

# Pan Tadeusz

by

**Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855)**

(continued from September 2015 issue)

## Book Twelve

### Let Us Love One Another!

*Argument: The last banquet in the grand old Polish style. The centerpiece. An explanation of its figures. Its transformations. Dąbrowski receives a gift. More of Penkniże. Kniaziewicz receives a gift. Tadeusz's first official act upon receiving his inheritance. Gervazy's observations. The Concert of Concerts. The Polonaise. Let us love one another!*

**Translated by Christopher A.  
Zakrzewski**

At last the doors of the great hall flew open with a crash, and in strode the Chief Steward, head capped and erect. He greeted no one, nor did he take his place at the table, for today he appeared in the new role of Marshal of the Court. Using his mace of office as a pointer, he proceeded, as master of ceremonies, to usher each guest to his seat. The Chamberlain-Marshal, being the highest authority in the province, took the post of honor, a velvet chair with ivory armrests; next to him, on the right, sat General Dąbrowski, on the left, Kniaziewicz, Patz, and Małachowski. The Chamberlain's wife took her seat among them; after her came the other ladies, officers, magnates, local gentry and landowners. All took their places, men and women alternately, in the order of precedence indicated by the Steward.

The Judge, after bowing to his guests, withdrew from the banquet hall and repaired to the courtyard where he was fêting a large number of his village folk. Assembling them around a table some eighty yards long, he seated the parish priest at one end and himself at the other. Sophy and Tadeusz did not sit down; they were busy waiting on the peasantry and ate on the fly. Such was the ancient custom, the new heirs did the honors of the table at their first banquet.

Meanwhile, the guests awaited dinner in the great hall; with wonder they gazed at the table upon which stood an enormous exquisitely wrought centerpiece made of a precious metal to match. Prince Radziwiłł styled the Orphan was said to have had it crafted in Venice but with a Polish ornamental touch of his own devising. Pillaged during the Swedish wars, the article had passed, God knows how, to the Manor; and now, retrieved from the lumber house, it lay in a mighty circle like a carriage wheel on the table.

The centerpiece was coated from rim to rim with froth and sugar icing, the result being a marvelous simulation of a winter landscape. In the center stood a forest made from fruit preserves; clustered around it, covered not with hoarfrost but with sugar frosting, stood a number of cottages suggesting peasant hamlets and noble villages; and all around the rim of the vessel stood tiny blown-porcelain figurines in Polish costumes. Like stage actors they appeared to be playing out some momentous event. Their gestures were skillfully portrayed, their colors striking; but for the lack of voices you would have sworn they were alive.

But what did they represent? the guests were curious to know. At this the Chief Steward raised his mace and addressed the assembly:

“By your leave, most highly honored guests! (Here they partook of vodka.) All these figurines you see before you are acting out the history of our regional diets, the voting, the upsets, and the quarrels. I surmised the scene myself; so allow me to explain it all to you.

“Here on the right you see a large crowd of the nobility. Evidently they have been invited to the inaugural banquet, for a table stands set. No one has yet seated the guests; they stand around in little knots. Each group holds council. Notice the man in the center of each group. By his open mouth, wide-eyed stare and busy hands, you can tell he is a speaker making his point. He traces something with his finger on the palm of his hand. The speakers are pushing their candidates, with mixed results as you can readily tell by the expressions of their fellow noblemen.

“True, in this second group the nobility listens intently. Look at this fellow with his hands under his belt. See him straining to hear? And this one here, cupping his hand to his ear, twirling his

mustache in silence? No doubt he is collecting the pearls of eloquence and threading them upon his memory. The speaker looks pleased; clearly, he has won them over. He rubs his pockets, for he knows he has their vote in his pocket.

“But what a difference in this third group here! The speaker has to seize his listeners by the belt. See them pulling away, averting their heads? Observe this listener bristling with anger. See? He raises his arm, threatens the speaker, stopping his mouth with his hand. He cannot bear to hear his rival praised; and observe this other fellow lowering his head like a bull as if to toss him. Some reach for their swords, others take to their heels.

“One man stands silent, apart from the groups; clearly, he hasn’t thrown in with either side. He is fearful, he hesitates. He hasn’t a clue who to vote for. In his struggle with himself, he leaves it all to chance. He raises his hands, puts out his thumbs and, shutting his eyes, tries to align his nails; clearly, he has entrusted his vote to fate. If the thumbs meet, it is, ‘yea,’ if not, ‘nay.’

“On the left we observe yet another scene. The nobility have converted the cloister’s refectory into an electoral hall. The older men sit on benches arranged in rows. The youth stand behind, peering over their heads into the center of the hall. There stands the Marshal with the ballot urn in his hand. He counts out the votes, the nobility watch with eager eyes. He has just shaken out the last one. The ushers raise their hand and announce the elected official.

“One of the nobles refuses to abide by the common will. See him poking his head through the kitchen window? Observe that insolent, wide-eyed stare of his. His mouth gapes open, as if he would swallow up the entire room. Easy to guess what he is shouting, *Veto!*—I say no! And now see how this voice of discord sends the throng charging through the door. Heading for the kitchen, I’ll warrant. Their blades are drawn. Oh, there will be bloodshed, I shouldn’t wonder.

