

# Pan Tadeusz

by

**Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855)**

(continued from April 2014 issue)

## Book Eleven

### The Year 1812

*Argument: Spring omens. The arrival of the armies. The Mass. Official rehabilitation of the late Jacek Soplica. Eavesdropping on Gervazy and Protazy from which a quick end to the lawsuit may be inferred. A lancer courts his lass. The dispute over Scut and Falcon settled at last. The guests gather for the banquet. The betrothed couples presented to the generals.*

**Translated by Christopher A.  
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**O** memorable year, to have seen you in our land! The peasantry still calls you the year of the harvest; our soldiery styles you the year of war. Ever the subject of old men's yarns! Ever the theme of poets' musings! A great sign in the heavens long foretold of your coming. Dull rumors spread abroad; and when at last the spring sun dawned, a strange premonition, a joyous, expectant longing seized the hearts of our people as if the world were coming to an end.

When came the time of the cattle's going to grass in early spring, men observed that they showed little eagerness to graze on the shoots already greening the clod. Gaunt and famished, they lay languidly in the fields, drooping their heads, bawling or chewing phlegmatically on their winter-feed. Nor did the villagers plowing for the spring crop rejoice as usual in the long winter's passing. They crooned no songs, but toiled listlessly on as if seed and harvest time were out of mind; and as they harrowed the seed fields, they checked their oxen and nags at every turn, gazing anxiously westward as if some great marvel were shaping there.

With apprehension they watched the birds' unseasonable return. Even now the stork was alighting on his ancient pine, unfurling his white pinion like spring's first battle flag. Swift upon his heels came shrill regiments of swallows, mustering over the bodies of water, scooping up the frozen mud to frame their little houses. Woodcock

whirled in the dusky thickets. Flocks of weary geese swept over the forest, dropping clamorously into the glades to rest and refresh themselves; and all the while, the cranes, throbbing high in the darkness overhead, gave out their dismal moan. Alarmed by these sounds, the watchmen puzzled over the cause of this stir in the bird kingdom. What storm, they wondered, had hastened their arrival?

At last, like flocks of finches, plovers, and starlings, new throngs appeared. A host of bright plumes and pennons flashed upon the hilltops, then streamed down into the meadows. Cavalrymen! Strangely arrayed, bearing arms never before seen. Regiment after regiment came riding down; between them, like freshets in full spate, swept columns of iron-shod troops. Endless files of black shakos and glinting bayonets issued forth from the forests. Like swarms of ants without number the infantrymen marched, all bearing north, as if on the heels of the birds man were driven by the same strange instinctive force to leave the fabled South in a mass migration to our land.

Day and night, horses, men, field guns, and eagles streamed past. Here and there an incandescent glow lit up the horizon. The ground shook; thunder rumbled from every quarter.

War! War! Not a nook in our land where its rumblings went unheard. Not even the rustic woodsman whose sires and grandsires had departed this life without ever venturing beyond the forest; whose ear knew no sound in the sky but the rush of the wind, and none on earth but the wild beasts' roars; whose only visitors were woodsmen like himself—not even he, in these remotest parts, was spared the sights of war. A lurid glare flashed in the sky: a piercing shriek, and an errant missile fired from the battlefield sought a path through the trees, snapping branches, uprooting stumps. Trembling in his mossy lair, the venerable bison bristled his shaggy mane. Half rising on his forefeet, he shook his beard and looked round, startled by the brilliant shower of sparks in the brushwood. The stray grenade spun round, seethed and hissed then burst like a thunderbolt. For the first time in his life the bison took fright; and scrambling to his feet he fled into the deeper regions of the forest.

A battle! “Where? Which way?” the young men asked, seizing their arms. The womenfolk implored heaven with upraised hands. Certain of victory, their eyes filled with tears, the people cried out, “God’s on Bonaparte’s side! Napoleon stands with us!”

O Spring, to have seen you in our land! O memorable spring of war! O spring of harvests! To have seen you flowering with grass and corn, glittering with valiant men, rich in events, and great with hope! Even now you stand before my eyes like a radiant apparition. Born in chains, enslaved while still in my swaddling bands, I have known but one such springtime in all my life.

Soplica Manor stood close to the high road leading up from the Niemen. Two generals—our own Prince Joseph and King Jerome of Westphalia—advanced along it with their armies. Having taken the part of Lithuania lying between Grodno and Slonim, the king granted the troops a three-day rest. Despite the rigors of the march, the Poles among them raised a howl of protest; so eager were they to pursue the Muscovite.

