of Man”,⁹⁸ i.e. a picture of Society, while the second plane is the “individual reality of Man”,⁹⁹ i.e. the inner lives of the main characters, and in particular their moral dilemmas. In Nałęcz-Korzeniowski’s plays both these planes are quite distinctive. The panorama of Polish Society – presented mainly in *Dla milego grosza* (*For Dear Money's Sake*) – harks back to the Shakespearean idea of the historical drama, which Nałęcz-Korzeniowski understood as a portrayal of the “reality of mankind in history”¹⁰⁰ as it undergoes political and economic change. Nałęcz-Korzeniowski’s desire to paint a picture of the Society of his day – at a time when the feudal system was clearly becoming more and more a thing of the past and was being replaced with capitalist labour relations and a new pragmatic morality based on the profit motive – explains both the satirical dimension of his plays and their realism. This realism is evident not only in the picture which Nałęcz-Korzeniowski paints of the outside world and of the atmosphere that prevails there, but also in the psychological credibility of the characters, who – as often happens in real life – are (or become) like most members of Society. This is particularly true of the main characters: Henryk and Anna.

The psychology of the characters – i.e. the way they think, feel and judge – is linked to the second plane of the play’s “represented world” – the “individual reality of Man” – which above all consists of difficult decisions that have to be taken, an example being Henryk’s decision to abandon Society (in *Komedia*) and Józef’s decision to do the same in *Dla milego grosza*. In both cases we have a Shakespearean

⁹⁵ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. “Korespondencja ‘Tygodnika Ilustrowanego’. Żytomierz 1 marca 1860 r.”. *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1860, № 26, p. 231.

⁹⁶ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Dla milego grosza*, ed. cit., pp. 65–66.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁹⁸ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. “Studia nad dramatyecznością w utworach Szekspira”, ed. cit., p. 11.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

escape from reality into the world of delusion.¹⁰¹ In the second play Henryk substitutes the donning of a mask for membership of Society, but this is also an escape. He cuts himself off from the world and distances himself from other people by means of sarcasm and derision, while at the same time giving discreet aid and support to social castaways such as Józef.

Henryk's story was typical of many of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's contemporaries, who were faced with similar choices at a time when Romantic idealism and heroism were rapidly becoming a thing of the past. His dilemmas may therefore be interpreted as the author's way of indirectly posing the question of whether a heroic stance based on Romantic patriotism was justified or not.¹⁰²

The convictions that Nałęcz-Korzeniowski expressed in the two plays which he wrote in the 1850's relate first and foremost to a new way in which individuals understood their obligations towards Society. These included not only conspiratorial activity (which had proved to be insufficiently effective towards the end of the Romantic era) but also – and above all – social work, supporting the needy (cf. Henryk's financial support for the family of the impoverished Secretary in *Komedia*), campaigns to change social attitudes and economic modernization (cf. the industrialist Master in *Dla milego grosza*).

Nałęcz-Korzeniowski himself was in two minds about the modernization of farming methods in the Polish countryside. Although he was more inclined to support traditional models of farming on estates owned by Polish landowners, he insisted that the interests of the peasants should always be properly taken into account.¹⁰³ He was therefore against the exploitative methods of management that were commonly used by the nobility on their estates and campaigned not only for the humane treatment of serfs, but also for the abolishment of serfdom itself. This, however, was not to be achieved immediately, but by a process whereby the serfs would be allowed to buy the land which they normally tilled for themselves.¹⁰⁴ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski was therefore not a radical revolutionary. He only envisaged a gradual social and economic evolution and was hostile to capitalism. He remained a traditionalist in his views on the development of industry, which in his opinion was responsible for disrupting relations between the nobility and the peasantry, weakening the unity of the Polish nation and depraving the morals of individuals.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 227.

¹⁰² The same question arises in Apollo Korzeniowski's unfinished play – begun in the 1860's – entitled *Ojciec (The Father)*.

¹⁰³ Zdzisław Najder sums up Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's views on social and economic matters as follows: "Korzeniowski's utopian agrarianism and his spirited attacks on industry as a source of materialism, corruption and breakdown of social cohesion were salient themes of his writings." (Zdzisław Najder. *Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Fidelity*, ed. cit., p. 26). Cf. Zdzisław Najder. *Wstęp*. [In:] *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego. Dokumenty rodzinne, listy, wspomnienia*, Vol. I, ed. cit., p. 22.

¹⁰⁴ Jerzy Zdrada. "Pomiędzy szyderstwem i rozpaczą". *Rzeczpospolita* 28th February 2007 (supplement devoted to Joseph Conrad), pp. 5–6.

¹⁰⁵ Analysing the articles which Nałęcz-Korzeniowski published in various magazines, Andrzej Busza writes: "We find, once again, in these articles severe attacks on capitalism and industrialization. His economic theories were based on the conviction that agriculture is all-important in the national

In *Dla milego grosza* (*For Dear Money's Sake*) these traditionalist views are echoed by the Nobleman, who – like Józef – is a positive character. He alone understands that – deep down – Henryk is a sensitive person who is also a discreet critic of bogus morality. Unlike the anglomaniac Adam Muchowski in *Dla milego grosza* (*For Dear Money's Sake*) – who is a caricature of superficial novelty seekers – Nałęcz-Korzeniowski himself was characteristically wary of various artistic, intellectual, technological and other fashionable trends that originated in western Europe.

Because of Russian censorship, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski could not give direct expression to his anti-tsarist and anti-Russian prejudices in the plays that he wrote in the 1850's, although they formed the basis of his historical outlook. They are present in a veiled form in the unfinished plays of the 1860's, for instance in *Akt pierwszy* (*Act One*), *Ojciec* (*The Father*) and *Rozmowy* (*Conversations*). It was only in 1864 that Nałęcz-Korzeniowski was able to give full vent to his anti-tsarist views in an anonymous political pamphlet published in Leipzig and entitled *Polska i Moskwa* (*Poland and Muscovy*).¹⁰⁶

Summing up, we may say that although the subject of money – which was ubiquitous in the Polish and foreign comedies of manners of the day – is also present in his plays, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski developed new techniques for creating theatrical reality by – among other things – introducing a refreshing element of tragicomedy. In the plays he wrote in the 1850's he touched on certain subjects (for example misogyny) which only became popular in the art and literature of the *Młoda Polska* (Young Poland) period (ca. 1890–1918). In the 1860's he tried to introduce elements of the *pièce à thèse* into his plays and experimented with the symbolist techniques that were much used in poetic drama at the turn of the century.

2. THE UNFINISHED PLAYS OF THE 1860'S

Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski probably wrote his subsequent plays in the 1860's, during his term of exile in Vologda (from 1862) and Czernihów/Chernihiv (from 1863). Most of these works are unfinished and have never been published. From an artistic point of view they are definitely inferior to the plays written in the 1850's, although their subject matter – the social and political situation in the Polish lands under tsarist rule – is similar.

These later plays are also realist comedies of manners. Although they are incomplete, the fragments that have come down to us would seem to indicate that the plays were planned as *pièces à thèse* or poetic dramas.

economy.” – Andrzej Busza. “Conrad’s Polish Literary Background and Some Illustrations of the Influence of Polish Literature on His Work”. *Antemurale* (Romae–Londinii) 1966, fasc. X, p. 126.

¹⁰⁶ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. “Polska i Moskwa. Pamiętnik *** zaczęty 186...”. *Ojczyzna. Dziennik Polityczny, Literacki i Naukowy* (Leipzig) 1864, Nos 27–29, 31, 34–36, 42–52.