“But here in the corridor, ladies and gentlemen, you will mark a priest in a chasuble—the old prior bearing a monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament. A surpliced altar boy clears his way with a bell. The nobility sheathe their sabers, bless themselves, and genuflect. The priest turns to where the clash

of steel persists; soon he will have the whole lot hushed and reconciled.

“Ah! But you youngsters have no recollection of how famously our self-governing nobility, armed and unruly as they were, got along without the benefit of a police force. So long as the true faith flourished, we respected our laws. We enjoyed liberty with order, glory with prosperity. Other countries, I am told, keep bands of ruffians at hand—all manner of law officers, gendarmes, and constables. But if it takes the sword alone to guard the public security, then I will not believe true liberty exists in those lands.”

Here the Chamberlain broke in, rapping on his snuffbox. “Come, Mr Steward,” said he, “put off these stories of yours. Granted, our regional diets are of great interest, but we are famished. Have them bring in the dinner!”

But the Steward merely lowered his mace to the floor.

“Your Excellency, grant me this pleasure,” he replied. “Allow me a moment to explain this final scene. Here you see the newly elected Marshal leaving the refectory on the shoulders of his supporters. See the nobility tossing their caps in the air? Their mouths are open. ‘*Vivat!* A long life!’ they shout.’ And there, opposite, broods the beaten contender. He stands apart, cap pulled down over his brow; meanwhile, in front of their house, his wife stands waiting. She has guessed, poor thing. She swoons in her chambermaid’s arms. Poor thing! She has been counting on the title Right Honorable, and now it’s another three years of just plain Honorable!”

With that the Chief Steward ended his commentary and waved his mace. Upon this signal, the footmen began filing in two by two with the dinner. The opening dish was *barche royale*. Next came an old-Polish broth prepared with masterly skill. To the marvelous secrets of its preparation the Steward had added the measure of throwing in a few pearls and a coin. (The broth was said to purify the blood and fortify the health.) The rest of the dishes followed. Who could tell them all? And even if one could, who could make head or tail of specialties no longer known today—*koutuz*, *arkas*, and *blemas*; or dishes containing ingredients such as burbot meat, forcemeat, civet, deer musk, gum dragon, pine

nut, and sloe berry? And the varieties of fish! Dried huchen from the Danube, flounder, white sturgeon, caviar (Venetian and Turkish), large pike, medium-size pike (eighteen inches at least), large carp, noble carp! And, to crown all, the chef's great secret, an entire fish, uncut, fried at the head, baked in the middle, and the tail marinating in a sauce.

But the guests took no interest in the names of the dishes nor did they take time to probe the mysteries of the fish. They dispatched the repast with military gusto, washing it down with ample drafts of Hungarian wine.

Meanwhile, the grand centerpiece was changing color. Stripped of its covering of snow, it was beginning to show green. Warmed by the summer heat, the light froth of sugar icing melted by degrees to uncover what had so far been hidden from the eye. A new season transformed the landscape. Spring emerged with her burst of greenery and many hues. Numerous varieties of grain sprang up as if leavened with yeast: gold-spiked wheat dusted with saffron, rye silvered with painter's vermeil, buckwheat skillfully fashioned from chocolate, and blossoming orchards of apple and pear.

But the guests had little time to taste the fruits of summer. They begged the Steward to stay their passing. No use! Like a planet governed by her ineluctable motions, the centerpiece changed season again. Already the gilded grainfields were soaking up the warmth of the hall. The grass yellowed, the leaves reddened and began to fall as if autumn winds were blowing. Now the trees, gorgeous a moment ago, stood stark and leafless, as if blasted by wind and frost. These bare trees were cinnamon sticks; and what looked like pine-trees were actually sprigs of laurel sprinkled with caraway seeds, to simulate pine needles.

Sipping their wine, the guests fell to breaking off and nibbling on the branches, roots, and stumps; meanwhile, circling the centerpiece, the Steward beamed, casting triumphant glances at his guests.

"My dear Steward!" said Henry Dąbrowski, feigning great amazement. "Is this a shadow play before me? Or has Pinetti placed his demons at your disposal? Do such centerpieces still exist among us in Lithuania? Do the people still feast in

this grand old way? Tell me, for I have spent the best part of my life abroad."

"No, General!" replied the Chief Steward with a bow. "No godless arts these, but rather a harking back to those grand old banquets held in the halls of our forefathers when Poland was happy and strong. What I have done, I learned from this book. As to the custom being observed in the rest of Lithuania, alas! new fashions are making inroads even here. Many a young squire balks at such excesses. He eats like a Jew, begrudges his guests food and drink, and stints his Hungarian wine, while draining drafts of that infernal bogus champagne from Moscow, which is all the rage. Then in the evening he loses as much gold at cards as it would take to feed a hundred fellow noblemen. Even the Chamberlain—and here I shall be quite candid, trusting His Excellency will not take it amiss—even the Chamberlain scoffed on seeing me haul this centerpiece from the lumber room. A tiresome old contraption whose day was done; that is what he said. A child's bauble! said he. Not fit for such illustrious folk. Yes, my dear Judge, even you thought it would pall on our company. And yet judging by the awed expressions of you gentlemen here, I see it is a beautiful object eminently worthy of being displayed. Who knows if Soplica Manor will ever again have the fortune of fêting such a distinguished body of guests. General, I see you have a discerning eye for banquets. Please accept this little tome. May it serve you well when you come to throw banquets for a company of foreign monarchs, aye, even Bonaparte himself! But before I dedicate this book to you, allow me to relate the manner in which it came into my possession."

