

TRANSFORMATIONS in THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE. Steppe and Sea in Polish Literature and Art

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There is a picture on the ceiling of one of the rooms of the Town Hall in Gdańsk, which in an allegorical way shows a link between the port town of Gdańsk with Poland (Fig. 1). One can see a panoramic view of the town placed on a triumphal arch, the finger of Providence pointing from the sky and the White Eagle from Poland's coat-of-arms soaring nearby. A symbolic rainbow connects the flow of the Vistula River with its mouth in the Baltic Sea. A citizen of Gdańsk shakes hands with a Polish aristocrat. This is an example of an allegorical landscape, which was to serve as rhetorical support for political agitation.

In the period of 1466–1772, the Polish-Lithuanian state had continuous access to the Baltic Sea. The Teutonic Order, which once drove the Polish state away from the sea now formed with this state "an undivided whole, one tribe, one nation in friendship, alliance and unity," as stated in the peace treaty of Toruń. The Grand Master of the Order still maintained power in this area but under the control of Polish kings. Access to the sea was easy because of the flow of the Vistula River and all the smaller rivers connected to it. A political program by the Jagellonian Court was drawn up, which would make the Polish-Lithuanian state the real *Dominium maris* (Odyniec 1982: 16–22).

In reality, the Poles scarcely identified themselves and their own territory with the Baltic Sea until the 20th century. The Baltic Sea was never an element of the national identity of the ancient Poles. Noblemen were not interested in the political plans of the Jagellonians. The Parliament considered these ambitions as the private affairs of the kings and they had to fight battles for this area with the help of mercenaries. On the other hand, the free town of Gdańsk with

its privileges obtained much profit from selling Polish products abroad.¹ Moreover, trade was not seen as an occupation of priority of this nation. It was one of the main prejudices of noblemen that trade was an occupation of the lower strata. At that time, the filling of the territorial identity of a nation could be awoken by economic profit or by participation in war. The territory could be considered as one's own when one fought for it or profited from it. None of these conditions was evident in this case.

In Polish literature the sea is a commonly used motif. It occurs in many forms, in the same way it was used in the European tradition, but seldom as a description of a concrete sea. The sea with its attributes is one of the main *topoi* in European literature. Sailing the sea could be an allegory of the unpredictable course of human life with all its dangers and changes of fate, as for example in the *Odyssey*. It could be a metaphor for the creation of a literary work. A boat on the sea could symbolise the Church or the Country, *Patria*, as in baroque sermons or speeches. A sailor could represent Man facing his passions, etc.²

The primary sense of the word *topos* depicts the special connection between a speaker's concrete place and his situation. Seldom in Polish literature does one speak of the Baltic Sea as a concrete sea, a concrete area on the earth. When one does, it is almost always in terms of reluctance and fear. The Baltic Sea, seen as a *topos* in the primary sense of this word, rarely occurs in Polish literature, and when it does, its negative traits are stressed.³

Some examples: Jan Kochanowski (1530–1584) introduced the threatening term of "wet dead" into Polish literature. Andrzej Zbylitowski's (1558–1629) sea is dangerous and is associated with unrestrained greed. It is opposed to the peaceful and secure cultivation of the earth, an activity that does not allow one to lose the measure of things away from one's eyes. Zbylitowski writes about the good way of living:

¹ See Waclaw Odyniec, *Polskie dominium Maris Baltici. Zagadnienia geograficzne, ekonomiczne i społeczne X–XVIII w.* Warszawa 1982; Zygmunt Boras, *Refleksje o świadomości morskiej szlachty polskiej w XVI–XVII w.* – Jerzy Topolski (Ed.), *Świadomość historyczna Polaków. Problemy i metody badawcze.* Łódź 1981; Maria Bogucka, *Dzieje kultury polskiej do 1918 roku.* Wrocław 1991.

² See Ernst R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter.* 2. Auflage. Bern: A. Francke 1954.

³ See Edmund Kotarski, *Sarmaci i morze. Marynistyczne początki w literaturze polskiej XVI–XVII wieku.* Warszawa 1995.