Only one play written in the 1860's was published during the author's lifetime: *Akt pierwszy (Act One)* [probably written in 1865; staged in 1868; 1st edition 1866;¹⁰⁷ 2nd edition 1869], described by Nałęcz-Korzeniowski himself as not having been originally written in verse. The play was ready in late February or early March 1865 and was provisionally entitled *Córka (The Daughter)*. This we know from a post-script to a letter sent by the author to Kazimierz Kaszewski, expressing his wish that the play be published in the *Kłosa* weekly magazine. In the event it was serialized in another weekly – the *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*.¹⁰⁸

Akt pierwszy (Act One) is the first part of an unfinished trilogy entitled *Bez ratunku (No Escape)*, whose second part was to be an (unfinished) drama entitled *Ojciec (The Father)*. Nałęcz-Korzeniowski probably began writing the trilogy in the early 1860's. In 1861 he had a clear idea in his mind of the structure of *Ojciec (The Father)*.¹⁰⁹ The entire trilogy – which was intended to portray Polish family life and Polish public morality – was finished in December 1868.¹¹⁰

If they like the play which I enclose, then they can print it – without giving my name. This is the first act, but it's complete in itself. I once intended to dramatize our family life, with each act presenting a different family member. This first act presents the daughter, while the second act presents the father and the third act presents the mother. [...] [It's] rather a home-made product (though not original). Although it's only one act, it's a rounded whole – as the second and third acts will be. Each act can be printed separately. Taken together, they portray a complete family.¹¹¹

Each part of the trilogy was therefore intended to be a completely separate play – with its own set of characters and its own plot – showing the symbolic meaning of a particular family member in the life of Society and the nation. Loosely connected by a common theme, they were to form a united whole when put together.

This cycle of plays is innovative in that it gives much prominence to the role of women in Society at a time when the whole Polish nation was being subjected to foreign oppression. Indeed, it is almost exclusively devoted to women's attitudes – seen as a particular kind of duty and behaviour that was consistent with the messianic calling of the Polish nation. Another innovation in these plays is that women are shown in a negative light.

¹⁰⁷ The first version of *Akt pierwszy* was published under the title *Bez ratunku (No Escape)* in 1866. See: Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. "Bez ratunku. Urywek dramatu nieoryginalnego". *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1866, № 339, pp. 139–140; № 340, pp. 151–152; № 341, pp. 160–162.

¹⁰⁸ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. [List do Kazimierza Kaszewskiego / Letter to Kazimierz Kaszewski], dnia 26 lutego / 10 marca 1865 roku // OS 26th February 1865. Rkps BJ (manuscript held by the Jagiellonian Library), sygn. 3057 II, f. 25.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Ewa Korzeniowska. [List do Apolla Korzeniowskiego / Letter to Apollo Korzeniowski], Teterów, dnia 20 czerwca / 2 lipca 1861 roku // OS 20th June 1861. [In:] *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego. Dokumenty rodzinne, listy, wspomnienia*, Vol. I, ed. cit., p. 122.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. [List do Kazimierza Kaszewskiego / Letter to Kazimierz Kaszewski], Lwów, dnia 24 grudnia 1868 roku / 24th December 1868. [In:] *ibid.*, p. 226.

¹¹¹ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. [List do Kazimierza Kaszewskiego / Letter to Kazimierz Kaszewski], Czernihów, dnia 19/31 stycznia 1866 roku // OS 19th January 1866. [In:] *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego. Dokumenty rodzinne, listy, wspomnienia*, Vol. I, ed. cit., pp. 170–171.

The heroines of this trilogy: Adela in *Akt pierwszy (Act One)* – the daughter of a traitor and the unfaithful wife of Karol – and the Mother in *Ojciec (The Father)* – who tries to persuade her son Henryk to collaborate with foreign oppressors and thus save his own life – become metaphors of the behaviour of a fair section of Polish Society between 1830 and 1863. This behaviour contrasted with the heroic stance of those people who embodied the Romantic idea of sacrificing oneself for one's country. According to the stage directions, *Akt pierwszy (Act One)* is set in Poland "between the uprisings",¹¹² while *Ojciec (The Father)* would seem to be set in the period just before or actually during one of the uprisings.

The events portrayed in *Akt pierwszy (Act One)* take place in a garden which is close to Karol's country manor house. The time is sunset and the season is spring or summer. Maria's father Karol is about to leave for four days to see his uncle Henryk, who – on the occasion of Maria's coming wedding – is to present her with Ludymiec, a landed estate he has bought as a dowry for her from Count Alfons, who is one of Karol's neighbours. Together with Józef – his future son-in-law and fellow veteran (of the November Uprising, no doubt) – Karol wants to use the income from the dowry to make improvements on the farm. Uncle Henryk will not be coming to Maria's wedding, however, as he disapproves of her mother Adela, whose family betrayed Poland in 1792 by joining the Confederation of Targowica.

We therefore know from the outset that Karol's wife Adela will be unfaithful to him, coming as she does from a family of traitors. In her case, biological and psychological determinism win the day: her affair with the handsome, gallant and profligate ladies' man Count Alfons destroys her family, i.e. her own marriage and her daughter's engagement to the patriotic Józef.

Having heard of Karol's departure, Count Alfons arranges to meet Adela, who appears to be dejected throughout the play. The reason for her low spirits turns out to be her concern for the fate of the bankrupt count – as well as her own disgrace. She knows perfectly well that by meeting her lover she is destroying her family. She is ashamed of her misdeed and even suffers pangs of conscience, but her instinct for betrayal gets the better of her.

On the one hand, Adela is weak when she yields to the count's persuasions, but – on the other hand – she is strong and courageous when she is moved by her feelings for him. Having succumbed to a fatal passion, she suffers pangs of conscience, but her behaviour undergoes a radical change as soon as she receives a letter from the count suggesting that they meet. Reading the letter, she no longer regrets her sin and can even overcome her fear of being found out at any moment. The tell-tale sign of this play of conflicting feelings and thoughts in her psyche is the "bitter smile" which appears on her face as soon as she opens the count's letter.¹¹³

Unfortunately for Adela, her husband Karol unexpectedly returns home together with Henryk, whom he has met on his outward journey. Karol manages to snatch the ill-fated letter from his wife's hand and jokingly says that it must be from a lover.

¹¹² Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Akt pierwszy. Dramat w jednej odsłonie (Nieoryginalnie wierszem napisany)*, ed. cit., p. 1.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Terrified that the truth will come out, Adela tries to snatch the letter back and at one point even faints, when – after several attempts – she fails to retrieve the letter.

Czesław Miłosz is of the opinion that *Akt pierwszy* (*Act One*) is worthy of attention because it propagates the conviction that ...

[...] service rendered to the enemy, i.e. to the Russians, is invariably the symptom of a weakening of one's moral instincts and that this psychosomatic trait is passed on through one's genes. If in many of the tragedies that we know Fate acts through an inherited inclination to murder or incest, why should it not also manifest itself in this way? – assuming that any manner of collaboration (and of this we cannot be sure) always has the same causes, i.e. weak nerves and an attachment to material gain.¹¹⁴

What is more, despite the fact that no one dies in the play, there is an atmosphere of impending doom from the very beginning, just as in a Greek tragedy. In 1966 Andrzej Busza observed that the whole trilogy was “a psychological drama about a family, haunted, in Theban fashion, by the curse of a national betrayal, committed by one of its ancestors.”¹¹⁵

This unsettling atmosphere is heightened further by the repeated hooting of an owl. Józef has a premonition of impending disaster and even thinks of killing the owl. Karol makes light of his son-in-law's apprehensions, but even he fears that his settled family life, which he sees as a reward for the wounds he incurred as an insurgent, may one day come to an end. He is afraid that he may have to pay with suffering for his present, somewhat unreal happiness.