A sudden noise broke out at the door. A chorus of voices cried out, "Long live Cock o' the Steeple!" The throng burst into the hall with Matthias Dobrzyński being thrust to the forefront. The Judge seized him by the arm and, leading him to the table, seated him prominently among the generals.

"Matthias!" said he. "How unneighborly of you to turn up so late Dinner is almost over."

"I dine early," replied Dobrzyński. "It is not for the victuals I came. A lively curiosity seized me to have a closer look at our army. One could say a lot on that score. Hard to make out just what it is.

The nobility spotted me and fetched me in by force. And now you have seated me, for which I thank you, good neighbor.”

With that he turned over his plate as a sign that he would not be eating, and sat there in moody silence.

“Dobrzyński?” said General Dąbrowski, turning to him. “So you are that celebrated hewer of men of Kościuszko times—that Matthias styled ‘The Switch’? I know you by reputation. Why, look at you! So hale! So spry! Yet how many years is it now? See how I have aged! Look at Kniaziewicz’s grizzled locks! Yet here you are still able to hold your own among the youngsters. I’ll wager your Switch buds forth as always. I hear you recently gave the Muscovites a sound thrashing. But where are your brethren? I’d give my right eye to see those Penknives and Razors of yours, those last shining examples of old Lithuania.”

“General!” said the Judge. “After our victorious battle, almost all the Dobrzyńskis sought refuge in the Kingdom. No doubt they have joined one or other of the legions.”

“Indeed!” said a youthful squadron commander. “I have in my second company a whiskered ogre of a fellow by the name of Sergeant Major Dobrzyński. He calls himself Sprinkler, but the Mazovians refer to him as the Lithuanian bear. Upon your command, General, I could have him brought in.”

“There are several other Lithuanian-born men in our ranks,” added a lieutenant. “I know one they nickname Razor and still another who rides with the flankers bearing a blunderbuss. We also have two Dobrzyński riflemen serving with the grenadiers.”

“Aye!” exclaimed the General. “But what about their leader? I wish to hear of the one called Penknife of whom the Steward has told me so many wonders. A veritable giant of fabled times!”

“Penknife did not seek refuge across the border,” the Steward replied, “but, fearing the investigation, kept out of sight of the Muscovites. The poor fellow spent the whole winter roaming the forests and has only just emerged. In martial times such as these, he may be of service to you, for he is a valiant knight; though, alas, the years are

beginning to weigh heavily on him. But look, here he comes now!”

The Steward pointed to the entrance hall where the servants and rustic folk stood pressed together. A shining bald skull rose high above them like a full moon. Thrice it rose, and thrice it vanished in a cloud of heads; it was Gerwazy, bowing as he made his way through the press.

“Your Excellency the Hetman of the Crown, or is it General?” said the Warden, breaking free from the crowd. “Whatever the title! Rębało at your service; aye, and this my Penknife, whose fame derives not from its hilt or chasing but from the temper of its steel, so that even Your Excellency has heard of it. Could this blade but speak, perchance it would put in a word for this ancient arm of mine, which, by God’s grace, has long and faithfully served our land and the family of my Horeszko lords whose name lives on in the memory of men. Rare the accountant, my boy, who trims his goose quill as deftly as Penknife docks a man’s neck. Some reckoning that would take! As for the number of ears and noses lopped off—past telling! Yet the steel is clean of nicks. No murderous deed has ever imbrued it. Nothing but open warfare and duels. Alas, but once—may the Lord grant him rest—but once, I say, did it snuff out the life of an unarmed man. But there, as God is my witness, it was *pro publico bono*!”

“Show me that penknife!” cried out Dąbrowski with a laugh. “Oh, what a beauty! A true headsman’s sword!”

And running an awed eye over the prodigious rapier, he showed it to his fellow officers. All of them tried it in turn, but few were able to raise it above their head. They said Dembiński of the brawny arm could have hoisted it, but he was not present. Of those who were present, only Squadron Leader Dwernicki and Platoon Commander Lieutenant Różycki succeeded in swinging the bar of steel; and so the rapier passed from hand to hand for trial.

It turned out that General Kniaziewicz, the most strapping fellow among them, also had the strongest arm. Seizing the rapier as effortlessly as if it were a mere fencing foil, he raised it aloft and executed a series of lightning-fast flourishes over the heads of the guests. He recalled the maneuvers of Polish swordsmanship: the *horizontal cut*, the



*circular*, the *diagonal*, the *cleaving stroke*, the *counter thrust*, the *counter-time*, and *terce*—maneuvers he had learned as a cadet in military college.

While Kniaziewicz laughed and swung, Gerwazy, tears in his eyes, knelt down and clasped him by the knees.

“Splendid, sir!” he moaned at every sweep of the blade. “So! were you in the Confederacy too? Splendid! Marvelous! That’s the Pułaski thrust! Dzierżanowski bore himself in that manner. That is Sawa’s thrust. Who could have trained your arm in that fashion except Matthias Dobrzyński? And that one, I’ll be bound! I will not brag, but it is my invention, a cut known only to us Rębańs. It is named after me—*The Old Boy’s cut*. Who taught you that? It is my cut, mine!”