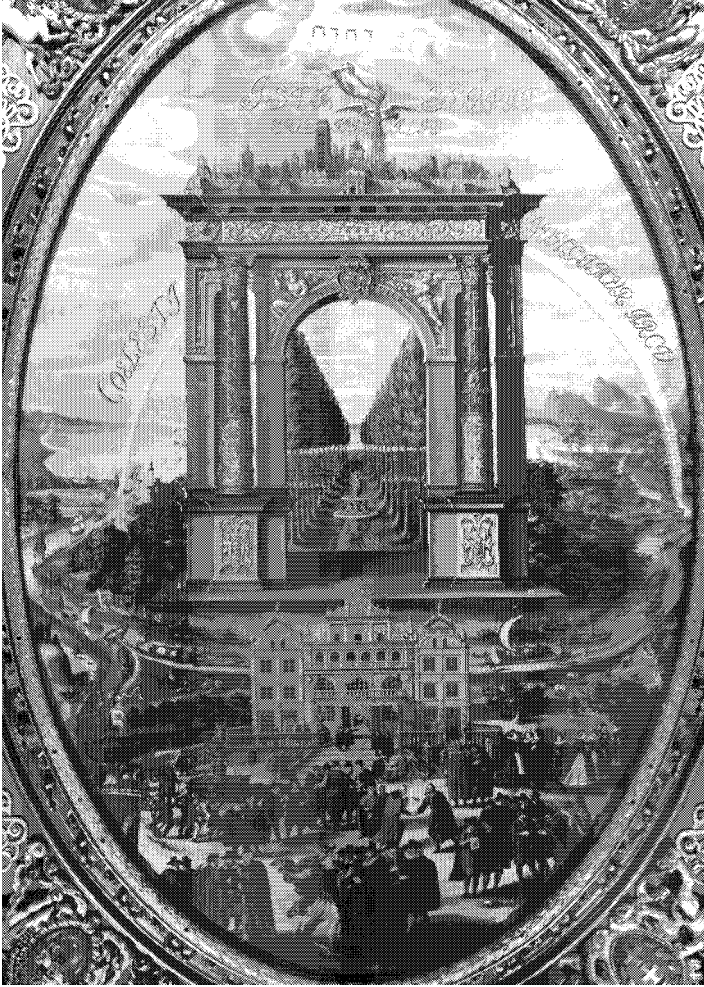


Figure 1. Izaak van der Blocke (died in 1628), *Alegoria handlu gdańskiego* ("Allegory of Gdansk Trade," The Town Hall in Gdańsk, 1608).

(11–12) *Nie zjrzę ja nikomu ani morzem pływać
Ani bogactw rozlicznym sposobem nabywać,
(Gruchala, Grzeszczuk, Zbylitowski 1988: 156.)*

"I envy no one who sails o'er the sea
Or by sundry means acquires property,"

(175–176) *I w nawałach do dalekich krain pielgrzymować
I do insul po morzach dalekich żeglować,
(Ibid. 160.)*

"Voyage on pilgrimage to the far-off lands,
And over the deep sea sail to islands,"

(181–182) *Wolę patrzeć na pługi, kiedy ciągną w pole
I na brony, którymi uprawują role,
(Ibid. 160.)*

"I choose to watch ploughs, when in fields they toil,
And harrows, which are used to till the soil."⁴

The same contrast of earth and sea can be found in the popular poem by Sebastian Klonowic (1545–1602), *Flis* ("Sailing," 1595). It describes the life of the raftsmen on the Vistula River and the landscape along this river. Pictures of the fertility of the land and of good old habits of human life emerge. The good way of life secures the wellness of the land and together the wellness and modest habits unify the landscape in an Arcadia-like image.

(2) *Lecz miła Polska na żyznym zagonie
Zasiadła jako u Boga na łonie
Może nie wiedzieć Polak, co to morze,
Gdy pilnie orze.
(Klonowic 1914: 1.)*

"But my dear Poland on its fertile clod
Settled as if in the bosom of God.
A Pole doesn't have to know at all the sea,
When he ploughs tirelessly."⁵

Flis is an interesting and strange poem. In it, to some degree the mythological image of the main river of the land as a source of the land's fertility appears. This image harks back to the myth of Osiris and his death which gave power to the Nile, taken over by Greek mythology in the tales about Cornucopia, the Horn of Plenty, thrown down into the river and giving life to the earth (Schama 1995). But the old image of the river giving life to the earth does not bring out either the source or the mouth of the river. The river is perceived more as a water or circulatory system. It can be compared to the blood circulation of the body.

⁴ Trans. by Michael J. Mikoś.

⁵ Trans. by Michael J. Mikoś.

