

Sarmatian Review Literary Award

Over the years, *Sarmatian Review* has published a number of translations by Christopher Zakrzewski, a polyglot who teaches Latin in a Canadian college. Over the years, Mr. Zakrzewski chiseled and has perfected his translations of *Pan Tadeusz*. His final prose version seems to us the best of all: a contemporary reader can best savor *Pan Tadeusz* as a stylized and incredibly elegant tale of country life in Polish-speaking Lithuania in the early nineteenth century. Zakrzewski's translation is a major achievement. The older translations are too remote from the rhythm of contemporaneity. We have been publishing his new translation in installments.

Zakrzewski has also translated portions of Canto Five of Juliusz Słowacki's *Pan Beniowski* for *Sarmatian Review* (SR, April 2002), the only substantial portion of *Pan Beniowski* available in English. For these achievements Mr. Zakrzewski receives the 2010 *Sarmatian Review* Literary Award. The Award consists of a wooden plaque and a check for \$500.00. The plaque is inscribed with the following:

2010

Sarmatian Review

Literary Award

is given

to

Christopher A. Zakrzewski

of Our Lady the Seat of Wisdom Academy, Canada

for artistic excellence in translating into English
the Polish Romantic poets

Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki

Polish Institute of Houston

Pan Tadeusz

by

Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855)

Book Three

Coquetries

Argument:

The Count's sally into the garden.

A mysterious nymph tends the geese.

The mushroom gatherers.

*A comparison with the wandering
shades of Elysium.*

Varieties of wild mushroom.

Telimena at the Temple of Musings.

Consultations touching Tadeusz's future.

The Count as landscape painter.

*Tadeusz's picturesque views on trees and
clouds.*

The Count's thoughts on art.

The bell.

A note.

A bear, my lordship!

Translated by Christopher A. Zakrzewski

The Count had turned for home; yet he kept drawing rein to look back at the garden. Suddenly, he caught a glimpse of the mysterious white dress in the manor window. Once again some weightless object seemed to float to the ground, streak across the garden, and flash among the green cucumber leaves. So a fugitive sunbeam drops through an opening in a cloud only to glance off a flat flint in the field or a sheet of still water in the meadow.

Alighting from his mount, the Count dismissed his men and ran stealthily back to the garden. In no time he gained the fence, found an opening and, like wolf stealing into the fold, slipped inside—only to blunder into a row of dry gooseberry bushes. The rustling twigs seemed to startle the little gardener. She turned and looked around, but saw nothing to alarm her; all the same, she made for the far side of the garden. Meanwhile, the Count, having slipped sideways through the great leaves of wild rhubarb and yellow dock, dropped down on all fours and, hopping frog-fashion through the grass, crept noiselessly up to within a few yards of the girl. He raised his head. A marvelous prospect burst upon his eyes.

There stood in this corner of the orchard a sparse assemblage of cherry-trees. All around them grew a grain patch artfully sown with a wide assortment of crops: wheat, maize, broad bean, English pea, bearded barley, millet, and even the odd flower and shrub. Contrived as a covert for the manor's free-ranging poultry, the garden was the brainchild of the bailiff's wife, a famous housekeeper by the name of Kocky of the house of Turkey. Her invention signaled an epoch in the annals of domestic husbandry. Today it is household knowledge, but then it was still a novelty, known only to the few initiates. Eventually, it made its way into the pages of the almanac under the title, *Remedies for Hawks and Kites: A New Method of Raising Poultry*. This was that garden.

The crested rooster, strutting his watch, had only to come to a halt, cock his beaked head sideways (the better to sweep the clouds with his eye) and, spying a hawk, sound the alarm. At once the entire flock of birds—hens, geese, and peafowl—would scurry for cover in the grain patch; even the startled doves, finding themselves cut off from the manor roof, sought shelter there.

For the moment no enemy hovered in sight; the fierce summer sun blazed alone in the sky. The birds sought out the shade of the covert. Some basked in the grass, others wallowed in the sand.

Rearing but a head above the birds was a group of barenecked little human folk with tow-white, short-cropped hair. Among them, standing taller by another head, and with longer hair, was a girl; and behind them, fanning the broad hoop of its iridescent tail covert, sat a peacock. Set picturesquely against this dark-blue backdrop, the white heads stood out in bold relief. The eyes of the peacock's tail flashed out around them like a garland of stars. All this appeared as in a shadow play: through a translucent screen of golden grain stalks, silver-veined ribbon grass, coral-red amaranth, and verdant mallow. The blend of shapes and tones suggested a

grillwork wrought of silver and gold; and yet everything was light and airy like a breeze-blown drape.