And rising to his feet, he embraced the General.

“Now may I die in peace,” said he. “Here stands one who will take my darling child to his bosom. For years the thought has plagued me day and night that my rapier will rust away after I am gone. Now it shall not rust away. Your Excellency! Sir! General! Forgive me, but have nothing to do with those little skewers, those flimsy little German foils. A nobleman’s child wouldn’t stoop to carry such a twig. Bear a sword worthy of Polish nobility. See! I lay my Penknife, the dearest thing I own, at your feet. I never had a wife, I never had a child, but it has been both wife and child to me. For years I never let it out of my embrace. From dawn to dusk I caressed it. At night it slept at my side. But now that I have grown old, it hangs like the Jew’s Decalogue on the wall over my bed. I thought I should be buried with it clasped in my hand. But now I have found an heir. Long may my Penknife serve you!”

“Comrade!” replied Kniaziewicz, half laughing and half moved with emotion. “If you give away your wife and child, you will be left old and alone, childless and widowed, for the remainder of your days. What can I offer you in return for such a precious gift? Tell me how I may sweeten your orphaned and widowed state!”

“Am I Cybulski,” dolefully rejoined the Warden, “who, as the ditty says, gamed away his wife at a round of marriage with the Muscovite? It is enough to know that my Penknife will flash before the world in a hand such as yours. Only be sure to give it ample strap, well let out, for it’s a

bit on the long side. When cutting, always swing it with both hands from the left ear down. This way it will unseam your foe from crown to gut.”

The General accepted the rapier, but, as it was so long, he was unable to wear it. His servants stowed it away in the baggage wagon. As to the fate of the weapon, several accounts made the rounds, but the fact is that no one knew for certain, either then or later.

“Come now, comrade,” said Dąbrowski, turning to Matthias. “You seem unhappy with our arrival. Why so sour and silent? How can your heart not leap at the sight of our gold and silver eagles, with our buglers trumpeting Kościuszko’s reveille so close to your ear? Come, Matthias! I took you for a better fighting man. If you will not take up the sword or mount a horse, then at least join your comrades in a merry pledge to Napoleon’s health and the hopes of Poland!”

“Hah!” snorted Matthias. “I have heard and seen for myself what’s up. Two eagles, sir, do not share a nest. God’s favor, Hetman, rides a paint horse. The Emperor a great hero? One could say a lot on that score. I recall what my comrades, the Puławskis, said on seeing the great Dumouriez. Poland needs a Polish hero, they said, not a Frenchman, nor yet an Italian. What she needs is a Piast, a Jan, a Joseph, a Matthias—*basta!* They call it a Polish army, but look at these *fusiliers*, these *sappers*, these *cannoneers* and *grenadiers!* I hear more German styles among them than native ones. Who can sort it out? No doubt there will be Tartars and Turks among you, schismatics even, who care nothing for God or the faith. With my own eyes I have seen our village lasses raped, passers-by robbed, churches looted. The Emperor makes for Moscow. That is quite a march for an emperor who sets out without God’s blessing. They tell me he has fallen under the Bishop’s ban. What a farce! But then he can kiss my—”

And dipping his bread in the soup, Matthias ate, leaving the last word unuttered.

Matthias’ words were hardly to the Chamberlain’s taste. The youth began to murmur among themselves, but the Judge cut off the squabbling by announcing the arrival of the third betrothal party.

It was the Notary. Though he announced himself, no one recognized him. Until now he had always

dressed in the Polish fashion, but in one of the clauses of their nuptial articles, his plighted lady, Telimena, had made him renounce the slit-sleeved Polish robe. Like it or not, he had to dress up like a Frenchman. Evidently, the frock coat robbed him of half his soul, for he walked like a crane, stiff and erect as if he had swallowed a stick—loath to look to the right or the left. Despite his composed expression, he was clearly in torments, unable to bow, at a loss what to do with his hands—he who was so very fond of gestures. He placed his hands under his belt, but there was no belt; so he proceeded to stroke his belly. Realizing his gaffe, he grew flustered and, blushing like a lobster, thrust both hands into the same pocket of his frock coat. Like one running the gauntlet, he endured the murmurs and sneers, as ashamed of the coat as of some discreditable deed; but then catching sight of Matthias' stare, he fairly blenched.

Until this moment, the two men had enjoyed a great friendship. Now Matthias shot the Notary so fierce, so withering a look that the latter turned white as parchment. He began to clutch at his buttons as if Matthias' gaze would strip him of his coat. Dobrzyński merely repeated the word "stupid!" twice. So much did the change of dress appall him that he rose at once from the table, slipped out of the hall without excusing himself and, mounting up, returned to his village.

Meanwhile, decked out from top to toe in the very latest style, the Notary's comely sweetheart, Telimena, was spreading her splendor all round. Vain to set down in words the manner of gown she wore and the arrangement of her hair; no pen could express it. Only the painter's brush could limn those laces, tulles, muslins, cashmeres, pearls, and precious stones; and her lively glances; and her rosy cheeks!

The Count recognized her at once. Paling with astonishment, he rose from the table and felt about for his sword.

"So it is you!" he cried. "Do my eyes deceive me? You! Clasp another's hand in my presence? O faithless creature! Perfidious soul! And you hide not your face in the earth for shame? Can you be so forgetful of your vow so recently made? And I so easily gulled? Why ever did I wear this bow? Woe to my rival who treats me with such disdain! Over my dead body shall he mount to the altar!"