Fliś is a strange poem. In it the river has a dubious significance. On the one hand, the river has an obvious destination and it has its end in the sea. The landscape and the atmosphere of Arcadia change dramatically when the river reaches the sea: all treasures of the land disappear into the sea.

(30) *Wszystkie do Polski przyszły to wykrety
Gdy się u Gdańska zjawily okręty
Prostość ojczysta i niewinność ona
Jest przeniewierżniona.*

(35) *Czym się to dzieje? Jeśli by mnie pytał
Ja na to patrząc właśnie jakbym czytał
Iż co się rodzi na polskim ugorze
Połknie to morze.*

(Klonowic 1914: 6.)

"All of these falsehoods to Poland made their way,
When the ships appeared in Gdansk to stay,
Native simplicity and innocence
Are changed in consequence.

Why does it happen? If you would ask me,
I'd say as if I were reading clearly:
That whatever grows in the Polish land,
The sea gulps this instant."⁶

The river changes into a channel, which passes on the richness of the land to the sea. The mouth of the river is almost like a wound on the land's body. The sea is directly contrasted with the landscape of plenty. It appears as an abyss, an unlimited space with destructive power.

On the other hand, however, one can follow a quite different sequence of images, which evokes a different attitude towards the sea. The river is the life-giving river of the land in the sense that it brings wellness to the people, who actively work on it. It is connected through the sea with other oceans and other continents. The life and work on the earth is noble but often difficult and it is right to look for help in trading the products abroad: to help oneself and others who need one's products more.

⁶ Trans. by Michael J. Mikoś.

Klonowic was obviously a well-educated man. His other works, written in Polish and in Latin, often depict social and economic problems of the country. The hierarchy of human occupation and the new forms of enrichment of an individual and of the country interested him. He pleaded for a noble way of life and of work. He did not oppose trade; rather, he seemed to encourage it.⁷ The poem *Flis* is a kind of discourse between two contradictory ideologies with no clear solution or support for either of them. On the one hand, it praises working on the earth and expresses opposition to opening the state too widely towards the trade community of other countries. On the other hand, it does not mind exploring the attractive possibilities of the world's open trade system.

Klonowicz's split point of view was unique in Polish literature. He himself did not dare to go too far in his conclusions. The end of the poem stays the same as the beginning: a deep mistrust and fear of the sea.

The time in which *Flis* was written was the time of the intensive exploration of the seas, of changing attitudes towards the sea and – of map drawing. The opposition of the Earth and the Sea and the dubious attitude towards the sea could be illustrated by the famous map of the Baltic sea, *Carta Marina*, drawn by Olaus Magnus and published in Venice in 1539. In spite of the sea being dangerous with all its whales, beasts and monsters one can see heavy ship traffic on it. The earth, inland, is shown with pictures from national life (battles, spheres of influences of power, i.e. the houses of the kings and different human occupations) and nature (Fig. 2).

Opposition between the culture of the earth with its static order and the culture of the sea has an elementary mythological character. It mirrors the different orders of morality and law, different institutions of society and between societies. This notion has been constantly renewed since antiquity.

In his work *Nomos der Erde* ("Nomos of Earth," 1950), theorist and historian of law Carl Schmitt describes the two domains of order as law and justice, on one hand, and as freedom on the other.

⁷ See Edward Lipiński, Sebastian Klonowic, *Studia nad historią polskiej myśli ekonomicznej*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1956.



Figure 2. Olav Magnus (1490–1557), *Carta Marina* (Venice, 1539).

Earth is called the Mother of Law in mythological language. The myth of the Earth suggests three roots of law and justice. The first: the fertile earth gives the measure of things by virtue of labor, which has been applied to it and which is rewarded by harvest. The second: the earth, which is cultivated by man, shows the firm lines of division, which imply the diversity of cultivation: the diversity of arable and pasture land, crop rotation, as well as fallow fields. The third: property borders such as enclosures and fences, walls and houses are marked in the earth (Schmitt 1988: 13).

"The law and local order [*Ordnungen und Ortungen*] of human coexistence, that is: family, tribe and estate, property and neighbourhood, the moods of power and dominion

become apparent on earth. Law is earthly and concerns Earth. [---] This is what the poet has in mind when he says: "justissima tellus."