Over this polychrome of ears and stalks there hung, floating like a baldachin, a radiant mist of mayflies—or *dames* as they are locally called. Barely visible, the insects danced on four gauze-like wings as clear as glass; and though they gave off a humming sound, they seemed scarcely to stir. The girl held a tuft of grey ostrich plumes in one hand; she was waving it over the heads of the tots, as if brushing away the golden swarm. Clasped in her other hand was a gleaming horn-like object—plainly a feeding vessel, for she was lowering it to each of the little mouths by turns. The vessel brought to mind Amalthea's golden horn.

All the while, still mindful of the disturbance in the gooseberry patch, she cast backward glances. Little did she know that her prowler had crept up from the opposite side and was even now worming his way across the garden beds. Without warning, he leapt out of the burdocks. She looked up to see him bowing low before her just four beds away. Instantly she turned, threw up her arms, and prepared to take flight like a startled jay. Already her feet skimmed the leaves; but then, alarmed by the intruder and the flight of their mistress, the little tots raised a frightful wail. On hearing their cries, the girl thought twice about abandoning them to their fright. And so, faltering, like a reluctant sprite drawn by a sorcerer's charm, she retraced her steps; back she ran to attend to the shrillest of her charges. Crouching down, she pressed the tot to her bosom, fondled another, and calmed them all with soothing words. Even as chicks seek shelter under the brood-hen's wing, so the tots wrapped their arms about her knees and huddled around her.

"Come," she chided them, "is it nice to be crying so? Is it polite? Why, you will scare the gentleman! He had no intention of startling you. He is no nasty old beggar, but a guest, a nice gentleman. See how handsome he is!" And she looked for herself.

The Count, clearly delighting in these flatteries, smiled at her sweetly. But the girl, suddenly remembering herself, fell silent and, mantling deeply like a rose, lowered her eyes.

He was indeed a comely gentleman: tall of stature, with a longish face, gentle eyes of cornflower-blue, cheeks pale yet fresh, locks long and fair. Tufts of grass and leaves, gleaned from his passage across the beds, clung to his temples like an unraveling wreath of bays.

"You!" he declaimed. "By what name shall I honor you? Deity! Nymph! Shadow! Apparition! Speak! Do you walk this earth of your own free will or does another's bind you to this terrestrial vale? Stay! Let me guess! A

spurned lover—some rich baron or jealous guardian—holds you bewitched in this park. For beauty such as yours paladins entered the lists. Of such heroic stuff romancers spun melancholy lays! Reveal, fair damsel, the secret of your cruel misfortune, for even now your preserver hangs upon your beck. Even as you reign in my heart, so shall you reign over this arm!” And he stretched forth his arm.

Blushing girlishly, yet beaming with joy, she listened to him speak. As a child rejoices in a book of gaudy pictures or takes pleasure in a handful of glittering game counters even before knowing their value, so, without grasping the burden, she delighted in the sonorities of his speech.

“Sir, where have you come from?” she replied at last. “What are you seeking here among the flowerbeds?”

The Count’s eyes grew wide with surprise and bewilderment. For a moment he stood speechless. Then lowering his exalted tone, he replied:

“Please excuse me, miss, I seem to have spoiled your fun. Forgive me. I was hurrying to the house for breakfast. It is running late and I wanted to arrive there on time. As you know, the road takes a roundabout route. If I am not mistaken, the way across the garden is shorter?”

“There is your way, sir,” she said. “Only do mind the beds. You will find a path in the grass yonder.”

“Right or left?”

Raising her eyes, the girl seemed to study him closely. The house stood in plain view not a thousand paces off, and yet here he was asking the way. But the Count was set on drawing her into a conversation.

“Do you live here, miss?” he pursued. “Close to the garden? In the village then? How is it that I have never seen you in the house? Have you been here long? Visiting perhaps?”

The little gardener shook her head.

“Forgive me, but is that not your room by the window yonder?”

Meanwhile, his thoughts ran this way: “Perhaps not a romantic heroine after all. Still, she is pretty and young. Not seldom does a great soul lie hidden away like a rose in the forest; but bring her forth into the world, expose her to the light of day, and she dazzles the beholder with a thousand shades of hue.”

Without a word, the little gardener rose to her feet, scooped up the tot that clung to her arm, took another by the hand, and, driving the rest like a flock of geese before her, went forth into the orchard.

“If you please, sir,” she said with a backward glance, “be so kind as to drive my scattered birds into the grain patch?”

“Me!” cried the astonished Count. “Drive your birds?”

But by now she had fled under the canopy of the grove. For an instant longer he imagined he saw a pair of eyes flashing at him through the avenues of flowering trees.

Left alone, the Count lingered on in the garden. Even as the earth grows cool after sunset, so his soul began to shed her ardor and take on darker tones. He lapsed into a dreamy state, but his dreams were far from pleasant. He roused himself angrily. But who to blame? How little had come of it! His hopes had run too high. With a burning brow and throbbing heart he had crept his way across the beds toward his shepherdess. All those charms ascribed to the mysterious nymph; all those wondrous qualities imputed; all those surmises made—and all so wide of the mark! True, her face was pretty, her figure supple, but how out of place! The lively glow and plumpness of her cheeks bespoke a surfeit of simple bliss: a sign that her mind and heart lay as yet inactive and dormant. And her replies! How coarse! How rustic!