In the end Karol reads the letter and the truth about Adela's infidelity is revealed. His daughter Maria, however, quickly steps in to take the blame, saying that the letter is addressed to her. Maria's fiancé Józef leaves in despair and Karol flies into a rage. Maria faints and Adela – now on her knees – weeps. Henryk consoles Maria, while Karol – who is absolutely thunderstruck – is heard disowning a woman in his family, though exactly whom we do not know: this is a question for the stage director and the actors to resolve. The play ends on the following words spoken by Karol:

KAROL Weźcie mi ją precz z oczu... Nie znam tej kobiety.¹¹⁶

KAROL Take her from my sight ... I don't know this woman.

The ending of the play is therefore very powerful, melodramatic and dire for all the characters. Whereas the beginning of *Akt pierwszy* (*Act One*) shows us the peaceful, bucolic life of a nobleman's family and their joyful preparations for the daughter's wedding, the end of the play shows us a family that has fallen apart. Like Adela and Karol, Maria and Józef will never be able to see things the same way again. Such

¹¹⁴ Czesław Miłosz. *Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski*. [In:] *idem. Prywatne obowiązki*, ed. cit., p. 269.

¹¹⁵ “*Bez ratunku* is a psychological drama about a family, haunted, in Theban fashion, by the curse of a national betrayal, committed by one of its ancestors. It is not a well-written work...” – Busza. “Conrad's Polish Literary Background and Some Illustrations of the Influence of Polish Literature on His Work”, ed. cit., p. 124.

¹¹⁶ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Akt pierwszy*, ed. cit., p. 40.

an ending does not make the play a tragedy, but rather a drama written in a serious vein. This unhappy and somewhat uncertain ending gave the play's first audience quite a surprise, which was exactly what the author had intended, as we read in his preface:

Act One was supposed to make such an impression on the audience. Seeing the words THE END on the last page of this volume, the reader will not believe his eyes and will turn the page – only to see the cover, which is the shroud of dead thought [laid] on paper. Such is the impression that *Act One* will surely make on the reader.¹¹⁷

Nałęcz-Korzeniowski was of the opinion that in his times Polish comedies of manners should not have happy endings, arguing – somewhat guardedly – that Polish Society was in a difficult situation, as some of its members had agreed to become slaves or “Helots”,¹¹⁸ while the rest were suffering oppression at the hands of the authorities. He held that the theatre could not be indifferent to this and that playwrights ought to forego the use of banal, “symmetrical”¹¹⁹ techniques which give plays a harmony that is so much at variance with the reality of the outside world:

On the other hand it is plain for all to see that there are whole sections of Society in which order, moderation and harmonious proportion cannot be expected of any aspect of life – and even less so of Art. We have been living like this for a hundred years.¹²⁰

In *Akt pierwszy* (*Act One*) there is an indefinable and almost irrational atmosphere of fear. This is a static play, with very little action. Nature (the hooting of an owl) and the time of day (sunset, followed by twilight and dusk) further heighten the impression of eerie abnormality. In these respects Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's play is similar to the symbolist dramas of the turn of the century.

The remaining unfinished plays of the 1860's have yet to be published. They include the fragment of a play which is probably the “continuation” of the events of *Akt pierwszy* (*Act One*) and consists of practically four scenes. Like all the other fragments that will be discussed below, it was written in the 1860's and certainly before 1869. It bears the title *Akt drugi* (*Act Two*)¹²¹ and the action takes place the day after the events of *Akt pierwszy* (*Act One*). It is a comedy of manners which would seem to make use of the motif of nuptial infidelity (or suspicions of nuptial infidelity) on the part of Adela and Maria. Karol suspects that one of them has committed adultery and – wishing to avenge himself – decides to consult the opinion of his uncle Henryk, but only after first determining whether it is his wife or his daughter who has a lover – and also who actually sent the intercepted love letter.

We read that there is a connection between the letter and Henryk, who – because of his aversion to Adela and her family – may have had a hand in the intrigue, perhaps

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. III.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. V.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. IV.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. V.

¹²¹ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Akt drugi*. Rkps BJ (manuscript held by the Jagiellonian Library), sygn. 6577 IV, Vol. II, ff. 139–141.

wishing to make Karol aware of his wife's licentiousness. Karol and Henryk read the letter together. At one point Henryk admits that the letter was written by him, but a moment later denies what he has just said and leaves the house to attend to some matter. He promises to return in the evening and advises Karol to talk the matter over – both with his wife and with his daughter.

After Henryk's departure Karol continues to brood over the disgrace which he claims has befallen his family. As the matter of the letter has yet to be fully explained, one can surmise that the pompous style which Karol employs in giving vent to his injured pride is quite inconsistent with his real situation. Obsessed with the need to uncover the plots and betrayals that beset him, Karol is not yet aware of what the audience knows. His situation therefore appears to be tragicomic. Unfortunately, as Nałęcz-Korzeniowski left the story there, we shall never know whether Adela really was unfaithful to her husband – as would appear from the plot of *Akt pierwszy* (*Act One*) – or whether she merely succumbed to a passing infatuation that Henryk wished to exploit in order to harm her interests.

Nałęcz-Korzeniowski wrote a further fragment of the play entitled *Ojciec* (*The Father*), which – together with *Akt pierwszy* (*Act One*) and another play which has not come down to us – was to have formed a trilogy painting a metaphorical portrait of the Polish family of the author's times.

In 1996 Zdzisław Najder noted that this fragment compared favourably with many of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's post-Romantic poems.¹²² In his book entitled *Sztuka i wierność. Szkice o twórczości Josepha Conrada* (*Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Fidelity*) Zdzisław Najder observes that Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's reason for writing this play was an experience that he shared with many of his generation, namely that of having to choose between "fidelity and treason, honour and fear, life and death, reputation and shame".¹²³ Najder goes on to try to explain what Nałęcz-Korzeniowski may have experienced during his life before coming to write *Ojciec* (*The Father*):

Was there in Apollo Korzeniowski's life an event, a personal crisis, which could have prompted these interests? We do not have any grounds to think so; but, of course, he saw around himself enough acts of fidelity and of betrayal to be concerned with these subjects. And he was far from being original in these motifs. The images of duty abandoned, of betrayal, and above all of desertion, had been common in Polish literature since the early nineteenth century, since the loss of Polish national independence.¹²⁴ [...] There were many cases of identical conflicts, differently resolved, among Korzeniowski's fellow conspirators.¹²⁵

In the fragment that remains of *Ojciec* (*The Father*) the author has lightly sketched out the realities of his times. Talking to her son, the Mother, who embodies tradi-

¹²² Najder. *Wstęp*. [In:] *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego. Dokumenty rodzinne, listy, wspomnienia*, Vol. I, ed. cit., pp. 21, 41.

¹²³ Najder. *Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Fidelity*, ed. cit., p. 13. Cf. Najder. *Sztuka i wierność. Szkice o twórczości Josepha Conrada*, ed. cit., p. 18.

¹²⁴ Najder. *Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Fidelity*, ed. cit., p. 13.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

tional “homely” values connected with caring for the well-being of one’s family, stresses people’s everyday material needs:

- MATKA (*gwaltownie*) Nie, nie wiem! Nie pojmuję! Chcę, byś ty był żywy!
- HENRYK Lecz cóż o mnie powiedzą?
- MATKA (*z bolesną ironią*) Co powiedzą?! Oto –
słowo, co was prowadzi, które Wam jest cnotą!
Kiedyście je wyrzekli, zapewne myślicie,
że nic dodać nie warto! Tak! trza, by me dziecię
ginęło za myśl ludzi, którzy w złej godzinie
nic dla Niego nie czynią?...
(*gwaltownie*) Nie! Syn mój nie zginie.
(*z rozpaczą*) Cześć! Imię! Obowiązek! O! zabójcze mary...¹²⁶
- MOTHER (*vehemently*) No, I do *not* know! I do *not* understand! I want you to be alive!
- HENRYK But what will they say about me?
- MOTHER (*upset and sarcastic*) What will they say?! That’s the phrase that leads you all
on! That’s your [idea of] virtue! Once you’ve said that, there’s nothing more to
say, or so you think! Oh, yes! So my child has to die? For the ideas of people
who haven’t lifted a finger to help him in his hour of need? ... (*vehemently*) No!
My son is *not* going to die! (*despairingly*) Honour! Family Name! Duty! Oh,
what deadly illusions!