The Prince’s general staff put up in the neighboring town; meanwhile, an army of forty thousand together with its staff encamped around Soplica Manor. The staff included Generals Dąbrowski, Kniaziewicz, Małachowski, Giedroyć, and Grabowski. The hour being late, they took up quarters wherever they could find them, some in the castle, others in the manor house. Orders went out, sentries were posted. The weary generals retired to their rooms. Stillness descended on the entire domain—manor, camp, and fields. Roaming patrols stirred like shades in the night. Campfires flickered; now and then a watchword rang out from a post.

All slept, master of the manor, generals and troops. Only the Chief Steward forwent his rest. Charged with preparing a great banquet for the morrow, he was determined the meal should win the Soplica house imperishable fame. He would put on such a feast as did honor to Poland’s most highly revered guests and the double solemnity of the occasion, for tomorrow was both a religious and a family holiday. Three sets of betrothals were due to take place; and hadn’t General Dąbrowski made known his wish that evening to partake of a traditional Polish repast?

Despite the late hour, the Steward had quickly rounded up several cooks from the neighborhood. There were five of them, all serving as his under-chefs. The master cook girded his waist with a white apron, donned his hat, and rolled up his sleeves to the elbow. Holding a flapper in one hand (any greedy fly seen alighting on a delicacy was instantly swept away), he donned a pair of well-wiped glasses with the other then, reaching deep into his bosom, drew out a book and opened it. Titled *The Compleat Chef*, the tome described in detail every specialty of the Polish board. Count Tęczyński had made good use of it in Italy where he threw such lavish banquets as to arouse the awe of Pope Urban VIII himself. Charles “My-Dear-Fellow” Radziwiłł also consulted it when receiving King Stanislas at Nieśwież. So memorable was the banquet that its fame survives in Lithuania’s local lore.

Whatever instruction the Steward was able to understand and convey aloud from the book, his able assistants promptly carried out. The kitchen seethed with activity. Fifty knives pounded on wooden slabs. Kitchen boys, black as fiends in hell, bustled about, some lugging firewood, others carrying pails of milk and wine. They filled kettles, pots, and pans; vapors wafted forth. Two lads squatted by the hearth working the bellows. To help the fire along, the Steward had melted butter poured over the logs (a luxury permitted only in prosperous houses). Several more boys piled up the hearth with dry logs, others skewered enormous roasts on broiling spits: beef, venison, haunches of wild boar and stag. Still others plucked heaps of fowl, raising clouds of down and feathers. Heath cock, black grouse, and chickens lay denuded of their plumage. True, there was a general dearth of chickens. Since the night of the raid when bloodthirsty Sack Dobrzyński assailed the henhouse and made a shambles of Sophy’s enterprise, the Manor had not yet fully regained its reputation as the district’s richest producer of poultry. Still, what with the larder, the butchers’ stalls, the forests, and neighbors near and far, they amassed a great supply of meat of every description; indeed, there was enough and to spare. For a banquet, the generous host requires but two commodities: plenty and art. Soplica Manor enjoyed them both.

The solemn feast day of Our Blessed Lady of the Flowers was breaking. The weather was

sublime, the hour early, the sky cloudless. Heaven stood stretched over the earth like an ocean becalmed, incurvate. A few stars still shone clear in the depths like pearls on the sea-bottom. Drifting into view from the marges, a lone white cloudlet dipped its pinion into the azure and vanished like the Guardian Angel's wing when having tarried through the night to hear the prayers of men, the ministrant spirit hastens to rejoin his fellow heaven-dwellers.

The last pearls of the stars guttered and dimmed in the welkin's depths. Heaven's brow began to grow pale. While the right temple rested on a pillow of darkness and retained its swarthy tone, the left was growing rosier by the minute. Then, like a great eyelid, the line of the horizon parted to show at its midpoint first the white of the eye then the iris then the pupil. A beam shot forth, arced across the vault of the sky, lodging itself in the white cloudlet like a golden dart. That beam, the signal of day, unleashed a sheaf of flames. A thousand skyrockets crisscrossed the heavenly vault, and the eye of the sun rose aloft. Still sleepy it blinked, fluttering its radiant lashes, coloring sevenfold at once, sapphire blue reddening to ruby, ruby red yellowing to topaz, until shining forth, first like a clear crystal vessel then like a lustrous diamond, it burst aflame like a throbbing star large as the moon; even so the sun began his solitary march across the illimitable sky.