“Why delude myself?” he cried out. “My nymph’s a common gooseherd!”

With the girl’s disappearance, the entire bewitching shadow play took on a whole new aspect. Alas, could all this charming ribbonry and grillwork wrought of silver and gold be nothing but straw? He wrung his hands, gazing on the little bentgrass broom, which he had taken for a tuft of ostrich plumes. He recalled the golden vessel. Amalthea’s horn was—a carrot! Even now one of the village urchins was busy dispatching it. So it was farewell to the charm, the spell—the wonder. Even so a boy, when he spies a dandelion, feels drawn to the soft and delicate head. Eager to touch it, he approaches, blows upon it, and the whole flower dissolves into a cloud of down, leaving nothing to the over-keen eye but a stark grayish-green receptacle.

Ramming his hat over his eyes, the Count spun on his heel and returned whence he came, though he shortened the way by cutting across the vegetables, flowers, and rows of gooseberry bushes. Only after clearing the fence did he take time to catch his breath. But then he recalled he had spoken to the girl of breakfast. Perhaps word of their meeting in the garden so close to the house had already got out? What if they had dispatched servants to fetch him, only to learn that he had run off? No telling what they would think. Yes, it behooved him to go back.

Keeping low along the fences, he skirted the boundary strips and patches of weed. At last, to his relief, after taking a thousand detours, he emerged on the road that made straight for the manor courtyard. He followed the fence without glancing at the garden. So the grain pilferer, betraying no sign of his deed or intention, averts his gaze

from the granary. Such was the Count's circumspection, though there was no one about to observe his movements. On he walked, his head turned away from the garden, eyes to the right.

Here stood a birch grove, clean of undergrowth and richly swarded. Gazing into the trees, the Count saw—gliding over that verdurous broadloom, weaving in among the silver boles under a canopy of low-hanging leafy branches—a host of shadowy shapes. Like spirits in the moonlight executing strange, dance-like motions they roamed, bizarrely clad, some sheathed in black, others draped in long flowing robes as white as snow. One wore a broad-brimmed hat as wide as a cooper's hoop. Another went bareheaded; still others walked as if wrapped in vapors, their headgear trailing in the breeze like a comet's tail. Each struck a different pose. One stood rooted to the forest floor; only his lowered eyeballs moved. Another stared straight ahead, moving like a somnambulist, swerving neither to the right nor left, as if walking a line. The figures kept bending down in various directions, as if making profound bows. Upon approaching each other or crossing paths, they exchanged neither word nor nod—so absorbed were they in their task; so deep was their distraction. The shadowy forms put the Count in mind of the Elysian shades: bereft of pain and cares, they roam the blessed fields in quiet yet mournful tranquility.

Who would have recognized in these silent folk so frugal of movement—our friends, the Judge's companions. Having concluded their stormy breakfast, they had gone outdoors to observe the solemn rite of mushroom gathering. Being sensible folk, they knew how to curb their speech and fit their gestures to every place and season. And so, before following the Judge into the woods, they had assumed a new demeanor and a change of clothing. Over their robes the men had thrown loose linen smocks. Straw hats covered their heads; hence their pale aspect reminiscent of purgatorial souls. Most of the younger set had also changed. Only Telimena and a few of the others still had on their French attire.

The unrusticated Count could make nothing of it. Intrigued to no end, he struck out with all speed for the birch-grove.

The woodland teemed with mushrooms. The lads picked the rosy-cheeked *chanterelles*—objects of high praise in Lithuanian songs, for they are called emblems of maidenhood. Worms never gnaw at them; nor, strange to say, do insects alight on their caps. The young ladies sought after the shapely *bolete*, which the folksong calls the “King of Mushrooms.” All hunted for the smaller *saffron milk cap*. Although less exalted in song, these were the tastiest of all, for you could eat them fresh or salted,

in autumn or winter. The Chief Steward sought out the *fly agaric*.

Other common varieties of mushroom were shunned for their inferior taste or injurious effects; yet even these were not without their utility. They provided the fauna with food, the insect with a nesting place, and the glade with adornment. Like a table service they stood ranged on the meadow's linen: the round-edged *russulas*, silvery, yellowish, or ruby-red, like goblets brimming with various vintages; the *yellow boletes*, their caps dimpled like the bottoms of upturned cups; the *funnel clitocybes*, slender as champagne stemware; the *fleecy milk cap*, round and white, broad and flat, like cream-filled teacups of Dresden porcelain; and the spherical *puffballs*, squat as pepper-pots, replete with a powdery black spore mass.