We find Henryk preparing to make a sudden departure. He is leaving home because he is eager to do his duty as a patriot. His mother, who has just come back from church, reproaches him for not having been to Sunday Mass. Wishing to persuade him not to leave, she speaks bluntly, though not openly, about the political situation. She even thinks of travelling with him, but this is impossible because he has sworn to travel alone. The very mention of this sworn commitment causes her to react with vehement rage and despair:

- MATKA A! Jedź więc
Przysięgi potęga świętsza nad miłość matki!
(*do siebie*) Mój Boże jedyny!
Osobny raj mieć winien każdy ból matczyny;
bo ta ziemia, ci ludzie, wszyscy bez litości!¹²⁷
- MOTHER Oh! Go, then! The power of an oath is more sacred than a son’s love for his
mother! (*to herself*) Dear God! There ought to be a separate heaven for every

¹²⁶ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Ojciec*. Rkps BJ (manuscript held by the Jagiellonian Library), sygn. 6577 IV, Vol. II, f. 6.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 3.

pain that a mother has to bear. This land and these people – pitiless, the whole lot of them!

Concerned for the life of her son, the Mother opposes the patriotic ideals of her husband – the titular Father – who is driven by a sense of duty towards his country. The Mother laments the fact that – both for her husband and her son – the two most important things in life are “the fatherland and duty”.¹²⁸

In an attempt to dissuade Henryk from leaving, the Mother reminds him that as a newborn baby he was very weak and that it seemed that he was going to die. Only she – his mother – believed that he would survive, thanks to her prayers and the strength of her love. Having been saved, however, he has been condemned to a life of misery,¹²⁹ bound by fidelity to the ideals that have been passed down to him by his father:

MATKA Ojczyzna i powinność wzięły mi twe serce. –
 Gdy mówiono przy tobie o ojczyźnej męce,
 ziomków doli i kraju, drżały twoje ręce;
 i widziałam w twym oku, o! mój synu luby,
 straszną przyszłość poświęceń, mojej – twojej – zguby!
 Serce mi wciąż szeptało i modlitwą w niebie
 na to cię uprosiłam u Boga dla siebie,
 by mi Syna wydarła przeznaczeń zawilość,
 kiedy lat niepokojem wzrośnie moja miłość!¹³⁰

MOTHER The fatherland and duty have robbed me of your heart. Your hands trembled when you were told of the terrible suffering of your country and the plight of your fellow countrymen. In your eyes – oh, my dearest son! – I saw a future full of fearful sacrifice: your doom and mine! My heart never ceased to whisper and, answering my prayers, God gave you to me – only for you to be snatched from me at a time when my love and concern for you have grown over the years – snatched by the whirlwind of destiny.

Complaining that his mother is “driving him to tears” and “weakening his resolve,”¹³¹ Henryk nevertheless decides to do his duty. Although his mother gives him her blessing before he leaves, she continues to oppose the sacrifice that he is prepared to make and – filled with despair – faints.

The next scene finds Henryk in prison. From the stage directions, it would appear that he has been sentenced to death for his part in an anti-government conspiracy. He is visited by his fiancée Natalia – the daughter of the very government official on whom his fate now depends. Natalia has been sent to attempt to persuade him to betray his companions in return for his own release, but she has no intention of doing so, as she is convinced of the justice of his cause and actually advises him to keep

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 3–4.

¹³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, f. 4.

faith with his fellow conspirators. She is even willing to share his fate and be executed with him, but Henryk will not hear of it. Moved by emotion, in a moment of weakness Natalia advises him to betray the conspirators, but quickly has a change of heart. Henryk's wish is that she tell people of his sacrifice, so that its memory may live on after his death. Just before she leaves the prison cell, Natalia symbolically weds Henryk before God, believing that one day they will meet in heaven.

Henryk's next visitor is his mother, which means that he is faced with further temptations. His mother tries to convince him that his fidelity to "Duty"¹³² – i.e. to the national cause – will destroy him and make her life a misery. Listening to her words, Henryk again begins to have doubts about his mission, but at the last minute the titular Father appears in order to convince him that fidelity to one's obligations and one's ideals is paramount. The Father defends patriarchal values, which give meaning to his own life and that of his family:

OJCIEC (*poważnie*) Kobieto! – Prawo Boże i ojców zwyczaj
was wszystkich – nawet ciebie – woli mej poddaje.
Namaszczony tem prawem od ludzi i nieba,
jestem Głową Rodziny i słuchać mię trzeba!...
(*ukazując na Henryka*) Jego cześć – moją cześcią; i ja – jej strażnikiem!
Tych świętych obowiązków nie podzielę z nikim! –
Nad nim mój wyrok tylko...¹³³

FATHER (*gravely*) Woman! By Divine Right and in accordance with the customs of our forefathers you are all – and that includes you – subject to my will. Having been anointed with this power by Society and by Heaven, I am the Head of the Family and must be obeyed! ... (*pointing to Henryk*) His honour is my honour – and I am its defender! I will not share these sacred duties with anyone! Only I can be his judge ...

The Mother cannot understand this line of thought, however. She sees the question of fidelity to one's obligations solely through the prism of her own suffering:

MATKA Nie mogę! Nie mogę! –
Ja pierwiej od was przeczulałam tę drogę!
Gdzie wam wieńce się śniły, – Ja krzyże widziałam...¹³⁴

MOTHER I can't [take any more of this]! I saw all this coming before any of you! I saw crosses where you dreamt of seeing laurel wreaths!

This fragment of the unfinished play ends with the Mother falling to the ground in a faint after giving her final blessing to her son.

¹³² *Ibid.*, f. 6.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, f. 7.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

Henryk must choose between the altruistic ideals of his father and his mother's overriding desire to care for the well-being of her family.¹³⁵ Even though this play is unfinished, we can be fairly sure that Henryk will not betray his fellow conspirators, that he will give up his hopes of marrying his fiancée Natalia and that – in accordance with his father's values and beliefs – he will sacrifice his life for his country.

Here Nałęcz-Korzeniowski presents the tragic choice faced by several generations of Poles, who often paid with their lives for their fidelity to the ideals of their ancestors. Although the characters of this play have been situated in a particular time and place (i.e. in Poland after the partitions) the universal subjects of their conversations – the timeless problems of fulfilling one's obligations, being faithful to one's ideals and the constant need to make fundamental choices – creates the impression of a certain indeterminacy of time and space. Speaking metaphorically, the characters of the play are situated outside history and are faced with a borderline predicament.

It is above all in the manner in which the characters have been constructed that we can detect elements of early symbolism – which, however, do not extend to the whole vision of the play's "represented world." The poetic stylization of this "represented world" is therefore only partial. It is supported by elements of a morality play which are present in the "psychomachia" scene, where the "battle" for Henryk's soul is played out. This wider sense does not preclude realism, however. The play combines elements of both tragedy and comedy. What is tragic here is the fact that the punishment meted out to Henryk by the Russian authorities – i.e. death or exile – will be out of all proportion to the seriousness of his offense. At times, however, Henryk's deliberations seem to be quite exaggerated, as does the exclamatory style of his utterances:

HENRYK Bądź błogosławione –
 serce co spływasz ku mnie, z mem sercem złączone!
 Wdowo – nie będąc żoną! pomnij! Gdy powieki
 zamknę, chowaj przysięgę.¹³⁶

HENRYK Blessed is the heart that sails towards me and is joined to mine! O widow –
 without even having been a wife! Remember! When my eyelids are closed,
 keep your vows.