The guests rose to their feet. The Notary was horribly put out. But the Chamberlain hastened to reconcile the rivals; meanwhile, Telimena took the Count aside.

"I'm not yet the Notary's bride," she whispered. "If you have anything against our marriage, then tell me this; and let your answer be brief and to the point. Do you love me? Does your heart still hold the same affection? Are you ready to wed me on the spot, right away, today? If so, I will renounce the Notary."

"Unfathomable woman!" replied the Count. "Your sentiments once struck me as poetic, but now they seem quite prosaic. What are these marriages of yours if not chains that bind hands and not souls? Believe me, there are ways of avowing one's love without declarations, ways of being bound without plighting one's troth. Two flaming hearts at Earth's antipodes can converse in the tongues of the glimmering stars. Who knows, perhaps that is why the earth finds itself so drawn to the sun, and why the earth is ever the object of the moon's desire. Perhaps that is why they gaze eternally upon each other; why they come together by the shortest route, and yet never unite!"

"Enough of this!" said Telimena. "I'm not a planet, thank heaven. Enough, I say! I am a woman. I see where this is tending, so you can stop your twattle. Now heed my warning. If you should breathe so much as a word against my marriage, then as sure as God's in heaven, I shall fly at you with these nails of mine and tear—"

"Madam," protested the Count, "I shall not stand in the way of your happiness."

And so with his eyes filled with sadness and disdain, the Count turned away; but to punish his faithless sweetheart, he took, as the object of his eternal flame, the Chamberlain's daughter.

Seeking by wise examples to reconcile the youngsters, the Steward resumed his story of the boar of Naliboka Forest and Reytan's quarrel with the Prince de Nassau, but by now the guests had eaten their ices and were filing out into the courtyard, to enjoy the fresh air.

The village folk had finished their feast. Jugs of mead made the rounds. The musicians tuned their instruments and called the folk to dance. They

sought out Tadeusz who was standing to one side whispering something of pressing moment to his future bride.

“Sophy” said he. “I must consult with you on an important matter. I have discussed it with my uncle, and he is not opposed. You know that most of the villages of which I am to take possession belong by right of inheritance to you. These peasants are your subjects, not mine; and I should be loath to dispose of their affairs against their lady’s will. Now that we have our beloved country restored, will this happy circumstance mean nothing more to our peasantry than a change of masters? True, we have always ruled them with kindness, but God knows to whom I should will them after my death. I am a soldier, and we both must die. Being a man, I fear my human caprices. I should do better to renounce my rights and entrust the fate of the peasants to the care of the law. Since we are free, let us enfranchise our peasantry. Let us grant them title to the land they were born on, the land they have earned by blood and toil, and thanks to which they feed us all and make us prosper. But I must caution you that by giving up these lands we shall be earning a smaller income. We shall be forced to live on slenderer means. Now I, from my youth, am quite used to frugal living. But you, Sophy, come from a noble family. You spent your early years in the capital city. Can you see yourself living in the country, far from high society, like a common country girl?”

“I am a woman,” replied Sophy modestly. “Governing is not in my line; you will be the husband. I am too young to give counsel here. Whatever you decide I shall agree to with all my heart; and if you should be the poorer for freeing the peasants, then you, Tadeusz, will be all the dearer to my heart. I know little about my family and do not bother myself about it. This much I know—that I was an orphan in need, and that the Soplicas took me like a daughter into their home. Under their roof I was raised and given away in marriage. I do not fear country living. If I lived in the great city, it was long ago, and I have long since put it out of mind. But I have always loved the country. Believe me, my hens and roosters amuse me far more than any Petersburg you would care to imagine. If I felt drawn to the amusements and the people there, it was mere childishness on my part. I know now that the city bores me. This winter, after my brief stay in

Wilno, I realized I was born for country living. Despite the city’s amusements, I longed once more for the Manor. Nor do I fear manual labor, for I am young and strong. I know how to mind the household and bear the keys. You will see how I shall learn to keep house!”

Even as Sophy uttered these last words, a surprised and sour-faced Gerwazy approached the couple.

“I know all about it,” he said. “The Judge has already talked of this liberty. But how it concerns the peasantry, I cannot fathom. I fear there may be something of the German in this. Why, freedom’s a matter for the nobility, not the peasantry! True, we are all sons of Adam, but I was taught the peasants sprang from Ham, the Jews from Japheth, and we, the nobility, from Shem. Therefore, as elder brothers, we lord it over the other two. But our parish priest preaches otherwise from the pulpit. Such was the case under the Old Covenant, he says. Ever since Christ Our Lord, of royal blood, was born of the Jews in a peasant’s stable, he has put all estates on an equal footing and made them one. So let it be, since it cannot be otherwise; the more so, as I hear that even my Gracious Lady Sophia has consented to it. Hers to command, mine to obey! Authority belongs to her alone. But see that we do not grant them an empty freedom, in word only, like that under the Muscovites. When the late Mr Karp freed his serfs, the Muscovites reduced them to starvation by burdening them with a triple tax. So my advice is to turn to ancient custom, ennoble our peasants, and let it be known that we have conferred upon them our blazon. My mistress will bestow the Half Goat on some villages, and my master, his Star and Crescent on others. Then even Rębajło will recognize the peasant as his equal when he sees in him an honorable gentleman with a coat of arms; indeed, Parliament will ratify it!