Today, as if in expectation of a fresh miracle, the entire local populace had assembled before dawn at the chapel entrance. They had come partly out of curiosity and partly out of religious devotion. Among those expected to attend the mass at the Manor were the army's generals, those famous captains of our legions whose names the people knew and revered as those of patron saints, whose every peregrination, campaign and battle had become the gospel of our land.

Several senior officers and a host of soldiers had already arrived. The peasantry thronged around them, staring in disbelief at their fellow countrymen arrayed in uniforms and bearing arms, all of them free and speaking the Polish tongue.

The opening procession began. Scarcely could the little chapel contain such a throng! Kneeling down on the green outside, the people bared their heads and peered in through the open doors. The tow-white heads of the Lithuanian folk shone gold

like a field of ripened rye. Hither and yon, crowned with fresh flowers or peacocks' plumes, loose ribbons trailing from braided tresses, a lovely maiden's head bloomed among the heads of the men like a cornflower or a cockle among the grain. The meadow teemed with the gaily-clad worshippers; and at the sound of the bell, as under a breath of wind, all heads bowed like ears of wheat.

For this was the day the village girls brought the first fruits of spring, fresh bunches of herbs, to Our Lady's altar. The entire chapel, the altar, the holy image, and even the bell tower and gallery stood garnished with bouquets and wreaths of flowers. Fresh breezes stirred up from the east, blowing the garlands down on the heads of the kneeling faithful while spreading scents as sweet as the thurible's fumes.

The mass and the sermon now over, the Chamberlain whom the district estates had recently elected their Confederate Marshal led the solemn assembly out of the chapel. He wore the ceremonial uniform of the province: a gold-embroidered tunic, a fringed robe of gros-de-Tours silk, and a gold, brocaded belt. His dress sword, hilt sheathed in shagreen, hung at the waist. A large diamond pin sparkled at his throat; his confederate cap was white, topped with a thick tuft of costly egret crest-feathers. (On feast days you wore only the best; the plumes should run you a ducat apiece.) So appareled, he mounted a rise in front of the chapel; and with the villagers and soldiers pressing around him he addressed them as follows:

"My brothers, you have just heard liberty proclaimed from the pulpit. His Imperial Majesty has restored it to the Crown and is even now restoring it to the Duchy of Lithuania—to the whole of Poland. You have heard the government edict and proclamations calling for a nation-wide General Assembly. I have only a few brief words to say to this community; they pertain to the Soplica family, the lords of these parts.

"No one in the district will have forgotten the mischief wrought here by the late Jacek Soplica Esquire. But now that his sins are known abroad, it is time the world was informed of the great services he rendered. The Generals are present here among us; it is from them that I learned what I am about to relate to you. Jacek did not die in

Rome as was reported; instead, he reformed himself, changed his name and state in life. All his offenses against God and his country he has blotted out by his holy life and noble deeds.

“When almost beaten at Hohenlinden General Richepanse was on the point of sounding the retreat, unaware that Kniaziewicz was marching to his relief, it was he, Jacek, *alias* Robak, who braved sword and lance to deliver Kniaziewicz’s letters with news that our own lancers were taking the enemy’s rear. Then again, in Spain, when our lancers took the fortified ridge at Somosierra, he was twice wounded at Koziatulski’s side. Later still, as an envoy entrusted with secret orders, he traversed various quarters of our land, gauging the currents of popular feeling, organizing and forming secret societies. Finally, at Soplica Manor, his ancestral seat, while preparing the ground for an insurrection, he died in an armed foray. The news of his death reached Warsaw just as Napoleon in recognition of his earlier heroic deeds had conferred upon him the order of Knight of the Legion of Honor.

“And therefore, taking all these things into account, I, representing the authority of the Province, proclaim with my Confederate mace of office that by his loyal service and the Emperor’s favor, Jacek has wiped clean his tarnished name and restored his honor. Once more he may take his rightful place among our nation’s patriots. Should any man, therefore, ever dare to recall to the late Jacek’s kin the crimes for which he has long since atoned, that man shall as a penalty for such a provocation incur the *gravis nota maculae*—this in the words of our Statute, which thus reproves both *miles* and *skartabell* should he spread calumny against a citizen of the Commonwealth; and since general equality before the law has now been proclaimed, Article 3 is likewise binding upon burgher and peasant. This edict of the Marshal, the clerk shall duly set down in the acts of the General Confederation, and the Court Usher proclaim it.