The rest had names found only in the tongues of hares and wolves. Human folk had not yet christened these, yet they grew in profusion. No one touched these feral varieties; and if someone mistakenly stooped to pick one, he angrily snapped off the cap or trampled it underfoot; though in so sullyng the sward he behaved quite unwisely.

Telimena picked neither the feral nor human varieties. Bored and distracted, her head thrown back, she stood gazing up around her. The Notary testily observed that she was rooting for mushrooms in the trees. The more spiteful Assessor likened her to a broody bird spying out a place to build her nest.

But Telimena seemed to be seeking out a place of silence and solitude. Slowly she drew away from her companions. Straying deeper into the forest, she mounted a gentle slope where the trees grew thicker and shadier. A grayish rock crowned the knoll; a stream flowed from beneath it. Out it gushed and fled away, as if seeking shade, to water the tall rank grasses that grew all round. There, swaddled in the herbage, couched in a bed of leaves, unseen, untroubled, and motionless, the nimble rascal purred. So a querulous child lies tucked in its crib, while its mother, bestrewing the pillow with poppy leaves, laces up the cradle's green drapes. Here was a lovely nook indeed. Telimena often sought refuge here. She called it her *Temple of Musings*.

Stopping by the rill, she cast off her scarlet shawl and let it float to the ground. As a bather bends down, bracing herself for the plunge, so she dropped to her knees, sank slowly to one side, and, as if swept up by a coral tide, flounced down and sprawled at full length on the green. There she lay with her elbow on the grass, her temple resting on the palm of her hand, head bent at an angle, eyes poring over the gleaming vellum of a French novel; and, as she read, her black ringlets and pink ribbons danced over the alabaster pages.

A quaint picture she presented: her scarlet shawl spread over the emerald sward, she disposed upon it; her frame sheathed in a long coral-red frock, set off at either end by her black hair and slipper and enhanced by the shimmering white line of her kerchief, stocking, and arm. A distant viewer might easily have mistaken her for a gaudy caterpillar sprawled on a maple leaf.

Alas, no expert was at hand to appraise the merits of this charming scene. Absorbed in their pursuit of mushrooms, none of the gatherers paid it the slightest attention. Only Tadeusz took notice. Casting sideward glances at Telimena, yet loath to approach her directly, he crept cautiously toward her. So, pushing before him his two-wheeled blind woven from branches, the hunter stalks the bustard. So the plover shooter, resting his gun on his horse's saddle or neck, approaches his prey. Like a plowman drawing his harrow or skirting a balk he advances. Each step brings him closer to his quarry's resting place. Such was the lad's circumspection.

But then his uncle upset his ambushade. Striding briskly up toward the stream, the Judge cut Tadeusz off. The fitful breeze played upon the tails of his white sarafan and the voluminous handkerchief knotted to his belt. Secured by a string, his hat waved up and down like a burdock leaf, beating over his shoulders and eyes. So, plying his massive cane, the Judge bent his steps toward the stream. After squatting down to wash his hands, he seated himself on a large rock opposite Telimena and, leaning forward on the ivory ball of his prodigious ferule, began to speak.

"You must know, my dear, that ever since young Tadeusz arrived, I have had no end of worries. I am old and childless. The dear lad is my one solace in the world, the future heir to my fortune. God willing, I shall leave him a handsome inheritance befitting a gentleman, but he too must give thought to his prospects and learn to stand on his own two feet. Now consider, my dear, the straits I am in. You know what a strange fellow my brother Jacek—Tadeusz's father—is. His intentions are hard to read. He refuses to come home. God knows where he is hiding now. He will not even allow his son to know he is alive, yet still he insists on running his affairs. First he wants Tadeusz to go for a soldier and join the legions; that caused me a great deal of grief. Then he agrees that he should stay home and take a wife. That will not be difficult to arrange. I have my eye on a certain party. No one among our fellow citizens boasts a better name or set of relations than the Chamberlain. His elder daughter, Anna, is eligible; she is fair and well dowered. I thought I might launch the process."

On hearing this, Telimena turned pale. She closed her book, tried to rise, but then sat down again.

"So help me, dear brother!" she cried. "Have you taken leave of your senses? Can you be so heartless? Make of Tadeusz a sower of groats? Is that the sort of benefactor you are? Why, you will stifle the lad! Depend on it, he will end up cursing you one day. The idea of burying such talent in the backwoods and kitchen gardens! Why, even from what little I know of him, I can see he is a bright lad. What he needs is to see the world. You would do better, my brother, to send him to the capital, to Warsaw, for instance, or—do you know what I'm thinking?—why not Saint Petersburg? I expect to be traveling there this winter on business. We could plan his future together. I am acquainted with a good many people in Petersburg and have influence there. What better way of getting ahead in the world?. With my help, he will gain admittance into the finest houses; and once he comes to know people of note, he will find a berth—earn a ribbon. Then, if he so wishes, he can resign his post and come home. But by then, he will be somebody and know the ways of the world. What say you to this, my brother?"