“And now, my lady, let not your husband fret that he will impoverish you sorely by giving up your lands. God forbid that I should see the hands of a nobleman’s daughter calloused by domestic toil. I have a remedy for this. I know of a treasure chest in the castle containing the table service of the Horeszko family along with all manner of rings, necklaces, bracelets, rich plumes, caparisons, and prodigious swords. It is my lord Pantler’s buried

trove, kept safe from the hands of pillagers. By rights it belongs to the heiress, my lady Sophia. All this time I have guarded this hoard like the apple of my eye against the Muscovites and you, Soplica folk. What is more, I have a hefty purse of my own thalers saved up from past services rendered and sundry gifts I received from my former master. I had hoped to spend the odd penny in repairing the walls once the castle were restored to us. But now it seems the new master and mistress will have need of it. And so, Master Soplica, I shall settle into your house, live on my lady's bounty, and rock the cradle of a third generation of Horeszkos. If it be a son, I shall train milady's child in the use of Pocketknife. But a son it will be! Wars loom ahead, and wartime always begets sons."

Gerwazy had scarcely uttered these words when Protazy approached with a solemn air. Bowing before the couple, he plunged his hand deep into his robe and withdrew a great panegyric two-and-a-half sheets long. The piece had been composed in rhyme by a young subaltern who had enjoyed fame in the capital for his splendid odes. Later, he joined the army where he continued to cultivate the literary arts. After declaiming three hundred of his lines, the Usher reached the part of the poem that went as follows:

*O you! whose charms*

*Rouse torments exquisite and cruel delights,*

*Whose lovely glance, when turned on Bellon's host,*

*Shivers the spear-shafts, breaks the serried shields,*

*Do you oust Mars this day, bid Hymen in,*

*And tear the snakes from Strife's Medusan head!*

Tadeusz and Sophy clapped continuously as if in applause, though in truth they had heard enough. At last, at the Judge's behest, the parish priest mounted the table and announced Tadeusz's decision to the villagers. Upon hearing this news, the peasantry ran up to their young master and fell at the feet of their lady.

"Our patrons' health!" they shouted with tears in their eyes.

"And yours, fellow citizens!" replied Tadeusz. "Fellow Poles, equal and free!"

"A toast to the common folk!" proposed Dąbrowski.

"Long live the generals!" shouted the peasantry. "Long live the army! The people! All the estates!"

A thousand voices thundered out the toasts in turn. Only Buchman refused to share in the common rejoicing. He endorsed the idea in principle, but he would suggest certain amendments: first, appoint a legal commission, then—; but there was little time, and Buchman's advice was promptly relegated to the shelf.

Already the pairs were lining up in the courtyard, officers and ladies, privates and village girls.

"The *Polonaise*!" they called out with one voice.

The officers brought in the military band; but the Judge whispered into Dąbrowski's ear:

"Pray hold off your bandsmen a while. You know it is my nephew's betrothal day. We have an ancient family custom of betrothing and marrying to the strains of our village music. Look there! The dulcimer player, the fiddler, and the pipers stand waiting. Honest musicians. See? the fiddler bridles, the piper bobs his head, imploring us with his eyes. If I send them away, the poor fellows will be sure to cry. Our peasantry knows no other music to skip to. So let our boys go first. Allow the folk to have their fun. Then we can listen to your splendid band."

And he gave the signal.

The fiddler tucked up the sleeve of his coat then seizing his instrument firmly by the neck, thrust the chin-rest under his jaw and sent the bow over the strings like a racehorse. Upon this signal, the two pipers next to him blew into their bags, filled their cheeks with air, and like birds beating their wings, worked the bladders with their arms; you'd swear the pair would fly off on the breeze— like Boreas' full-cheeked babes. But where was the dulcimer?

There were many players of the dulcimer, but none would dream of playing in Jankiel's presence. (Where Jankiel had spent the winter was a mystery; now he had suddenly turned up in the company of the General Staff.) No one disputed his supremacy in the art of dulcimer playing, his



consummate skill, taste, and talent. They entreated him to play and brought over the dulcimer. But the Jew begged off. His hands had grown stiff, he protested; he was out of practice and dared not play; the distinguished guests embarrassed him; and making a bow, he tried to slip away. Seeing this, Sophy ran to the Maestro, holding out on her snow-white hand the hammers with which he was accustomed to strike the strings; then stroking the old man's silver beard with her other hand, she said with a curtesy:

"Dear Jankiel, be so good as to play! This is my betrothal day. Did you not always promise to play at my wedding?"

Now Jankiel was immensely fond of Sophy; he nodded assent with his beard. They led him into the midst of the guests, seated him on a chair and, bringing forth the dulcimer, set it on his lap. With pride and delight he eyed the instrument. He reminded one of an old campaigner recalled to active service when his grandsons heave down his sword from the wall; and though he has not held the weapon for years, he smiles, confident his hand will not betray it. Two of Jankiel's pupils knelt down by the dulcimer. They tuned the strings to pitch, twanging and testing them; meanwhile, Jankiel sat silent, eyes half-closed, the hammers resting motionless in his hands.