“As for the Legion’s medal of honor, in no way shall its late arrival detract from its glory. If it cannot do honor to Jacek’s breast, then let it serve as a memorial of him. I hereby drape it over his grave. Let it hang here for three days; then let it be deposited in the chapel as a votive offering to the Blessed Virgin.”

So saying, he took the order from its case (it was a starry white cross attached to a red ribbon tied in a bow) and draped it over the humble gravesite cross. The star’s rays sparkled in the sun like the dying gleams of Jacek’s earthly glory; meanwhile, the people knelt and recited the *Angelus*, invoking eternal rest upon the poor sinner. The Judge went the rounds of the guests and village folk, inviting all to the manor for the banquet.

On the turf ledge fronting the house, two old masters with brimming mead-pots on their laps sat gazing out into the garden. Standing there like a sunflower among clusters of painted poppies was a Polish lancer in a glittering cap adorned with gilded metal and a cock’s feather. Before him stood a girl in a dress as green as the low-lying rue. With eyes blue as pansies she stared into the eyes of the youth; and in the garden behind them the young women picked flowers, averting their heads, so as not to disturb the two sweethearts.

But the two oldsters pulled on their mead, took pinches from each other’s bark snuffbox, and ran on like millraces.

“Quite so, Protazy, old boy,” said Gerwazy the Warden.

“Quite so, Gerwazy, dear fellow” said Protazy the Court Usher.

“Yes, quite right!” they repeated several times in unison, beating time with their heads.

“The action has come to an unexpected conclusion; no denying,” Protazy pursued. “But there are precedents. I recall lawsuits with excesses far worse than ours and still marriage articles settled the matter. That is how Łopót patched things up with the Borzdobohaty family, as did also Krepsztuł with Kupść, Putrament with Pikturna, Mackiewicz with Odyniec, and Turno with Kwilecki.

“But what am I saying! The Poles had their share of broils with Lithuania, aye, even worse than those besetting Horeszko and Soplica; but then Queen Jadwiga brought reason to bear and the thing was settled without resort to the courts. It is good for both sides to have eligible maids or widows ready at hand; this way a compromise is always there to be made. The most protracted litigations take place among the Catholic clergy or between close kin, where the case cannot be



resolved through the expedient of matrimony. That is why the Poles and the Russians are always at each other's throat. Lech and Rus were born brothers, after all. It also explains the number of long-drawn-out suits with the Teutonic Knights in Lithuania, before Jagiełło won the field. Finally, it explains why the Rymszas' famous lawsuit with the Dominicans *pendebat* so long on the court calendar; that is, until the priory's legal advocate, Father Dymsza, finally won the case. Hence the saying, 'The Lord God is greater than Lord Rymsza.' To which I might add, 'Mead is better than a Penknife.'"

And with that he drained a draft to the Warden's health.

"True, true," replied Gerwazy with a show of emotion. "Strange have been the fortunes of our beloved Crown and Grand Duchy. Why, they are like a married couple! God joins them, Satan puts them asunder. God wants his thing, the devil his. Ah, dear Protazy, that our eyes should be seeing this! Our brothers from the Crown greeting us once more. I served with them many years ago. Brave-hearted confederates they were I recall. Oh, if my lord Pantler had lived to see this moment! O Jacek, Jacek! But what's the use of lamenting? Now that Lithuania is reunited with the Crown, all is made good and right into the bargain."

"And the marvel of it is," said Protazy, "that only a year ago today we had an omen, a sign from heaven about this very Sophy whose hand in marriage our Tadeusz is begging this moment—"

"We should be calling her Mistress Sophia now," cut in Gerwazy. "She's grown up; no longer a girl. Highborn too, for she is the Pantler's grandchild."