The Sea doesn't know such apparent unity of space and law, of law and local order. One cannot sow fields or dig firm lines on the sea. The boats, which cross the sea, leave no trace behind them. "On the waves all is a wave" [*Auf den Wellen ist alles Welle*]. The sea has no character in the original meaning of the word, which is derived from Greek *charassein*, meaning to dig in, engrave, impress. The sea is free." (Schmitt 1988: 13–14.)

Pirates rule the sea. Their deeds are not common crimes because law, which reigns on the earth, is not valid on the sea. The pirate is brave and free and he profits thereof.

In old Polish literature, the Ukraine was the region which embodied all the blessings flowing from the earth. It was the land of milk and golden honey. At the same time, it was a land where social injustice became evident. Elementary justice and the order of everyday life were the sensitive points of this otherwise Arcadian landscape. In the poem *Żeńcy* ("Reapers," 1614), by Szymonowic (1558–1629), the harvesters are lucky men in the midst of nature which has reached its maturity and its plentitude. At the same time, they are individuals whose daily work is exploited by others. As expressed in the song of maid *Pietrucha* dedicated to *Starosta*, who is supervising the harvest:

*Słoneczko, śliczne oko, dnia oko pięknego!
Nie jesteś ty zwyczajów starosty naszego.
Ty dzień po dniu prowadzisz, aż długi rok minie,
A on wszystko porobić chce w jednej godzinie.*

"Little sun, lovely eye, eye of the gorgeous day!
The custom of our steward you do not obey.
You run day after day, till a long year slips away,
but he wants to have everything done without delay."
(Mikoś 1999: 344–345.)

Both topics – the praise of the Earth and nature and the elements of social criticism are present and interlace here. In the later literary works, from the 18th century on, both topics form two separate notions: the Ukraine as Arcadia and the Ukraine as a place of social confrontation. One can see both notions are deeply engrained in the mythology of the Earth as a mother of law (*Ortung und Ordnung*).

A third image depicts the Ukraine as a borderland. Above all it is a stage of battles and wars. It is a line of defense against the enemy of the country. The Ukraine is part of *Kresy* in this image, the whole eastern borderland of the Republic, which embraces Lithuania and Byelorussia as well. The meaning of the words *Ukraine* and *Kresy* is: 'land on the border,' and more than that: 'a land placed at the end, at the edge of the earth.' *Ukraine, kresy* means not just a border of a country but 'a space on the border of nothingness.' This notion belongs to the old mythological image of a land considered as a cosmos in opposition to the chaos of the world outside. Later, the border of nothingness becomes "the limit of a system of values," of the territory of a civilisation. *Kresy* was the end of the Republic as well as the end of Christian Europe, the border that must be sheltered and defended against Tatars and Turks and Asian Rus. It was the Ukraine, not Lithuania nor Byelorussia, which played this role in Polish literature. The imagined landscape of the Ukraine as a borderland was no longer the harvested field, but the steppe.

A population of very different nationalities and religions inhabited the *Kresy* (the Ukraine, Lithuania, Byelorussia). In the year 1795 the old Republic disappeared from the map of Europe, divided between three neighbouring states. In the literature and art of the 19th century, *Kresy* paradoxically became little by little a symbolical space for Polishness. As Czeslaw Milosz puts it: the spiritual centre for Polishness has been situated outside ethnic Polish territory, but still within the borders of the old Republic.

Literature and art acted together in a myth-forming project with a goal to increase integration of the divided country. In fact, the Poles throughout the entire 19th century continued to identify their national territory with the territory of old Republic, but in a very specific way.

Adam Mickiewicz, who is considered one of the main figures of Polish romanticism and one of the founders of Polish national thought, stated in his lectures on Slavic literatures at Collège de France in 1842, in a characteristic way, that there are two schools of contemporary Polish national literature: the Ukrainian school and the Lithuanian school (Mickiewicz 1955: 374–375).

His way to describe them to his audience and oppose them to each other may have perhaps not always been adequate but it is obvious that the two schools created two interesting phenomena in Polish literature with two impressive yet

opposite world views. They brought forth two different images of the landscape, which came to be considered as national landscapes. Examples of this could be taken from the two main works of these schools: *Maria* (1825) by Antoni Malczewski and *Pan Tadeusz* (1834) by Adam Mickiewicz.