One may treat such exaggeration either as the product of Romantic mannerism based on the hyperbolization of emotions, or as an indication that – as a political exile – Nałęcz-Korzeniowski had perhaps begun to radically revise his previous stance on the subject of heroic sacrifice in the service of one's country. During his conversation with Natalia, Henryk is torn between the necessity for heroic sacrifice and his dream of living a normal life and starting a family of his own. Despite her own hesitations, however, his fiancée tells him to listen to the voice of goodness.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Henryk – the main character in *Ojciec* (*The Father*) – is not the same character as the Henryk in Apollo Korzeniowski's *Akt pierwszy* (*Act One*) and *Akt drugi* (*Act Two*), or the Henryk in *Komedia* (*A Comedy*) and *Dla milego grosza* (*For Dear Money's Sake*).

¹³⁶ Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Ojciec*, ed. cit., ff. 5–6.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 5.

One could interpret Henryk's vacillations as an attempt on the part of the author to show that a departure from the Romantic paradigm of struggle and sacrifice was possible; that there might be a more rational way of fulfilling one's obligations to Society – one that did not involve putting at risk one's own life and the lives of one's nearest and dearest. From what we know of the plot, it seems hardly likely that Henryk will choose this alternative, but his rejection of it is not a completely foregone conclusion. Nałęcz-Korzeniowski here shows us a character who – having been caught up in a dramatic and tense situation – faces a terrible dilemma and very nearly gives in to his mother's persuasion. By giving in to his mother, Henryk would save his own life, but at the cost of collaborating with his country's oppressors. Although this wavering is only momentary, it would seem that it might have served to cast some doubt on the wisdom of blind obedience to the Romantic ideal of heroism. The non-extant third play of the trilogy – which was to have been devoted mainly to the character of the Mother – would no doubt have shed more light on the author's bitter reflections in this unfinished second play.

Among Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's manuscripts there are fragments of two plays which bear no titles. Of the first, whose main character has killed his father, only a few lines remain. The author's use of cosmic metaphors might indicate that the play had a visionary component.¹³⁸ In the fragment that remains, the patricidal son tells us that “on the first day”¹³⁹ the King of the Comets saw his sleeping father Sławan, who was completely senile and who – being immortal – died by giving his life to his fellow countrymen. From the one scene that remains of the other play, we know that the main character is Józef, who has almost certainly been involved in an insurrection, having witnessed the death of his commander, who was also his friend.¹⁴⁰

Those unfinished manuscripts of plays which do have titles are somewhat longer, consisting usually of several scenes. They are realist dramas of manners, comedies with stock characters or plays with elements of the positivist *pièce à thèse*.

One of these unfinished plays is a realist drama entitled *Rozmowy* (*Conversations*). It is set in a Polish manor house in Ruthenia (the Ukraine / Ukraine) during the Crimean War (1853–1856) or – to be more precise (as appears from the stage directions) – during the siege of Sebastopol (Sevastopol) in the spring of 1855. The gentlemen and ladies gathered in Natalia's manor house are preparing bandages for the wounded soldiers of Sebastopol. Judging by their political views, they would seem to be on the side of the Russians. They are happy that – as they learn from the newspapers – the war will soon be at an end. As dyed-in-the-wool conservatives they yearn for peace and a return to the way things used to be.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. [Fragment dramatyczny o Ojcobójcy / dramatic fragment about the Patricide]. Rkps BJ (manuscript held by the Jagiellonian Library), sygn. 6577 IV, Vol. II, f. 120.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 123.

¹⁴⁰ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. [Fragment dramatyczny o Józefie / dramatic fragment about Józef]. Rkps BJ (manuscript held by the Jagiellonian Library), sygn. 6577 IV, Vol. II, f. 105.

¹⁴¹ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Rozmowy*. Rkps BJ (manuscript held by the Jagiellonian Library), sygn. 6577 IV, Vol. II, ff. 106–107.

The only person who is not busy preparing bandages for the wounded is Natalia, who – to the ill-concealed displeasure and scorn of the people gathered at her house – discreetly supports the Polish cause. In this way, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski exposes the conformist tendencies of the Polish landowners of Ruthenia, ridiculing their cowardice, cynicism and lack of patriotism. These negative traits become especially evident when the people gathered at the house vie with each other to decide on the best offering of thanks for the imminent end of hostilities. Their various suggestions are “witty”, albeit totally inappropriate:

- OBYWATEL 1 Ja tu *votum* robię;
 „Że jeśli jaką żyłkę polską znajdę w sobie
 To każę ją wnet wypruć, nie bacząc na ból”. [...]
- DAMA 1 Mniemam że niewiele
 Odstąpić od przedwiecznych obyczajów świata
 Gdy ofiarą tą będzie – jaki demokrat!¹⁴²
- GENTLEMAN 1 I do hereby solemnly swear that if I find so much as a little Polish vein in
 my body, I'll have it torn out, however much it hurts. [...]
- LADY 1 I think that we'll have made little progress since prehistoric times if the
 offering is to be a democrat!

The tactlessness and lack of sympathy for Polish conspirators and democrats in this play are quite stinging:

- OBYWATEL 3 (*śmiejąc się*) Litość zwyciężonym.
- DAMA 1 *C'est méchant, mais c'est juste.*¹⁴³
- GENTLEMAN 3 (*laughing*) Pity the vanquished.
- LADY 1 *C'est méchant, mais c'est juste.*

Natalia, who is outraged by jokes of this kind, reproaches the ladies for their lack of pity and the gentlemen for their lack of courage. Seeing that her noble acquaintances are quite impervious to criticism of this nature, she finally disowns them:

- NATALIA Tacy wszyscy – jak jeden. – Ja nie wasze – dziecię.¹⁴⁴
- NATALIA You're all the same. I'm not one of your kind.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, f. 107.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 108.

Another of these unfinished plays is closer to a comedy with stock characters than a realist drama. It consists of two incomplete scenes. The characters are January, the Countess, the Chamberlain's wife and the Servant.

The most conspicuous character is January. It would appear from the first scene that he likes to read books late at night, and so is averse to receiving morning visitors. What is more important, however, is what January has to say on the subject of conscience. In his opinion, conscience is an "insufferable bind"¹⁴⁵ which prevents people from acting in a decisive way and which destroys their self-confidence. He is bent on freeing himself of all pangs of conscience because he has to deal with some urgent business. Like all his relatives, he now has to do his best to keep on the right side of his uncle. In a monologue, he describes the latter as an eccentric recluse who – having avoided people all his life – has now in his old age decided to invite all his relatives in order to see which of them deserves to inherit his estate. January wonders what sort of mask he must wear in order to win the old man's favour. As the uncle has yet to make his will, his heirs will have to fight for the estate – and so January will have to eliminate his rivals.

This unfinished play was no doubt conceived as a comedy of manners about the life of a noble family. It has a traditional subject and makes use of such time-worn motifs of Polish drama as mistaken identity and a plot hatched by the characters in order to win an inheritance.

Yet another dramatic fragment would seem to be a positivist *pièce à thèse* and is somewhat more complex. The characters are Orfeusz, Zofia, Henryk and Benedykt. Zofia, the wife of an elderly industrialist, feels lonely in her marriage because her husband Benedykt – a materialistic person who thinks only about his wealth¹⁴⁶ – does not understand her. Although she loves the young Henryk – who used to be a poet and who is her husband's nephew – she tries not to give in to her passion. Henryk is visited by Orfeusz – a poet and an old university friend – who reproaches Henryk for busying himself with the affairs of his uncle's estate instead of pursuing the ideals of his youth.

Henryk's betrayal of these ideals in order to lead a comfortable existence as the manager of his uncle's country estate is reminiscent of similar themes in the plays which Nałęcz-Korzeniowski wrote in the 1850's. In a fragment that has survived, Henryk's friend Orfeusz speaks of the betrayal of ideals and predicts that – like his uncle – he will eventually become a dreary *nouveau riche*.