"True enough," averred the Judge, "a change of scenery, a chance to study men and manners can profit a youth. In my own youth I saw quite a bit of the world. I have been to Dubno, and Piotrków too, where as a member of the bar I pleaded cases at the Royal Assizes. To promote my affairs I even traveled to Warsaw. Yes, there is much to be said for it. I should very much like my nephew to see the world, but rather as a traveler or an apprentice, for a term of years, that he might learn the affairs of men—not for the sake of rank and ribbons! You will pardon me, my dear, but what kind of distinction are Moscow's ranks or ribbons? Since when did our gentry of old (or even now, for that matter)—since when, I say, did the wealthier squires of our district care for such trifles? Here we hold men in esteem for their gentle birth, good name, and office, by which I mean an office won by a vote of the local citizenry—not through someone's good influences!"

"If that is your view," broke in Telimena, "then so much the better. By all means, send your nephew into the world as a traveler."

"You see, my dear sister," said the Judge, ruefully scratching his head, "I should like nothing better. But there is another snag. Jacek insists on taking charge of his son; and now he has burdened me with his friend from across the Vistula—the Bernardine, Robak, whom he has taken completely into his confidence. They have already decided Tadeusz's future. They want the boy to

wed, to take Sophie, your ward, as wife. In addition to my fortune, they will receive a handsome portion from my brother. As you know, my dear, Jacek has capital in store. It is by his grace that I own the greater part of the estate; so he is entitled to take the business in hand. And so, my dear, think how best to smooth the way. They must become acquainted. True, they are rather young, especially little Sophie. But there is no harm in that. Anyhow, it is high time she came out of confinement, for she is growing out of childhood."

Telimena was aghast, almost in a panic. She struggled to rise to her feet, but succeeded only in kneeling down on her shawl. Although disposed to listening at first, she was now signing disagreement with her hand, waving it about her ear, as if driving the swarm of unpleasant words back into the speaker's mouth.

"What is this? What is this I hear?" she retorted hotly. "Sir, what is good or ill for Tadeusz you may decide for yourself. He is nothing to me. Make what plans you like. Make of him an overseer; consign him to a public house. Let him serve drinks, fetch game from the forest. Do as you please with him. But as for Sophie, what concern is she of yours? Whom she marries is for me, for me alone, to decide. The fact that Jacek pays for her education and affords a modest yearly allowance (and promises to give more) does not entitle him to treat her like bought chattels. Besides, it is still widely known that your generosity toward her is not without self-interest. You Soplicas must know that you bear the Horeszko family a debt."

The Judge heard this part of her speech with incomprehensible dismay, sorrow, and visible revulsion. As if dreading to hear the rest, he hung his head and waved assent, blushing deeply all the while.

"I have been a foster mother to her," pursued Telimena, closing her argument. "I am Sophie's kin, her only guardian. No one but I will provide for her happiness."

"And if she found happiness in this match?" ventured the Judge, raising his eyes. "If she took a fancy to Tadeusz?"

"Took a fancy! A fig on a thistle! Fancies! What do I care for fancies! Sophie may lack a dowry, but she is no country-bred wench—or just any gentlewoman. She springs from nobility. She is a Castellan's daughter; a Horeszko on her mother's side. Yes, we shall find a husband for her. Just think of the effort we put into her rearing. But here? Why, she would run wild in this place!"

The Judge listened to Telimena attentively, without lowering his eyes. His features seemed to soften, for his reply was rather cheerful.

"Well, my dear," he said, "nothing more to be said. God knows I have tried to raise this matter without rancor. If you will not give your assent, then you are quite within your rights. Sad it is, but anger is out of place. I urged the suit for my brother's sake only, but no one is forcing the match. Since you see fit to refuse Tadeusz's suit, I shall inform Jacek in writing that notwithstanding my best efforts, a betrothal between Tadeusz and Sophie cannot take place. Now the Chamberlain and I shall take the matter in hand. We shall start the process and push it to a swift conclusion."

But by now Telimena's fervor had begun to cool.

"Now just wait a minute, dear brother!" she broke in. "I am refusing nothing. You said yourself it was too soon; that they were too young. Let us bide our time and ponder the matter. There is no harm in that. The young couple shall become acquainted, but we cannot leave the happiness of others to chance; and, I must warn you, my brother, to refrain from putting any ideas into Tadeusz's head. No forcing of his attentions on Sophie! The heart is no slave. Love brooks no master; no chains shall constrain it."

With that the Judge rose and walked away, deep in thought. Meanwhile, drawn by an imaginary trail of mushrooms, Tadeusz approached from the other side; at the same time, the Count bore slowly up in the same direction.

All this time, the Count had stood observing the Judge and Telimena from his vantage point among the trees. Deeply stirred by the scene, he produced paper and pencil from his pocket (he never went anywhere without his drawing materials), spread the paper over a leaning trunk, and busied himself with sketching essays.