The literary image of the Ukraine in *Maria* changed considerably from the Earth-bound Ukrainian landscape, as it was known in old Polish literature. Here the Ukraine is a limitless space, with wide horizons, an emptiness interrupted by sudden, unexpected incidents. It is not a space for any continuous movement from one object to another or along a way. There are no lines, no borders and no measures such as in the traditional, mythological image of the earth. Passions both "private" and "social" are like the landscape: limitless haughtiness and unrestrained desire for private revenge, the bloody revolts of peasants and Cossacks – anarchy from above and from below.

The heroes of the poem are persons of strong, unbounded will, determined to accomplish their goals, but fate is almighty here. Love is tightly connected to death; melancholia and hopelessness follow acts of will. Occasional graves and traces of the illustrious past lay under the dust. Some of the old noble habits and values are still valid but they are the last remains of the old world, and they will be rewarded with treachery and annihilation.

The landscape of Lithuania and Byelorussia is quite different. The territory is precisely described. Each road is specifically sketched, each border and fence delineated. One can not see the horizon because it is hidden behind the forest or other interesting objects catch the eye. The primeval forest, which unfolds is wide and deep, but its very depths are the Arcadian space of the animal kingdom. Thus the forest is not as wild and threatening as it really could be. It is known and it is used for mushrooming and for hunting.

The landscape of Lithuania is the landscape of houses, castles, churches and churchyards, with fields and gardens. It is an image of a land of human work and of historical events that legitimate the order of society. The rules of social life are set up and respected and the regard for law is apparent by the presence of its numerous representatives.

The feelings are ordered, although they can be rapturous. When the fate of somebody unfolds really dramatically it has meaning in terms of personal growth. Time is circular and Nature is anthropomorphic. Everything in this

landscape and in this closed world is interrelated and function in an order, in a kind of higher harmony of belongings, habits, and confessions.

The differences in the landscape imagination of the Ukrainian and the Lithuanian schools correspond with the ancient opposition between the order of the earth and the free sea. Moreover: the Ukrainians steppe is described as a sea.

It is empty and unfolds endlessly. It reveals the core of anarchy and agnosticism. It is free.

In Malczewski's poem *Maria* the image is coherent and all the superficial and immanently mythological traits of the sea are present. The horsemen dive into the meadows and flowers as into water, the horse catches the wind like a sail, the hero is like a mast hit by lightning when he suddenly perceives approaching danger. In order to find signs of history one should dive into the earth. All is perishable and relative; there is no persisting value, nothing can resist corruption, there is no virtue that does not have a false side. The nearby nihilistic and agnostic world-view plays together with the open horizon. All is free. Anything can happen there and nothing is impossible. But, at the same time, the necessity rules and contests the will of Man. Stormy events and big emotions are on the stage. The steppe, like sea, is everything and nothing, *res nullius* and *res omnium*.

The steppe is a place of final catastrophes, of tempests, which destroy all. After the storm there is silence on the sea and in the steppe, as at the end of the second song of *Maria*:

*I cicho – gdzie trzy mogił w posepnej drużynie,
I pusto – smutno – tęskno w bujnej Ukrainie.*

"And it is quiet there where there are three graves in mourning company / And empty – sad – yearning for in luxuriant Ukraine."
(Malczewski 1922: 83.)

And lastly: the words of Lord Byron's *The Corsair* appear as one of the two mottoes of this poem.

During the lifetime of its author *Maria* remained quite unknown. It became successful in the 1830s and 1840s thanks to the artistic recognition given to it by romantic critics and poets like Mochnacki and Mickiewicz. *Maria* was very popular. Its style and imagery was imitated in numerous literary works. It also inspired the emotional depiction of the steppe in Polish painting.

There are several lines in the tradition of painting the Ukraine, battle scenes, scenes with heroic figural incidents, naturalistic landscape painting, and rustic or realistic depictions of the countryside. Among all those styles there is a certain type of painting that renders the Ukrainian steppe in the same manner as the Ukrainian literary school and as Malczewski did. An example could be here Józef Brant's (1841–1915) picture *Pojmanie na arkan* ("Capture with a Lariat," 1881) (Fig. 3) or Józef Chełmoński's (1849–1914) famous *Czwórka koni* ("Foursome," 1881) (Fig. 4).

The dynamics of the main group of paintings is a response to space without limits. It is an action of the highest possible tension and expulsion of energy. The paintings depict a spontaneous moment. The events in the steppe are like a tempest on the sea: they come and go as rapidly as the stormy waves.