For his part, Henryk, who was once a Romantic, sees the value of work and – not without certain hesitations – is convinced that the modernization of farming methods is a good thing in every way and that, moreover, it has a social justification:

HENRYK Myśl nasza może dojrzeć tylko na tej roli, pośród zbiedniałej szlachty, wśród zgnędniałych śmieci, w głodzie, w chłodzie, i w brudach śmieci: bo to jest

¹⁴⁵ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. [Fragment dramatyczny o spadku / dramatic fragment about an inheritance]. Rkps BJ (manuscript held by the Jagiellonian Library), sygn. 6577 IV, Vol. II, f. 121.

¹⁴⁶ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. [Fragment dramatyczny o Henryku i Orfeuszu / dramatic fragment about Henryk and Orfeusz]. Rkps BJ (manuscript held by the Jagiellonian Library), sygn. 6577 IV, Vol. II, f. 109.

rdzeń narodu! – Tu – poezja wszelka! Chleb dany – to rym szczytny; okrycie – myśl wielka; brud zmyty – to są laury; śmiecie wymiecione i zepsucie wyrwane – to strofy natchnione! – O! tu ksiąg nie czytają! Tu – martwa litera! Tu czyn tylko, a ciągły, do dusz się przedziera! – Gdy więc tu rozkazuję, – słuchaj przyjacielu: nie schlebiam żądzy władzy, lecz dążę do celu!¹⁴⁷

HENRYK Our thoughts and dreams can come to fruition only on this farmland, among impoverished noblemen and haggard outcasts who are hungry, cold and surrounded by the scum of the earth – because these people are the heart of the nation! All poetry is here! Bread that is given is a magnificent rhythm! A coat that is given is a great thought! The washing away of filth is a laurel wreath! The sweeping away of rubbish and the removal of decay are inspired stanzas! People don't read books here! Letters are dead in these parts! Here only continual action can reach into people's souls. So, my friend, when I do my work as a manager here – mark my words well – I don't indulge my thirst for power, but I do strive to achieve my goals!

Henryk has therefore made a sober assessment of reality. He knows that poetry and lofty slogans alone cannot heal or feed the nation because most people are deaf to them. Although he sometimes likes to sing a song (as on his walk round the garden with Orfeusz) he knows that concrete action, i.e. work – removing what is ugly and washing away “filth” – is much more important. He also knows, however, that he will have to confront his uncle, who has built a factory on his estate and is in favour of combining farming with industry. Henryk is against this because he is convinced that the country's economy ought to be based on farming. He tells Orfeusz that he would also like to fulfil another important social mission by improving relations between the nobility and the peasants.

Orfeusz voices his fears that Henryk's attempt to act as a “knight of the common people”¹⁴⁸ will go unnoticed by most of Society and that he and his campaign will be consigned to oblivion – remembered at most by the members of his local community, which Orfeusz somewhat disdainfully describes as a “sparsely populated parish.”¹⁴⁹

Orfeusz is a rather self-seeking person who is infatuated with himself and more interested in having fleeting affairs than in being faithful to one woman. This character may be interpreted semi-metaphorically as yet another incarnation-cum-parody of the Romantic poet. He has come to find out whether Henryk loves Malwina – Benedykt's one-time ward – as he suspects that Henryk's uncle wishes them to marry. For his part, Henryk speaks of her without much ardour:

... tylko jest miłą – kobietą...¹⁵⁰

... she's just a pleasant woman ...

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 112 and 113–114.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 115.

¹⁴⁹ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. [Fragment dramatyczny o Henryku i Orfeuszu / dramatic fragment about Henryk and Orfeusz]. Rkps BJ (manuscript held by the Jagiellonian Library), sygn. 6577 IV, Vol. II, f. 114.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 116.

He must therefore be in love with someone else – his uncle’s wife, perhaps? Orfeusz is surprised that Henryk shows no interest in Malwina as a potential wife, as he himself is in love with her and has come to see whether Benedykt will allow Malwina to marry him and whether Henryk has any objections. Orfeusz says that Malwina often stays in Odessa with her aunt, who is full of vanity and who “has been doing silly things all her life.”¹⁵¹ We also learn that Malwina has had a suitor – some dandy – whose advances she was advised to reject by her friends and acquaintances.

This particular dramatic fragment ends with Benedykt’s arrival on stage. Orfeusz proceeds to flatter him by hypocritically praising his modernization of the estate, which has brought progress to the village:

ORFEUSZ Jeśli – jak mówił Henryk – przed kilkoma laty
 Stały tu tylko nędzne budynki i chaty
 A dziś jak piramidy budynków kominy
 Gwar licznych robotników – huk i świst maszyny
 Powietrze stumanione tych fabryk oddechem [...]
 Nędzna idylla wzrosła – w przemyśle stolicę
 Ja to wielką zasługą – i zaszczytem liczę. –¹⁵²

ORFEUSZ If, as Henryk says, a few years ago there were only decrepit buildings and cottages here, and today the factory chimneys stand like pyramids, and the air is filled with the hubbub of teams of workers, the roar and swish of machines and the clouds of smoke that are breathed out by these factories [...] A lowly idyll has grown into an industrial capital. That, in my estimation, is an achievement to be proud of – indeed, an honour.

Hearing these praises, Benedykt asks rhetorically:

BENEDYKT A któżby chciał mi pomóc?¹⁵³

BENEDYKT But who would like to help me?

This question would seem to be addressed as a reproach to those who do not support Benedykt’s views on the matter of industrialization, but it might also be a proposition to Henryk or Orfeusz. Here, however, the manuscript ends – and so we shall never know what exactly Henryk’s uncle had in mind.

It is worth noting that in this dramatic fragment the trivial theme of Orfeusz seeking the hand of Malwina is connected with the serious theme of Henryk’s social and economic mission and also that of Zofia’s unhappy marriage to a man who is obsessed with making money. This dramatic fragment therefore has the flavour of

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, f. 117.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, f. 119.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

a *pièce à thèse* which has two emotional tonalities, combining the serious and the trivial.

In the 1860's Nałęcz-Korzeniowski probably also began to write the third part of the trilogy of plays that he had planned in the 1850's. After *Komedia (A Comedy)* and *Dla miłego grosza (For Dear Money's Sake)* comes *Koniec pana Henryka. Komedia (Henryk's Demise. A Comedy)*. Notwithstanding its subtitle, the play is not a comedy, but rather a chronicle: the ageing Henryk – a one-time freedom fighter – now makes a bitter reassessment of the course of his life. The fragment that has come down to us would seem to indicate that this play was also to have been a *pièce à thèse*. It is particularly worthy of note that Henryk no longer lives in Ruthenia (the Ukraine / Ukraine), but has moved to a village near Warsaw, where he now has a farm.

The first scene of this unfinished play – the only one that we have – is set in a settlement of (modest) country houses near Warsaw.¹⁵⁴ On a summer morning we find Henryk sitting in his summer house, looking through binoculars to see if he can spot his servant Maksym, who set out early in the morning to hunt some game. It is already nine o'clock and Maksym was due to have returned at eight. Maksym does not appear in this scene and Henryk resolves to give him a piece of his mind when he sees him. As he views his immediate surroundings through the binoculars, he makes various digressions on the habits of his neighbours. He tells us that he leads a contented life in these parts. His neighbours are a Count, a Baron and a lady who is obsessed with her own beauty. Although Henryk no longer leads a social life, he still loves to expose and deride people's hypocrisy:

HENRYK Wszystko mam, jak na dłoni, - sąsiedztwo i drogę.
 Dom Hrabiego, jak jaśnie wielmożna stodoła.
 Tam potencja Barona. – Tam wyjście z kościoła.
 Tam – śliczne pomieszkание: sielanka z kamienia,
 Patrzy w zwierściadło wody, jakby od niechcienia.
 Klnę, że właścicielka tak w lustro spogląda
 Gdy brak oczu bliźniego, a widzieć się żąda.¹⁵⁵

HENRYK I can see everything – the neighbourhood and the road – like the back of my hand. The Count's house stands like a right honourable barn. The Baron's fortress is over there. Then there's the back gate of the church. There's a lovely house over there – an idyll in stone, nonchalantly glancing at its own reflection in the water. But its damned owner never stops looking at herself in the mirror. She demands to be seen even when there's no one to look at her.