"Anyhow," said Protazy, "the sign was an obvious foreshadowing of her future. With my own eyes I saw it. Here we were on this same feast day, the servants and I, sitting and pulling on our mead, when from the eaves overhead a pair of old fighting cock sparrows came down with a plump. One was slightly younger; he had a slate gray throat. The other's throat was black. Off they went scuffling in the yard, rolling over and over in a cloud of dust. As we sat there watching, the servants murmured to one another, 'The black one's Horeszko; the gray, Soplica.' So whenever Slaty has the upper hand, they raise a cheer, 'Up

the Soplicas, and down with the Horeszko cowards!' And when he falls, it's 'On your feet, Soplica! What? Give in to a magnate? A gentleman would never live it down!' And so we sat there laughing, hanging on the contest's issue when suddenly Sophy, taking pity on the little jousting, ran up and covered them with her hands. Yet still the down flew as the little scraps battled it out under her hands; such was their fury! Meanwhile, gazing at Sophy, the old wives murmured to one another, 'The girl is destined to reunite two long-estranged families.' Now I see they foretold rightly; though, in truth, they had the Count in mind at the time, not Tadeusz."

"Aye, the world's a strange place," said Gerwazy. "Who can fathom it? Now I have something to relate as well, not as marvelous as your omen, but hard to comprehend all the same. Once upon a time, as you know, I would not spit on a Soplica even if he were on fire. Yet from the time Tadeusz was a lad I took a great shine to him. I noticed that whenever he got into a scrap with the other boys he would always come out on top. So every time he ran over to the castle I would dare him to perform a difficult task. He was equal to anything: snatching a dove from the turret, plucking a sprig of mistletoe from an oak-tree, or rifling a rook's nest in the tallest pine. There was nothing he couldn't pull off handily. 'The lad must have been born under a lucky star'—I thought to myself. 'Too bad he's a Soplica! Who would have imagined that in him some day I should be greeting the castle heir, the husband of my Lady, Mistress Sophia!'"

They ended their talk and drank on, deep in thought. From time to time you could hear them say, "Quite so, dear Gerwazy" and "Quite so, dear Protazy."

The turf bench on which they were seated ran by the kitchen. The windows stood open, belching smoke as though a conflagration raged inside. Suddenly, like a white dove, there shot forth out of these billows of smoke the gleaming hat of the head cook. Hanging his head out of the window, the Steward eavesdropped awhile on the two old masters then passed them down a saucer of gingerbreads.

"Here is something to wash down with your mead!" said he. "Now let me tell you the curious tale of a quarrel that might easily have ended in a

bloody brawl. Once while we were hunting deep in Naliboka Forest, Reytan played a prank on the Prince de Nassau; it very nearly cost him his life. It was I who brought them to terms. Let me tell you how it came about—”

But at that moment, the cooks broke in to ask who was setting the table. The Steward's head withdrew from the window. Gerwazy and Protazy went on sipping their mead, gazing pensively out into the garden where the handsome lancer stood talking with his young lady. He had just taken her hand in his left (his right hand resting in a sling; plainly, he had been wounded).

“Sophy!” he addressed his lady. “Before we exchange rings, please tell me this, for I must know. It matters not that last winter you were ready to give me your promise. I would not accept it then, for what good to me is such a forced promise? My stay at the Manor was very brief, and I was not so vain as to think that I could awaken your love by a single glance. I am not a vainglorious man. I wished to win your favor on the strength of my merits, even if it meant waiting awhile. But now, Sophy, you have been so kind as to repeat your promise. What have I done to earn such favor? Could it be, Sophy, that you take me not so much from attachment as from obedience to the will of your aunt and uncle? Marriage, as you know, is a serious undertaking. Consult your own heart in the matter and yield to no one's sway. Listen neither to my uncle's threats, nor to your aunt's entreaties. If what you feel for me is mere kindness and nothing more, then we can put off this betrothal for a time. I should never wish to fetter your will. So let us wait, Sophy. There is no need for haste; especially since last night I received orders to stay behind as an instructor in the local regiment until my wounds have healed. What say you to this, dear Sophy?”

Sophia raised her head and stared bashfully into his eyes.

“I have a dim recollection of the past.” she said. “All I know is that everyone kept saying I should take you for my husband. I always obey the will of heaven and my elders.”