It remains to be seen, why the luxuriant Ukraine changed its face so radically. Why does the Ukraine become a sea? What does it mean that the image of the Ukraine has been transformed into sea mythology? And what does it mean that the literary manner, which created this landscape imagery, reached the rank of the *national literary school*?

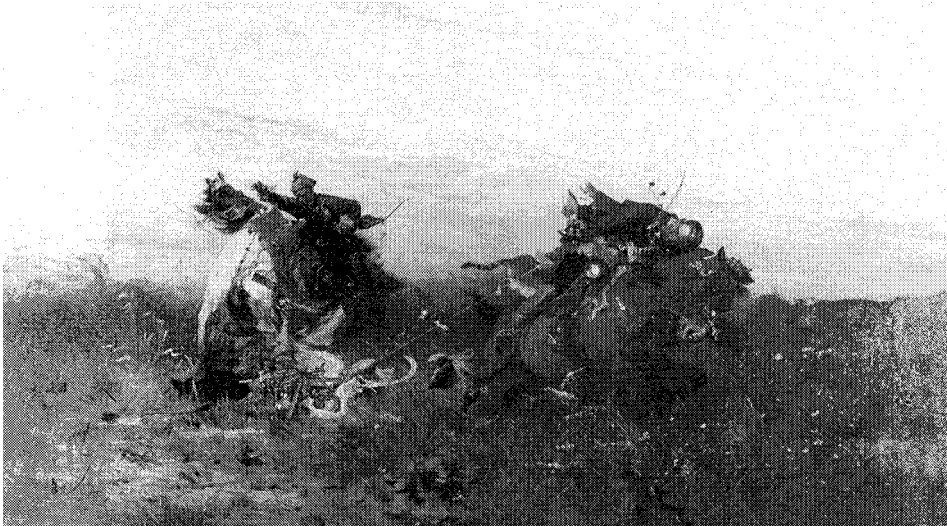


Figure 3. Józef Brant (1841–1915), *Pojmanie na arkan* ("Capture with a Lariat," National Museum in Poznań, 1881. Oil on canvas).



Figure 4. Józef Chełmoński (1849–1914), *Czwórka koni* ("Foursome," National Museum in Kraków, 1881. Oil on canvas).

The free space of the sea remains outside every specific space order of a state. The imagery transformation rendering the Ukraine as the sea reflects the situation of the nation, which has lost its state. The different forms of autonomous territorial entities, which were allowed by foreign rulers, were repudiated by the Poles. Without their own state, the people started to see their own existence as exterritorial. It is not important in this case whether they did so because of external circumstances or because of intimate experience. The waves of emigration, the participation in the revolutionary movements of all the different countries of Europe, the deportations to Siberia combined to untie the real bonds (or boundaries) of the concrete land of the former state and reduced the feelings of belonging to a concrete territory. Paradoxically, for this reason, the attitudes concerning the old boundaries of the former state remained unchanged among the Poles for a long time. The reflection and imagination concerning the national territory did not follow the course of historical transformation.

Bogdan Zaleski, one of founders of the Ukrainian literary school, said in his characteristic way that the Ukraine then took the shape of emigration. Moreover, he said that the Ukraine was Emigration (Zaleski 1985). Obviously, Zaleski wanted to emphasise the role of the diplomatic actions initiated within exile circles and undertaken by European governments sheltering Polish affairs against Russian and Prussian diplomacy, as in the past, the Ukraine had sheltered the boundaries and the affairs of the old Republic. But Zaleski's statement has more significance.

It is symptomatic that the national landscape, considered as a sea in literature, was compared with the extraterritorial group of emigrants, those Poles who at that time were forming the national ideology. It illustrates as well the more general phenomenon in which the loosened bonds of the concrete territory can strengthen the tendency for an idealistic or utopian view of the world. U-topia means a concept without a concrete place of implementation. Zaleski's words about the Ukraine becoming Emigration show that some of the Poles, who in that time formed the national ideology – and Zaleski was one of them – had lost, in some way, a sense of connection between the nation and the concrete local order (*die Ordnung*). It points out that the sensibility to the concrete circumstances of politics, its "here and now," had diminished among the Polish elite.