Hearing a rider approaching, Henryk begins to recite the opening lines of Antoni Malczewski's Romantic poem entitled *Maria* (published in 1825), but stops a moment later in order to make a sarcastic remark, as he feels the need to break all manner of standards and conventions:

¹⁵⁴ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Koniec pana Henryka. Komedia*. Rkps BJ (manuscript held by the Jagiellonian Library), sygn. 6577 IV, Vol. II, f. 126.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

HENRYK „Hej ty, na rączym koniu, gdzie pędzisz kozacze?”
(*przysłuchuje się*) Co? – To początek Maryi. – Skażę! (*przysłuchuje się*)
Co? Koń nie skacze.¹⁵⁶

HENRYK “Where are you speeding, Cossack, on that fleeting steed?” (*listening to himself*) What? That’s the first line of *Maria*. I’ll soon spoil that! (*listening to himself*) What? The horse won’t jump.

Henryk’s nature is that of a parodist, who is no longer surprised or delighted by anything. He finds fault with everything and there is nothing that he will not ridicule.

The rider turns out to be the young Leon, whom he used to know when he lived in Ruthenia. Henryk sarcastically calls him “a son of Adam pretending to be a centaur”¹⁵⁷ in order to acknowledge his dual nature of Romantic poet and excellent horseman. Having noticed Henryk, Leon decides to pay him a visit, as he thinks that he ought to consult him on a matter of some delicacy. He values Henryk for his prudence and experience, not knowing that over the years he has become an embittered and lonely person for whom prudence and experience are not life’s treasures, but rather two of life’s curses. Despite his embitterment, however, there is still some of the old Romantic left in Henryk, as he continues to criticize people whose only guides in life are prudence and experience – both of which cause people to be indifferent to the suffering of others and thus reluctant to help those in need.

Henryk laments the cruelty of his fate. Against the dictates of reason – and in accordance with “the will of God” – he has spent his life getting involved in other people’s difficulties. He sums up his life as a “damned affair”¹⁵⁸ which is not worth any regrets. That is why – towards the end of his life – he has decided to devote himself to farming and has leased some land not far from Warsaw:

HENRYK ... Moje stare kości
One trzęsą po drogach wcale mi nieznanym,
Grzebią mię w interesach mocno powikłanych
A w dodatku i cudzych i więżą w Warszawie [...]
Nająłem tę kolonię, by mój gust wieśniaczy
Choć czem kolwiek oszukać.¹⁵⁹

HENRYK ... My old bones are shaken by [journeys on] unfamiliar roads. I’m kept [for days on end] in Warsaw, overwhelmed by extremely tortuous dealings involving other people [...] I’ve leased this country house to humour my country taste as much as I can.

During his conversation with Leon – who is a young idealist and social activist – Henryk declares that he is repelled both by political conspiracies and by a servile attitude towards the rule of foreign oppressors, as – in his opinion – these extreme op-

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 127.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

tions have in no way helped him as an individual or Society as a whole. As if to spite himself, he condemns conspiracies and praises the dubious appeal of the conveniently “safe” road that has ultimately been taken by his generation – a generation, however, that has wasted an opportunity to build an authentically humane Society:

HENRYK Żadnych tajemnic, żadnych! Może spisek jeszcze?
 Pokolenie, którego widokiem się pieszczę,
 Sam dla niego współczesny, szło otwartą drogą,
 Bezpieczną. Tylu Hrabiów zaświadczyć to mogą,
 Tylu Lwów, Przemysłowców, Panów i Dam tyle,
 Co umieli przeskroczyć ciężkie życia chwile
 Nad brzegami Sekwany, Tamizy i Tybru.
 Tylu błaznów i błaznic różnego kalibru
 To moi rówieśnicy; a szczątki z ich trzody
 Jeszcze znajdziesz w salonach; a w Żurnalach Mody
 Portrety ich dotychczas. Myśmy się rodzili,
 A nawet, dla zwyczaju z lekka się i chrzcili;
 Lecz chrzest do człowieczeństwa nie zmuszał nas wcale
 Być człowiekiem.¹⁶⁰

HENRYK No secrets – none at all! More conspiracies?! The generation which I fondly contemplate and of which I am a member has taken a road which is open and [therefore] safe – as so many counts, men of the world, industrialists, gentlemen and ladies can testify, having survived life’s difficult moments by squawking and screeching on the banks of the Seine, the Thames and the Tiber. So many of my male and female contemporaries are greater or lesser clowns. Their last remnants can still be seen in fashionable drawing rooms and their portraits continue to grace the fashion magazines. Having been born, we even underwent a slight baptism for the sake of tradition, but this baptism into humanity did not in any way force us to be [truly] humane.

Showing no mercy, Henryk adds that in his generation there was even a dearth of honest women, most being fallen women who followed French customs and fashions. In painting such an ignoble picture of the older generation, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski expresses his belief that – at the dawn of the “anti-heroic” age – heroism is becoming less and less of a viable option. This conviction pervades his writing for the theatre. Henryk’s vacillations may be interpreted as Nałęcz-Korzeniowski’s way of questioning the wisdom of a stance based solely on Romantic heroism.

At the end of this dramatic fragment we also learn why Leon is on his way to Warsaw. He asks Henryk for his advice on a certain undertaking which he likens to a conspiracy. What he has in mind, however, is a task undertaken on behalf of the whole of Society. This is no doubt something akin to the Polish positivist idea of “organic work” (i.e. work at the grass roots level of Society), as he also talks of Society as a “body” and a “plant”¹⁶¹ that needs to be made healthier. On this note the fragment ends, however.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 128–129.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, f. 129.

Apart from the author's usual social theme, there would also seem to be a personal one – Henryk's disillusionment and his "tiredness of life":

HENRYK ... w tej komedii [...]
 ... ni w pięć ni w dziewięć, mam rolę aktora.
 A pora zejść ze sceny. Włos siwy już – Pora!¹⁶²

HENRYK ... in this comedy [...] I suddenly find that I'm playing the part of an actor. And now it's time to leave the stage. My hair's gone grey. Time's up!

Here, therefore, Henryk thinks that his role in the comedy of life is coming to an end. However, his exit from the stage and the play's subtitle refer not only to the prospect of his coming death, but also to his existential belief that his life has been a failure.

The whole trilogy tracing the fortunes of Henryk can be seen as an intriguing presentation of the various options that were open to the author's generation, beginning with the heroism and idealism of *Komedia (A Comedy)*, then going on to the mask of apparent conformism which we see in *Dla milego grosza (For Dear Money's Sake)* and ending with the apathy and "social withdrawal" that come as a result of the indifference displayed by Henryk's incorrigible contemporaries in *Koniec pana Henryka. Komedia (Henryk's Demise. A Comedy)*. All that remains for Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's (favourite) hero is to wait for "this damned affair"¹⁶³ – as he bitterly sums up his life – to come to an end.