And lowering her eyes she added:

“Before your departure, if you remember, when Father Robak died on that stormy night, I saw how sad you were to be leaving us. You had tears

in your eyes. Those tears, I must tell you truly, went straight to my heart. Since then I have trusted your word that you love me. Whenever I said a prayer for your good fortune, you would always appear before me with those big glistening tears in your eyes. Then the Chamberlain's wife took me up to Wilno for the winter. There I pined for the Manor and the little room where we first met by the table, and where later you bade me adieu. Somehow my memory of you was like a seedling sown in autumn. All winter long it germinated in my heart, so that I never stopped pining for that room. Something told me I should find you there again, and so indeed I have. With such thoughts in my mind, I often held your name on my lips. It happened to be carnival time in Wilno, and my companions told me I was in love. If it is so, then it must be with you.”

And leaving the garden they made their way to the lady's room, that same room which Tadeusz had occupied as a boy ten years earlier. There they found the Notary Bolesta, superbly attired, waiting on his plighted lady. He was bustling to and fro, fetching signet rings, small chains, pots and jars, cosmetic powders and patches. Jubilantly he gazed on his young mistress before the mirror as she put the finishing touches to her toilet and took the counsel of the Graces; meanwhile, the chambermaids hovered around her, some freshening up her ringlets with heated tongs, others, on their knees, attending to the flounces of her frock.

While the Notary busied himself thus with his betrothed, a kitchen boy suddenly rapped on the window. They'd spotted a hare! The beast had stolen out of the osiers, sprinted across the meadow, and leapt in among the sprouting vegetables. Even now he was sitting there; all they had to do was rouse him from the seedbed and run him down with their hounds positioned near the narrow exit by which the hare would be forced to make his escape.

The Assessor dashed up, tugging at Falcon's collar. Bolesta summoned Scut and followed fast after him. The Steward stationed both men and their dogs by the fence then armed with his fly swatter went stamping, whistling, and clapping into the garden, scaring the beast witless. The two hunters smacked their lips softly, restraining their dogs while pointing to the spot where the hare

would make its egress. Ears pricked and snouts to the wind, the hounds chafed and trembled like two shafts nocked to a single bowstring.

Suddenly the Steward cried out, "See-ho!" The hare bolted from under the fence and made its point to the meadow; off went Scut and Falcon after it. Without swerving they fell upon the creature from two sides at once. Like the two wings of a hawk they came down, sinking their fangs, talon-like, into its spine. The hare squealed once—piteously!—like a newborn babe. By the time the hunters had run up, the beast lay lifeless and the hounds were tearing savagely at the white fur of its underbelly.

As the hunters patted their dogs, the Steward drew the hunting knife that hung from his waist and cut off the hare's feet.

"This day," said he, "your dogs receive equal dues, for they have won equal glory. Equal was their address and equal their labor. Worthy is the palace of Patz and worthy is Patz of the palace; worthy are the huntsmen of the hounds and worthy are the hounds of the huntsmen. This brings your long fierce contest to a close. Now, I, whom you appointed judge of your wager, pronounce this final verdict: that you are both winners! I return your stakes. Let each man stand by his word and come to terms."

And at the old man's bidding the hunters turned to each other with beaming faces and joined their long-separated hands.

"I once staked my horse and trappings," the Notary announced. "I also swore before the district court to deposit this ring as a fee for our judge. A forfeit, once pledged, may not be reclaimed. And so, my dear Steward, accept the ring as a keepsake. Have your name or, if you prefer, the Chief Steward's device chased on it. The carnelian is smooth, the gold, eleven carats. As for the horse, our lancers have long since requisitioned it, but the saddle and harness are still mine. Experts praise these trappings for their comfort, durability, and pleasing looks. The saddle is narrow, in the Turco-Cossack style, and the pommel is set with precious stones. The seat is padded and lined with heavy silk, so that when you vault astride, you can settle into the down between the bow and the cantle as comfortably as you would in your own bed. And when you break

into a gallop (here Bolesta, who was known for his great love of gesticulation, spread wide his legs as if he were on horseback and pretending to gallop swayed slowly back and forth), when you break into a gallop, the light glances on the housing as if the charger dripped with gold, for the skirts are heavily sprinkled with gold and the broad silver stirrups brushed with a vermeil finish. Mother-of-pearl studs the bit- and bridle-straps, and from the breastplate there hangs a crescent moon like the one our heraldry calls *Lelima*. This singular garniture was taken (I am told) from a great Turkish nobleman at the battle of Podhajce. And so, my dear Assessor, please accept these caparisons as a token of my regard for you."