"Arranged as if by design," he muttered to himself. "He upon the rock, she on the sward. A picturesque *ensemble!* Distinctive heads! Contrasting lines!"

He drew nearer, halting from time to time to wipe his lorgnette and daub his eyes with a handkerchief, yet never dropping his gaze.

"Must this lovely, enchanting tableau vanish or be transformed on closer scrutiny?" he mused. "Will that velvet sward resolve itself into a patch of poppies and beet-tops? Shall I in yonder nymph discover a bailiff's mistress?"

Although the Count had often seen Telimena at the Judge's house (for he was a frequent caller there), yet he had never paid her much attention. What was his amazement now when he placed the model of his sketches! The beauty of the setting, the grace of the woman's posture, and the tastefulness of her attire had transformed her almost beyond recognition. Anger still smoldered in

her eyes. Enlivened by the breeze, by the recent quarrel with the Judge, and now by the sudden appearance of the two youths, her face flushed with tones all the more vivid and intense.

“Please forgive the bold intrusion, ma’am,” said the Count. “But I come bearing both apologies and expressions of gratitude: apologies for stealthily haunting your footsteps; gratitude for the honor of witnessing your musings. A grave offense committed, a heavy debt incurred, for I intrude upon a moment of your musings and stand obliged for several more of inspiration. Such felicitous moments! Now censure the man; but the artist awaits your grace. Having risked a great deal, I will risk still more. Be my judge!” And kneeling beside her, he handed her his landscapes.

Telimena appraised his essays courteously yet as one knowledgeable in matters of art. Though slow to praise, she was quick to encourage. “Bravo!” she exclaimed. “I congratulate you! There is talent here. Only see you do not neglect it. Above all, seek out lovely natural settings. Italy’s sunny skies! Rome’s imperial rose-gardens! Tiber’s classic cataracts! Posilipo’s awesome caverns! There, my dear Count, is your land for painters! Here? Lord have mercy! A child of the Muses suckled at Soplica Manor would starve to death. Dear Count! I shall have your sketches framed or place them in my album together with several other drawings I have picked up along the way. By now I have quite a collection in my *escritoire*.”

They began to talk of azure skies, murmuring seas, scented breezes, and craggy peaks. Here and there, in the manner of many a traveler, they dropped scornful remarks and poked fun at their native land.

Yet all around them, in all its imposing splendor, stretched Lithuania’s forest! All around them stood the bird cherry with her festoonery of wild hop; the rowan, fresh and mantling like a shepherdess’s cheek; the maenad hazel with her verdant thyrsi wreathed in grape-like clusters of pearly nuts. Beneath them grew the forest children: the guelder rose in the clasp of an alder, the black-lipped bramble entwined around a raspberry bush. Leafy-fingered trees and shrubs stood with nearer hands joined, like village maids and their swains poised to tread a measure around the married couple. And in their midst, surpassing the forest party in comeliness and charm of hue, there stood the wedded pair—a silver birch, the beloved, and her groom, a hornbeam. Farther back, like elder folk silently watching the rising generation, sat the venerable beeches and matronly poplars. Beside them towered a great oak, hunchbacked and bearded with moss. Bent under the weight of five long centuries, he leaned on the petrified trunks of his sires, which reared from

the forest floor like the ruinous columns of an ancient necropolis.

Tadeusz fidgeted and squirmed, bored to no end by this long discourse in which he had no part. When they began to sing the praises of exotic groves and rhyme off every species of tree—orange, cypress, olive, almond, cactus, aloe, mahogany, sandal, lemon, ivy, walnut, and even the fig—and then enlarge on their respective shapes, blossoms, and textures of bark, Tadeusz did nothing but huff and puff. At last, he could contain himself no longer. Though he was a simple youth, he knew how to delight in natural beauty. His imagination set ablaze by the sight of his native forest, he began to speak his mind.

“I have been to the botanical gardens in the city of Wilno. I have seen those celebrated trees that grow in the Orient or down south, in that beautiful Italian land of yours. But pray tell me, which of them compares with our own native trees? Surely not the aloe? Its twigs stick up like lightning conductors! Or the dwarf-like lemon with its gilded knobs and lacquered leaves? Lemon-trees are short and squat, like little old ladies, rich—but ugly! Your vaunted cypress? Why, that tall, gaunt, and emaciated tree expresses boredom rather than sorrow! People say the cypress looks so mournful standing over a grave. I say the thing is like a German lackey liveried in grief, loath to move a limb or nod his head for fear of breaching funeral etiquette!

“Is not our honest-hearted birch comelier? Picture her as a village woman, a mother grieving her son, or a widow, her husband. She wrings her hands. Her tresses spread wildly over her shoulders cascade to the ground. Mute with grief she stands, and yet by her posture how expressively she weeps! If painting is your passion, sir, why not paint the trees whose shade you now enjoy? You will be the laughingstock of the district if, biding in Lithuania’s fertile plains, you paint nothing but craggy peaks and desert wastes.”