Adam Mickiewicz's messianism, Juliusz Stowacki's *Genesis z ducha* ("Genesis from the Spirit," 1844–1846, ed. 1871), the ideas about spiritual resurrection or spiritual reincarnation of the nation were the main concepts which formed the national identity of Poles in the new modern world of the 19th century. The earth is called the mother of law; the sea is domain of freedom. The "spiritualisation of the idea of a nation," as Andrzej Walicki called the phenomenon of Polish national romanticism, was tightly bound to the idea of freedom, which was opposed to all schematised and petrified rules of law (Walicki 1982: 257).

There are some other aspects of this problem, which deserve attention. The old Polish identity was bound to the order of the Earth. Trade did not take root in Polish society. The access to the sea did not have an essential effect on the Polish mentality. The big changes in Europe, which proceeded as an effect of the extension of the power of some states on the sea and on territories outside Europe, did not reach the domain of the old Republic. In general, this territory remained within the old system of institutions and habits.

Analogously and consequently there were no conditions existing for the development of capitalism. Carl Schmitt shows that the early globalisation of the identities of the European nations and of their systems of law started in England, the first country that dared the first step from a terrestrial (earth-bound) to a maritime existence. England's industrial revolution and thus, the beginning of capitalism, should be seen in this perspective (Schmitt 1988: 19–20).

The extension of power on the sea resulted in limiting the sea's freedom at the level of the individual: the criminalisation of the occupation of a pirate.

In some sense the state itself takes over the activity of the pirate. The Polish Romantics were extraordinarily sensitive to this process and protested against it in the name of the whole Slavonic world. Mickiewicz's *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* ("The Books of the Polish Nation and Polish Pilgrimage," 1832) is a good example. This is a tale about Poles who, deprived of their country-territory, wander through Europe and are frightened and indignant because Europe became so foreign to them and unacceptable with its new ways of politics and morality.

In some sense the entire Romantic movement revolted against these two tendencies: the decline of the freedom of the individual and the rise of the power of the modern state. One of the programmatic romantic works was Lord Byron's *The Corsair*, which directly inspired Malczewski's *Maria*.

In this sense the Ukraine, considered as a sea, was both a reaction to and a protest against the modernisation of the world and the final expression of the fear of the sea.



Figure 5. Leon Wyczółkowski (1852–1936), *Orka* ("Plowing," National Museum in Kraków, 1892. Oil on canvas).

It is interesting, that in spite of the very fact that the whole romantic epoch cherished an extraordinary respect for concepts of freedom, the national movements of countries where the sea was really a main ingredient of the spatial, his-

torical and social identity such as Finland, Latvia, Estonia, which started to develop in this very time, do not use the symbolical language of the sea and concentrate on the symbols of the earth.

The Polish national movement in the last decades of the 19th century changed considerably and took similar shape. It distanced itself from the romantic view of the nation. It criticised romantic nationalism for its idealistic worldview, for its concept of freedom, for its negative attitudes to the modernisation of societies. It formed its concept of territory in quite a realistic way, dependent on the contemporary state of society: it insisted on viewing the territory within the boundaries of ethnic settlement. Its rhetoric was bound to the earth. It could be seen in art as well. The Ukraine became again the domain of agrarian work, as in the Leon Wyczółkowski's (1852–1936) painting "Plowing" (*Orka*, 1892) (Fig. 5). As in other countries, it was a development towards a more and more intensified politisation of the national movement, which reached its culmination in 1905 and, later, in the formation of several national states after World War I.

Thus, the nations received their own territory. It was like a new beginning of history: it was taking the earth into possession anew. In the great medieval decree of law the "taking earth into possession" is mentioned in the first place in a definition of law itself.⁸ Taking the earth into possession means above all setting up or reconfiguring a measure on it. One of the first actions of the governments of the new countries was agrarian reform. In spite of all its significance as a step toward the modernisation of society, these agrarian reforms were a repetition of an ancient colloquial gesture with its roots in the mythology of the earth.

Since 1918, Poland again has had an access to the sea and more than that: the Poles started to identify themselves with it. "The wedding to the sea," taking the sea into possession was the main slogan of a state, which developed intensively.

Thus, the ancient connotation of the earth and the sea seems to be always present in the life of men. The firm earth gives security to man with its order and law. The free and dangerous sea will always promise and improve life; it suggests richness, the flow of money and utopian concepts of human co-existence, while, at the same time, it always threatens with the destruction of these dreams.

⁸ *Decretum Gratiani*, ca. 1150, see Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 1988, p. 15.

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