To this the Assessor, clearly delighted by the gift, replied:

"And I staked the gift I received from Prince Sanguszko: namely, my shagreen-lined dog collars, inlaid with rings of gold, and my exquisitely wrought leash with its brilliant matching gem. These articles I intended to leave to my children if I should ever marry; and children I will have, for, as you know, this is my betrothal day. Nevertheless, my dear Notary, do me the honor of accepting these articles in exchange for your rich harness. Let them be a token of the longstanding quarrel that has come to such an honorable close for us both. May amity thrive evermore between us!"

And so they went back to the house to inform the guests that the dispute over Scut and Falcon had been put to rest at last.

Now rumor had it that the Steward raised the rabbit at home and secretly released it into the garden as an easy quarry by which to reconcile the two hunters. So artful was his ruse that he duped the entire Manor. Some years later the kitchen boy, wishing to set the Notary and the Assessor at odds again, breathed word of this. But the aspersions he cast on the hounds were to no purpose. The Chief Steward denied the rumor, and no one believed the boy.

The guests, having assembled in the great hall of the castle, stood talking around the table, waiting for the banquet to commence. At last, the Judge, escorting Tadeusz and Sophia, made his appearance; he was wearing the Governor's uniform. Tadeusz, raising his left hand to his

forehead, saluted his superior officers with a military bow. Sophia, lowering her gaze and blushing, greeted each guest with a curtsy (perfectly executed in accordance with Telimena's instructions). Save for the bridal garland that bound her temples, she had on the same costume she had worn in the morning when offering her spring sheaf to the Blessed Virgin in the forest chapel. For the guests she had reaped a fresh little sheaf of herbs: with one hand she portioned out the flowers and grasses; with the other, she adjusted the shining sickle balanced upon her brow. Upon receipt of their little bouquets the officers kissed her hand, while she, blushing, curtsied again in turn.

Then seizing the girl by the shoulders, General Kniaziewicz planted a fatherly kiss on her brow and whisked her up onto the table. The onlookers clapped their hands. "Bravo!" they cried, captivated by the girl's grace and beauty and even more by the rustic Lithuanian dress she was wearing. Upon these famous captains who had spent so much of their nomadic lives roaming foreign lands, the national costume worked a special charm, for it recalled to mind their youth and romantic attachments of long ago. With tears in their eyes they gathered round the table and gazed intently at the girl. Some begged her to raise her head and show her eyes, others, to turn around. The girl swung round bashfully, covering her eyes with her hand; and all the while Tadeusz looked on, rubbing his hands with joy.

Had someone suggested this costume to Sophy or had some instinct prompted her? (For, surely it is instinct that tells a girl what best becomes her face.) Enough to say that this morning, for the first time in her life, Sophy had braved Telimena's displeasure by stubbornly refusing to wear a fashionable dress. Moved by Sophy's tears, her aunt had eventually given way and abandoned her to her rustic costume.

The underskirt was long and white; the skirt, short, cut from green camlet stuff, rose-edged. The bodice, cross-laced from neck to waist with pink ribbons and green to match, concealed her breast like leafage embowering a bud; and the full white sleeves of her shirt, bloused at the wrist and laced up with a ribbon, shone bright upon her shoulders like the tensed wings of a butterfly about to rise in the air. The collar was close-fitting

too and fastened with a rose-colored bow. Her earrings—the proud handiwork of Sack Dobrzyński (his gift to Sophy while he was courting her)—were artfully carved cherry pits representing two hearts with a dart and a flame. About her neck hung a double string of amber beads. A garland of green rosemary bound her temples. Her ribboned braids lay draped over her shoulders; and over her forehead, as was customary among the field women, she had set a curved sickle, well polished from recent reaping and bright as the crescent moon upon Diana's brow.

The guests cheered and applauded. One of the officers drew from his pocket a leather portfolio containing a bundle of papers. Laying them out, he sharpened a pencil, moistened it with his tongue and, gazing at Sophy, set down to draw. No sooner did the Judge see the drawing materials than he recognized the artist, although the colonel's uniform, the glittering epaulets, the seasoned lancer's mien, the blackened moustache and Spanish beard had wrought a considerable change upon him.

"Why hello, dear Count!" exclaimed the Judge. "A traveling painter's kit in your cartridge pouch, I see!"