In this trilogy the generation of Poles who were born around 1820 (like Henryk and Nałęcz-Korzeniowski himself) is severely admonished for its self-seeking, its haughty arrogance and its attachment to material things. For the most part, this was not so much a generation of conspirators, as one of people whose sole concern was with their own well-being:

HENRYK Nasza generacja może patrzeć śmiało,
 Tajemnicą się brzydzi; bo zasług ma siła.
 Ona możnym i silnym zawsze czołem biła,
 Zawsze pełzała w błocie różnego gatunku.
 Chociaż z nieszczęśliwego jakiegoś trafunku
 Rozdeptana dziś trochę: ja do niej należę.
 Ostrożniejsi być musim i to w każdej mierze
 W nas doktryna się mieści, w nas tradycja cała
 Pełna zysków, procentów i tryumfów ciała.¹⁶⁴

HENRYK Our generation can look proud. It abhors secrecy because it can boast a multitude of achievements. It has always bowed down to the great and mighty and has always crawled through various types of mud, though just now (and Lord knows why) it is a trifle downtrodden. This is the generation I belong to. We

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, f. 126.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, f. 127.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 129.

must be more careful and in every respect. We are the bearers of the doctrine and the whole of tradition, teeming with profits, interest on capital and carnal triumphs.

Koniec pana Henryka. Komedia (Henryk's Demise. A Comedy) is a pessimistic play that is not only a summing up, as it were, of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's career as a playwright, but would also seem to be an attempt on his part to reassess the ideals of his youth. Had the play been finished, it would have completed the trilogy which Nałęcz-Korzeniowski had planned as an analysis of "some fundamental problems of Polish history and public morality"¹⁶⁵ in his own times.

The only manuscript that remains to be discussed is the fragment of a play by Nałęcz-Korzeniowski entitled *Wujaszek ze wsi (The Country Uncle)*. This would appear to be the embryonic stage of a comedy with stock characters, intertwined with a positivist *pièce à thèse* denouncing various social vices. The fragment begins with Uncle Karol making an unexpected call on his foster child Leon, who for the past ten months has been living in town as a dandy. It would appear that several years ago – just before his death – Leon's father placed his son in the care of his friend Karol, who – wishing to give the boy a proper education – sent him on a journey round the country so that he could learn at first hand how landowners and peasants lived and what sort of problems they had to deal with. One day, however, Karol accidentally learns from some correspondence that instead of making an educational tour of the country, Leon has been living in the town of Żytomierz (Zhitomir). Wishing to repair his tarnished image, Leon boasts that he has read some books on fishing (a brochure entitled *Artificial Fish Stocking*) and on economics (a brochure entitled *Loans for Landowners*). Although Karol himself dislikes town life, he has become reconciled to the fact that Leon will not be living in the countryside. What he cannot bear, however, is to see his foster son reading books which in his opinion can only have a disastrous influence on young people, as they purport to teach their readers how to make money more easily.¹⁶⁶

During their conversation Karol learns that Leon is planning to marry Aniela, whom he met at a ball on Shrove Tuesday. She was wearing a tulle satin dress, which was the latest fashion at the French Court. Mindful of social propriety, Aniela was initially dismissive of him during their conversation, but everything changed with the arrival of the good-natured lieutenant Zwada, who – in his usual forthright manner – began to reminisce about his friendship with Leon's father and mentioned in passing that Leon would inherit Karol's estate – quite a substantial one. It was only then that Aniela took an interest in Leon, who was embarrassed by what he saw as the "unbecoming"¹⁶⁷ behaviour of the lieutenant, who – notwithstanding the presence of a lady – had taken the liberty of talking to him in a manner that was far too familiar.

¹⁶⁵ Najder. *Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Fidelity*, ed. cit., p. 33. Cf. Najder. *Sztuka i wierność. Szkice o twórczości Josepha Conrada*, ed. cit., p. 40.

¹⁶⁶ Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski. *Wujaszek ze wsi*. RKps BJ (manuscript held by the Jagiellonian Library), sygn. 6577 IV, Vol. II, f. 132.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 136.

- LEON Nowadays all the best people think only about getting practical results. Profit is what they think and talk about all the time [...]
- KAROL I wanted to see you as a traditional farmer. The farmer's sharp tools are the sisters, if you like, of [the] noble weapons [of war]. Later I thought that, having settled down in a town, you had your eyes set on some craft. A craft is ...
- LEON A craft? God forbid! And do myself such an injustice?!
- KAROL There's no shame [in being a craftsman] if your hands are clean. Your eye guides the hammer, chisel or saw and your brow is later bathed in sweat. Craftsmen have always earned our respect by their blood, sweat and tears, and their service is just as noble as ours. Neither would I have anything against you going to university, except that – from what I've heard – what they teach there now is nothing short of an outrage and completely worthless, having been disfigured with filth and smeared with iniquity.

The manuscript ends with the arrival of Zakryściański, who has come to see Karol in an official capacity in order to talk about his foster son Leon. Before Zakryściański comes on stage we hear a loud jingling sound, which turns out to be made by the gold rosary beads which this “saintly man”¹⁷⁰ holds in his hands – not out of piety, of course, but in order to show off his wealth and social standing. One can only suppose that in the course of the play the hypocritical machinations of Zakryściański, Aniela and her family – who at all costs want the rich Leon to marry Aniela – would be exposed.

In all these fragments of unfinished plays by Nałęcz-Korzeniowski we can see the same themes that he used in the 1850's. What has changed, however, is the way in which the main characters are presented. The emotional tonality of these later plays is also different, the author's all-pervading sarcasm being more scathing and caustic than ever. They are inferior to the two plays of the 1850's both as regards their content and their artistic standard, which no doubt explains why the author left them unfinished. Even the third play of the trilogy that had been planned in the 1850's was left as a tentative rough sketch. Perhaps not knowing how to find a plausible ending for the story of Henryk, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski in *Koniec pana Henryka. Komedia (Henryk's Demise. A Comedy)* experimented with elements of the *pièce à thèse* – one of the many artistic tools at his disposal – in his constant endeavour to paint a dramatic portrait of the social realities of his times.

As a playwright, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski only partially followed the trends of his day. By using elements of tragicomedy in his plays he foreshadowed the new techniques for creating the “represented world” – naturalism, symbolism and positivism – that began to be used by European playwrights towards the end of the century. By virtue of their sarcasm and their uncompromising stance on exposing social ills *Komedia (A Comedy)* and *Dla milego grosza (For Dear Money's Sake)* contain the germs of naturalist drama of the kind written by Gabriela Zapolska. *Akt Pierwszy (Act*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 138.

One) and the unfinished *Ojciec (The Father)* – consisting of dialogues dealing with the theme of the Romantic version of the ethos of chivalry (based on honour and a readiness to sacrifice one's life for one's country) – are forerunners of symbolist poetic drama. The remaining dramatic fragments which Nałęcz-Korzeniowski wrote in the 1860's are not very far removed from the positivist social comedies of Edward Lubowski, Zygmunt Sarnecki and Kazimierz Zalewski. They also resound with echoes of Cyprian Kamil Norwid's reflections on humanity and on the ethos of work. In writing these last fragments, Nałęcz-Korzeniowski also took into account the changes in lifestyle (including economic changes) that Polish Society had undergone in the second half of the 19th century.

It is above all to their unique emotional atmosphere – based on scathing sarcasm and biting social satire – that the plays written by Nałęcz-Korzeniowski owe their worth. The “represented world” of these works is anything but mildly comic and is unsettling to the very end – in accordance with the author's determination to expose and ridicule the social ills of his day and also in accordance with his aesthetic views, which give his dramatic writing a penetrating and often startling quality.

The artistic value of Nałęcz-Korzeniowski's plays also resides in the author's use of the phenomenon of tragicomedy to create a “represented world” that is quite unique. Their uneven emotional tonality and the way in which value judgements are passed on the characters serve to show that the established social structure of Polish Society in the middle of the 19th century no longer reflected the current modes of thought, feeling and behaviour of particular individuals. By mingling the comic with the tragic in his plays, Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski was able to break free of the context of traditional social stereotypes. This allowed him to give his audiences (and his readers) a striking portrayal of the lifestyle, mentality and sensibility of Polish Society in the middle of the 19th century.

Translated by R. E. Pypłacz

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