He brought them down. First he beat a triumphal measure; then he smote the strings more briskly until the hammers fell like a torrential rain. The guests were astounded, but this was only a test, for he broke off abruptly, poising the hammers in the air. Again he brought them down. This time the hammers struck with light tremulous movements, brushing the strings like a fly's wing and producing a scarcely audible hum. All the while, the Maestro gazed aloft, waiting for the moment of inspiration. Then, gazing proudly down at his instrument, he raised both arms and let them fall. Both hammers crashed down at once, astounding the listeners.

A mighty sound burst forth from many strings at once, as if an entire orchestra of janissaries [23] had struck up with bells, zils, and pounding drums. *The Polonaise of the Third of May!* [24] The lively notes breathed joy, brought joy to the ear. The girls itched to dance; the boys could scarcely stand still. Among the elders the strains brought back memories of times past. They recalled the

happy days following that momentous third day of May, when, assembled in the town hall, the Senate and Deputies had fêted the King now formally reconciled with his nation; when they had danced and chanted, "Long live our beloved King! Parliament! The people! All the estates!"

The Maestro kept quickening the time, swelling the sound. Suddenly he struck a false chord that sounded like the hiss of a snake, like iron grating on glass. A collective shudder ran through the guests, a dark foreboding infected their joy. Saddened and alarmed, the listeners wondered if the instrument were out of tune or the player's hand had erred. But a master never errs! He had a reason for striking that perfidious string and marring the tune. Louder and louder he harped on that sullen chord which conspired against the commonwealth of tones. At last the Warden understood the Maestro's purpose. Clapping his hand to his face, he cried out, "Why, I know that sound! It is Targowica." And with a loud twang the sinister string snapped. Without skipping a beat, the player turned to the trebles then breaking up and blurring the measure, dropped the trebles and crossed over to the bass.

A thousand tumultuous sounds broke forth with increasing intensity: the beat of a march, war, a charge, an assault, gunshots, children's cries, and mothers' sobs. So expertly did the artist convey the horror of the attack that the peasant women shuddered, recalling with tears of anguish the Massacre of Praga of which they had heard in stories and songs. Great was their relief when at last, after causing every string to crash like thunder, the Maestro stifled the sounds as if pressing them into the very ground.

Scarcely had the audience time to recover from their wonder when the music changed again. Once more the first notes were light and hushed. A few thin strings whined shrilly like houseflies struggling in the spider's toils. But the strings grew in number, the scattered notes rallied, grouping with legions of chords, until at last they marched in time and harmony, resolving themselves into the mournful strains of that famous song about the poor trooper who wandered aimlessly through holt and wood. Hunger and hardship often laid him low, until one day he fell at the feet of his trusty mount; and over his body the pony pawed the dust.

An old song so dear to the Polish soldier's heart! The men recognized it at once. The rank and file gathered round the Maestro to listen, recalling that terrible time when they had crooned the song over their country's grave then marched hence into the wide world. Their thoughts ran on those long years of their wanderings by land and by sea, over burning sands and frost, among foreign peoples, where oft in camp this song had cheered and warmed their hearts. And so, reminiscing sadly, they bowed their heads.

But they soon raised them again, for now the Maestro was striking higher notes with swelling force, changing time and heralding another theme. Once again his lofty eye ranged over the strings; then joining his hands, he brought both hammers down at once. The resulting blow was so powerful, so deftly executed that the strings rang out like brass trumpets; and from these horns issued forth and aloft the famous triumphal march, *Poland Is Not Yet Lost!* Onward to Poland, Dąbrowski! And the guests, applauding, sang out the refrain, "Onward, Dąbrowski!"

The musician seemed astounded by his own playing. He let go of the hammers and flung up his arms; his fox-skin hat slipped to his shoulders, and his uplifted beard wagged solemnly. A strange ruddiness blotched his cheeks. A youthful fire blazed in his inspired eyes. Turning to Dąbrowski, the old man covered his face, and a torrent of tears flowed from under his hands.

"General!" said he. "Long has our Lithuania awaited you; aye, even so have we Jews awaited our Messiah. For years the bards prophesied you to the people. Heaven heralded your coming with a sign. Now live on and wage war, o you our—"

And as he uttered these words, the tears streamed from his eyes, for the honest Jew loved his homeland as passionately as any Pole. Dąbrowski put out his hand and thanked him; and Jankiel, doffing his cap, kissed the General's hand.

It was time to begin the *polonaise*. With a flick of his flowing sleeve and a twirl of his moustache, the Chamberlain stepped forward, offered Sophy his hand and, bowing courteously, besought the top of the dance. The other couples formed a line behind them. Upon the signal, the stately promenade began.