“My friend,” replied the Count, “natural beauty is but the form, the backdrop—the raw material, so to speak. The soul of art is inspiration. Art ranges on the pinions of invention. Taste must polish it; sound principles ground it. Nature is not enough; nor are fervent spirits, for the artist must loft himself into the realm of the Ideal! Not everything that is beautiful lends itself to the painter’s brush. All this you will learn in good time in the course of your reading. As for painting, know that a picture requires a point of vantage, grouping, arrangement, and, above all, a sky—an Italian sky! So it is with the art of landscape. That is why Italy was and continues to be the birthplace of painters; which explains why, apart from Breughel—not Van der Helle, mind, but

the landscapist (there are two Breughels)—why, apart from Breughel (and Ruisdael too), we in the northern latitudes boast of so few genre painters of the highest order. Skies! It is skies we need!”

“Take our painter Orłowski!” broke in Telimena. “Now there was a man with Soplica taste! (You should know that this is a disease among the Soplicas; they have but one abiding love—their native land.) I refer to Orłowski, the famous artist, who spent his years in Petersburg. (I keep one or two of his sketches in my escritoire.) He lived very near to the Emperor’s court. What a painter’s paradise! Yet, my dear Count, you would not believe how he pined for his land! He loved nothing better than to reminisce on his youth and sing the praises of everything Polish: the fields, the skies, the forests.”

“And rightly so!” rejoined Tadeusz hotly. “From what I hear, those clear blue Italian skies of yours are like water frozen over! Are not gales and inclement weather a hundred times lovelier? Here you have only to look up. No end to the sights! Consider the pictures and scenes unfolding from the play of clouds alone. Each has a different shape. Take the autumn cloud. Like a lazy tortoise, it moves along, great with showers. Long streamers fall to the ground like unbraided tresses: the rain streaming down! And take the hail cloud. Dark-blue and round, with a yellow core, it flies on the wind like a ball, and all around you hear the thunderous clatter. Take even our everyday white clouds like those up yonder. See how changeable they are! Like a flock of wild geese or swans they scud along. Swooping down from behind, the falcon-wind bunches them up; they mass together, swell, thicken, and lo! they grow curving necks and manes, put out rows of legs, and fly across the heavens like a herd of steppeland ponies—all silvery-white. Yet another change! Now masts erupt from their necks, the manes belly forth into broad sails, and the herd of ponies transforms into a magnificent seagoing schooner. Serene and leisurely, she glides over the azure face of heaven.”

Telimena and the Count gazed up at the cloud. Tadeusz was pointing to it with his right hand; but even as he did so, he was gently squeezing Telimena’s with his left. Several minutes of quiet contemplation elapsed. The Count spread a sheet of paper over his hat and reached for his pencil. Just then, the mournful sound of the manor bell burst upon their ears. Instantly, the silent forest broke out into a tumult of shouts and halloos.

“So with the tolling of the bell,” declaimed the Count, shaking his head, “does Destiny bring all the things of this world to a term. The reckonings of great minds, the inventions of ranging fancy, the tender amusements, the delights of friendship, the outpourings of gentle hearts!

The gunmetal barks from afar, and all is thrown into confusion, chaos, and turmoil, and then fades away.”

And gazing tenderly at Telimena he asked, “What remains?”

“Memories!” was her reply; and to sweeten his sadness, she handed him a freshly picked forget-me-not. The Count raised the flower to his lips, then pinned it to his bosom. Meanwhile, on the opposite side, Tadeusz was engaged in parting the leaves of a shrub. A white object—a lily-white hand—had thrust its way through the leafage. He seized it up and kissed it. Like a bee in a lily cup, his mouth sank into the hollow of the hand. A cold object touched his lips. It was a key and a scrap of white paper—a little note twisted into a cone. He snatched up the objects and put them in his pocket. He had no idea what the key signified, but the little card would doubtless shed light on it.

The bell continued to clank. A thousand shouts and cries answered like echoes from deep within the silent wood. It was the sound of people seeking one another out, hailing and hallooming, a signal that the day’s mushrooming had come to an end. Yet these echoes were anything but sad or mournful as it seemed to the Count; indeed, they had a prandial tone. Every day at noon, from under the manor gable the bell rang out, summoning the guests and the servants to luncheon. Many of the older domains observed this custom, and Soplica Manor held fast to it. And so the party of mushroomers emerged from the grove. All carried chip or wicker baskets tied down at each corner with a handkerchief. The baskets brimmed with wild mushrooms. Each young lady held a magnificent *bolete* like a folded fan in one hand and a bundle of *honey fungi* and *russulas* of various hues—all tied together like a nosegay of wildflowers—in the other. The Chief Steward held his *fly agaric*. Telimena walked empty-handed. The two youths brought up the rear.