It was indeed the young Count. He had not been a soldier long, but thanks to his immense wealth, his fielding of an entire horse regiment at his own expense, and the splendid manner in which he had acquitted himself in his very first engagement, the Emperor had only today conferred upon him the rank of colonel. And so the Judge greeted him, congratulating him on his promotion; but the Count paid him no attention and went on with his sketching.

Meanwhile, the second betrothed pair made their entrance. It was the Assessor, formerly the Tsar's and now Napoleon's loyal servant, with a company of gendarmes under his command. Though he had held that office for scarcely twenty hours, he was already wearing the dark blue uniform with its distinctive Polish facings. In he strode, spurs jangling, cavalry saber trailing behind him. At his side, arrayed in her full finery, solemnly walked his beloved, Thecla Hreczecha, the Chief Steward's daughter. The Assessor had long since washed his hands of Telimena and, so as to wring the coquette's heart the more, had



turned his affections to the Steward's daughter. The bride was scarcely young; indeed, she was said to be all of fifty years old. But she was a stout soul, an able housekeeper and suitably dowered; for, apart from the village she stood to inherit, a tidy monetary gift from the Judge had increased the sum of her assets.

As to the third pair, the guests waited in vain. Growing impatient, the Judge dispatched his servants to fetch them. They returned by and by with word that the third bridegroom, the Notary, had lost his wedding ring in the hare course and was even now scouring the meadow for it. As for his lady, she was still at her dresser and, though she was making all due haste with her housemaids doing their best to bear a hand, yet there was not the ghost of a chance she would complete her toilet in time; indeed, she would scarcely have it done this side of four o'clock.

(to be continued in a forthcoming issue)

## Czas niedokonany

### Imperfect(ive) Time

By **Bronisław Wildstein.** Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk ([www.zysk.com.pl](http://www.zysk.com.pl)), 2011. 592 pages. ISBN 978-83-7506-797-2. Paper. In Polish.

### Ewa Thompson

**T**his monumental novel may well be what intellectuals in Poland and in the United States have been waiting for: a novel that comprises the Eastern European ALL, that is to say, the times of Stalin and, earlier, of Lenin in Russia; the heady days of Solidarity in Poland; the post-Solidarity disappointments; a pre-Soviet pogrom that put an indelible stamp on the personalities of the Jewish characters; and, perhaps as a bait, the 2008 market crash in the United States.

This is a story of a family whose one branch originated in Pinsk, Belarus, where the family patriarch was a well-respected *tzadik*. This family was killed in a pogrom so brutal that it seems almost unreal to the inhabitants of the twenty-first century, at least in Europe. As a result, one surviving scion of this family joined

the bolsheviks and became a hands-on member of the Cheka, later NKVD. The omniscient narrator minces no words in describing the ritual of Cheka killings where by the end of the day the executioners waded ankle-deep in blood and blown-out human brains.

But this is a sideline. The main plot concerns a Polish family in Soviet-occupied Poland. The father, Benedict Brok, is a grandson of the *tsadik*, but he has long lost his connection to the Chassids. He is a thoroughly secularized member of the Polish intelligentsia. In better times, he might have been writing for a highbrow and gently leftist periodical such as *Wiadomości Literackie* (1924–1939), while at the same time lecturing at a university and frequenting Warsaw's "intelligentsia" cafés. But the times are not gentle: it is the post-World War II period in Poland. One is surrounded by incessant assurances that Sovietism is the new and victorious ideology that will solve all social, moral, economic and political problems. In addition, acquiring an apartment in Poland where 40 percent of housing was destroyed by Germans and Russians, is a Herculean enterprise. Our hero is a hard-core intellectual and not easily fooled, but he surrenders to the sea of arguments around him. His motto is to do as little harm as possible, and possibly do some good. There were party members like this: in fact, they probably were in the majority.

The mother, Susanna Brok, comes from a run-of-the-mill family of the Polish intelligentsia steeped in patriotism and painfully aware of the lack of freedom imposed on Poland by the Red Army. Benedict is likewise aware of it, but chooses a path that has generated countless debates in Poland: going along with the conquerors in order to mollify their influence on society, thereby preventing the most drastic displays of party dictatorship. The mother chooses conspiracy and distribution of samizdat that eventually leads to Solidarity. Toward the end of the novel the reader learns that the father was also an informer for the secret police and tried to protect his wife, of whose activities the said police were well aware.

Susanna is less of an intellectual and more of a person that can be mobilized, persuaded to fight