The Chamberlain led the train. His red boots flashed on the greensward, the sunlight beat on his saber. His lavishly wrought belt glittered. Though he moved slowly, with seeming indifference, you could read the dancer's engagement of purpose in his every step and gesture. He stopped as if to inquire of his lady, then leaned toward her as though to whisper in her ear. Abashed, the lady looked away, refusing to listen. He doffed his cap and bowed courteously. The lady returned his glance, yet still she vouchsafed no answer. He slackened his pace; followed her glance with his eye. At last, he laughed out, clearly delighted by the lady's reply. Quickening his pace, he looked down at his rivals, pulled his egret-plumed cap over his eyes then tossed it back on his head; then cocking it rakishly and curling his moustache, he marched forth. The guests followed jealously on his heels. He seemed intent on stealing his lady away. Now he would mark time, raise his hand politely, and beg them to pass him by, now he would contrive to step nimbly aside and change direction as if only too glad to confound the dancers; but they pursued him doggedly with swift steps and encircled him in the evolutions of the dance. Growing angry, he clapped his hand to his sword-hilt as if to say, "I care not; a plague upon your jealous eyes!" With pride written on his brow, defiance in his eyes, he made an about-face and bore down on the throng. Loath to stand in his way, the dancers stepped aside, regrouped then set off again in hot pursuit; meanwhile, shouts rang out on all sides, "Ah, he may be the last! Look on, you youngsters, look on! He may be the last to lead the dance in this way."

And so, boisterous and merry, ladies, nobility and soldiers swept by, pair after pair. Round and round they went, untwisting and twisting anew like the thousand coils of a giant snake. The speckled polychrome of their costumes shimmered like scales, gilded by the beams of the westering sun and enhanced by the dark pillow of the sward. Round and round they danced. The music played. The plaudits! The pledges!

Only Corporal Sack Dobrzyński held aloof; he neither listened to the music, nor danced, nor partook in the general merriment. Standing sullenly aside with his hands behind his back, he recalled the days of his courtship of Sophy. He recalled the gifts of flowers and bird's eggs he used to bring her, the baskets he had woven for

her, the earrings he had carved for her. The little ingrate! Though he had lavished those lovely gifts on her in vain; though she used to run from his sight, and his father forbade him to see her, yet still, despite all this, he loved her dearly. How many times had he sat on the fence so as to catch a glimpse of her in the window! How many times had he stolen into the hemp to watch her weed the garden, harvest her cucumbers, or fatten her capons! Aye, the little ingrate! He lowered his head; then whistling out a mazurka, he rammed his vizored cap over his eyes and made for the camp where the watch stood sentinel over the artillery. To distract himself, he struck up a game of canasta with a few old campaigners, sweetening his grief with a cup. Such was the constancy of Sack Dobrzyński's feelings for Sophy.

Meanwhile, Sophy danced blithely on. Though she led the dance, you could scarcely make her out from afar in that vast overgrown courtyard. Clad in her green skirt, dressed with garlands and chapleted with flowers, she ranged unseen over the grass and blooms, governing the dance even as an angel presides over the roll of the stars. Only by the eyes turned her way, by the arms stretched out toward her and the bustle of bodies around her, could one divine where she was. In vain did the Chamberlain cling to her side; already his rival had snatched her away! Nor did the lucky Dąbrowski have time to savor his triumph; he had to yield her to another. A third ran up, but he too was obliged to pass her up and walk away without hope of a reprise. At last, Sophy passed back to Tadeusz; and here, weary of dancing, fearing another change of partners, and wishing to be with her betrothed husband, she ended the dance; and returning to the table, she began to pour wine for the guests.

The sun was setting. The evening was warm and still. Puffs of cloud dotted the dome of the sky; overhead it was still blue, to the westward, rosy. The cloudlets, airy and bright, promised fair weather: there, like a flock on the green, they drowsed; over yonder, of smaller size, they suggested a flight of teal. In the west hung a larger cloud like a sheer lace curtain—translucent, amply folded, pearly white on the outside, gilded around the margins and mauve in the center. Still it glowed and flamed in the ebbing light until at last, turning yellow, it grew pale and gray; then lowering his head, the sun drew the drapes of the cloud and,

with one last warm and wafting sigh, drifted off to sleep.

And all the while the nobility drank on, toasting Bonaparte, the Generals, Sophy, and Tadeusz. Next they pledged all three betrothed couples in turn, then all the invited guests both absent and present, then all those friends remembered among the living, and last—all those of sainted memory.

And I too was a guest on that occasion. I drank the mead and the wine, and all I saw and heard I have set down in this book. Δ

NOTE: The full text of *Pan Tadeusz* in Christopher Adam Zakrzewski's translation can be purchased on Kindle for \$1.99.

## Testimony and Literature The Prose of Józef Mackiewicz

### Adam Fitas

In his well-known essay on Józef Mackiewicz, Czesław Miłosz pays special attention to Mackiewicz's postwar reports on communist and Nazi crimes. Miłosz places particular emphasis on the fact that these commentaries are strongly rooted in real life, and stresses their documentary and eyewitness character:

*Józef Mackiewicz saw the graves of Katyń and wrote what he saw. By chance, he also witnessed the murder of Jews condemned by the Germans in Ponary, and also left behind a factual report. As long as Polish literature exists, these two records of the horror of the twentieth century will always be remembered, and will provide necessary balance in case literature moves too far away from reality.*<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after writing this essay Miłosz commented on all of Mackiewicz's prose writings and opined that Mackiewicz was an old-fashioned realist writer, one who "used language as a tool, not allowing his style to become independent and take precedence over the hand that wrote it." Leaving aside for the moment the polemic on Mackiewicz's realism and the traditional or modern documentary-like aspect of his writing, I concentrate on Miłosz's deliberate uniting of the two core testimonies of Mackiewicz's. In fact, both *Ponary*—"Baza" (Ponary—"the Base"), as well as *Dymy nad*