The guests entered in orderly fashion and formed a circle around the table. The Chamberlain took the seat of honor. (It was the privilege of his post and senior years.) He bowed to the ladies, elders, and youth. At his elbow stood the Bernardine and the Judge respectively. The monk recited a brief prayer in the Latin tongue; the men took vodka, and all sat down and fell to, dispatching the chilled borsch in silence.

The noonday meal proceeded more quietly than usual. Despite the entreaties of the host, no one was in the mood to talk. The two sides embroiled in the great dispute over the greyhounds thought only of tomorrow’s contest and wager. (Great thoughts have a way of compelling lips to silence.) Telimena chatted constantly with Tadeusz, while not failing to lavish attention on the

Count as well. Even the Assessor was vouchsafed an occasional glance. So the fowler keeps his eye on both snares: one set for the goldfinch, the other for the sparrow.

Both Tadeusz and the Count felt very pleased with themselves. Both were happy, both brimmed with hope, and so neither of them felt an inclination to talk. The Count eyed his forget-me-not proudly. Tadeusz glanced furtively into his pocket to ensure the key had not slipped away. He even took it into his hand and fingered the note; as yet he had not had the time to read it. Meanwhile, the Judge waited attentively on the Chamberlain. From time to time he squeezed his lordship's knee and topped up his glass with champagne or Hungarian wine; yet even he lacked zest for talk. Clearly he was burdened by private cares of his own. The plates and dishes came and went in silence.

Suddenly, an unexpected guest broke the tedious flow of the meal. It was the forest ranger. Heedless of his intrusion on the lunch hour, he walked hurriedly up to the Judge. From his bearing and expression, you could tell he carried tidings of great and unusual import. All eyes turned on him.

"A bear, your lordship!" he gasped out, after catching his breath.

The rest they could surmise for themselves. Everyone understood that the bear had forsaken the heart of the old forest; that he was striking out for the woods across the Niemen; that they must hunt him down without a moment's delay. Instinctively they knew this; neither council nor reflection was needed. A single thought informed the brisk gestures, the torrent of clipped words, and the welter of orders, which issued simultaneously from as many pairs of lips; every directive tended to a single purpose.

"To the village!" cried the Judge. "Ho there! To horse! Summon the foreman! Have a troop of beaters ready at daybreak. Volunteers, mind! Who shows up with a spear is released from two days' road-work and five of corvée labor!"

"Bustle about!" barked the Chamberlain. "Saddle my grey, ride post-haste to the house and fetch my two bulldogs; aye, the pair the whole neighborhood talks about. The male answers to the name Constable, the bitch, Mouthpiece. Muzzle their snouts, throw them in a sack, and bring them here on the double! On horseback, so as not to waste time!"

"Vanka!" cried the Assessor to his servant boy in Ruthenian. "Run my Sanguszko hunting knife over the whetting stone. You know, the one I received as a gift from the Prince. Then fill my cartridge belt; and see to it that every round is armed!"

"Guns!" they cried one and all. "Have the guns ready!"

"Lead! Bring me lead!" the Assessor kept yelling, "I keep a bullet mold in my bag."

"Inform the priest," added the Judge, "that holy mass will be said in the forest chapel at daybreak tomorrow—for the success of the hunt. Aye, Saint Hubert's Mass, the one with the short office."

These orders issued, the guests relapsed into silence. They assumed a thoughtful air and began to turn their heads, as if looking for someone among them. Slowly everyone's gaze converged on the sober face of the Steward. Clearly they were seeking out a leader; and the honor of bearing the master huntsman's mace had fallen to the Chief Steward. Acknowledging the will of his comrades, the Steward rose to his feet. With a solemn blow he struck the table and, reaching deep into his bosom, drew out by its gold chain a pocket-watch the size of a large pear.

"Tomorrow, at half past four," he said in a grave tone, "our hunters and beaters shall rendezvous at the forest chapel."

With that he hurried away from the table; the ranger followed close on his heels. They had business at hand. They had to plan and organize the hunt. Even so generals inform their troops that battle will be joined at first light. In the camp, the soldiers clean their arms, chew on their rations, or, putting their cares aside, sleep on their saddles and greatcoats, while the officers plot strategy in the silence of the tent.

No more thought of lunch! The rest of the day was spent in shoeing horses, feeding the hounds, collecting and cleaning firearms. Scarcely anyone bothered to attend the evening meal. Even Bobtail's and Falcon's backers ceased to occupy themselves with the great lingering dispute, for now the Notary and the Assessor were arm in arm, busy hunting for lead.

Worn out by the day's events, the rest of the company turned in early, so as to be up at the peep of dawn the following day.



Nineteenth-century barn with pond belonging to a country manor. Louise A. Boyd, *Polish Countrysides* (NY, 1937).