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## Romantic anxiety or anxiety of Romanticism? On *Dziady* by Paweł Goźliński

**Abstract:** Paweł Goźliński's unusual crime story "inspired" by Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* has usually been interpreted as an accusation of Romanticism that keeps confusing the Poles with different national myths and causes them to exist on the verge of national madness. However, an analysis of the motifs of fear and anxiety enables another interpretation – Romanticism regarded from this perspective seems to be the threshold of modernity that determines a modern way of thinking about human nature.

**Keywords:** Romanticism, contemporary Polish literature, Terror Management Theory, Paweł Goźliński

Paweł Goźliński's hardboiled detective story *Dziady* fits – in its most general outline – into the structure of Mickiewicz's arch-drama. And this (although its individual elements are, of course, treated rather conventionally and subjected to numerous transformations) fits into an entirely complete structure, encompassing even the ballad *The Phantom*, the poem *To Muscovite Friends* or the less obvious Part I. This rarely staged<sup>1</sup> formula presented in the text of the novel turns out to be capacious enough to accommodate the

<sup>1</sup> The first staging of the whole (meaning all parts and the text without any abbreviations) of Mickiewicz's arch-drama was undertaken only by Michał Zadara. The premiere of his production took place on 20<sup>th</sup> February 20 2016 on the stage of the Polish Theatre in Wrocław.

new, macabre and national, *Forefathers' Eve*. Where did the idea come from to perform them in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in a world dominated by the media, inextricably linked to its virtual counterpart, populated with either celebrities or modern ghouls who have sold their souls to the Internet? This question is answered in the text itself:

[...] ten arcydramat o upiorach sam stał się prześladowającym nas demonem. Choć pisany przed prawie dwoma wiekami, tak, tak proszę państwa, dwoma wiekami, wciąż pozostaje najgłębszą diagnozą naszej narodowej tożsamości. Zarówno w jej anielskim, jak i wampirycznym wymiarze. On nie tylko zmieniał po wielokroć naszą historię, ale nas wciąż na nowo tworzy, narzucając nam język rozmowy o nas samych, o sensie naszych ofiar, o tym, co sprawia, że jesteśmy, czujemy, nazywamy się Polakami.<sup>2</sup>

[... this ghostly arch-drama has itself become a demon haunting us. Although written almost two centuries ago, yes, yes ladies and gentlemen, two centuries, it still remains the most profound diagnosis of our national identity. Both in its angelic and vampiric dimensions. It has not only changed our history over and over again, but it creates us again and again, imposing on us a language of conversation about ourselves, about the meaning of our sacrifices, about what makes us be, feel, call ourselves Polish.]

Although these words have a rather ambiguous status in the text, the diagnosis contained in them seems accurate and repeated many times on the pages of the novel: for as a society, Poles have not grown out of the Romantic myths that make it so easy to possess them with the wildest ideas, convince them of omnipresent conspiracy, push them into every kind of madness – if only to hunt down writers, which becomes the warp of the plot in Goźliński's detective story. If we add to this the idea of treating Słowacki's genesis concept as a source of inspiration for the planned crimes, which the author does not for the first time (a similar idea appeared in *Jul*<sup>3</sup>) and, of course, against historical-literary "facts",<sup>4</sup> the diagnosis of the importance of the Romantic

<sup>2</sup> Paweł Goźliński, *Dziady* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2015). All quotes from the novel are from this edition, page numbers are given in parentheses.

<sup>3</sup> Paweł Goźliński, *Jul* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2010). The names of some of the characters in *Jul* appear in *Dziady* (e.g., the main character of Goźliński's earlier novel is Adam Podhorecki, the main character of his *Dziady* is Sybilla Podhorecka, and Jan/ek Żebrowski also appears in both novels). This is another intra-textual determinant that allows us to connect the two novels into a certain conceptual whole.

<sup>4</sup> Although Słowacki's genesis thought is based on the conviction "on the stream of blood blessing" and on the conviction that the road to perfection leads through successive necessary deaths of the body and destruction of forms in order to free the spirit, this is by no means an encouragement to kill. Cf. Alina Kowalczykova, "Introduction," in Juliusz Słowacki, *Krąg pism mistycznych* [The circle of mystical writings] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1997), 32–66. It is worth adding at this point that for Paweł Goźliński it is extremely important that Słowacki wrote his *Forefathers' Eve* during the gen-

tradition in contemporary Polish culture seems quite obvious. Namely, it appears as a phantom, a vampire<sup>5</sup>, so often referred to directly on the pages of the novel, which, although it still bites, gnaws and sucks the national blood, has nothing alive and inspiring to offer.<sup>6</sup> Thus, although undoubtedly the twilight of the Romantic paradigm prophesied by Maria Janion after 1989 turned out to be very premature, even if only in its patriotic and martyrological version,<sup>7</sup> this prolonged presence has the character of a ghostly, sham life, which can only arouse terror, which is formulated by the author quite bluntly:

Bo Polacy jedno, co potrafią, to umierać – choć i to nigdy do końca. Naszą misją jest porażać Europę naszym fetorem, naszym trupim oddechem. I niech ta Europa nie

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esis period, because, according to the writer, he wanted “[...] swoim czytelnikom pomóc zrozumieć to, co pisał. Włożyć to wszystko w jakieś czytelne dla nich ramy. Wybrał, rzecz jasna, *Dziady*. [...] Słowacki nie miał żadnych wątpliwości, że to właśnie *Dziady* są naturalnym scenariuszem, który służy Polakom do opowiadania historii narodzin ich własnej tożsamości” [... to help his readers understand what he was writing. To put it all into some kind of framework that was readable to them. He chose, of course, *Forefathers' Eve*. [...] Słowacki had no doubt that *Forefathers' Eve* was the natural script for Poles to tell the story of the birth of their own identity]. Paweł Goźliński, „Po co nam *Dziady* w całości? Bo sprawa z polskością nie jest taka prosta” [Why do we need *Dziady* in its entirety? Because the matter with Polishness is not so simple], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 20, 2016, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75410,19653130,gozlinski-po-co-nam-dziady-w-calosci-bo-sprawa-z-polskoscia.html>. It should be recalled, however, that during the genesis period Słowacki wrote his own versions of or sequels to various Mickiewicz works (in addition to *Forefathers' Eve* also *Pan Tadeusz* or *Konrad Wallenrod*), in which one should see a certain broader tendency, which was probably the need to inscribe these texts into a higher genesis order, to reveal the truth potentially contained in these stories, which Mickiewicz, while creating his works, did not understand. See Magdalena Bąk, *Twórczy lęk Słowackiego. Antagonizm wieszczów po latach* [Słowacki's Creative Anxiety. The antagonism between the Poet-prophets years later] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2013), 272–301.

- <sup>5</sup> The meaning of this figure and its sources and variants are extensively discussed in Maria Janion, *Wampir. Biografia symboliczna* [Vampire. A Symbolic Biography] (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2004), 7–36.
- <sup>6</sup> This would not be an entirely original diagnosis; a similar thought can be gleaned from Grzegorz Janusz, and Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz's comic strip, *Przebiegłe dochodzenie Ottona i Watsona: Romantyzm* [The Cunning Investigation of Otto and Watson: Romanticism] (Warszawa: Mandragora 2007). Perhaps a similar intuition is contained – though less explicitly – in Jacek Dehnel's novel, *Ale z naszymi umarłymi* [But with Our Dead] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 2019), which, although depicts the disastrous consequences of the spread of nationalism illustrated by a zombie attack, the Romantic roots of this, incriminated, way of thinking are clearly discernible in the work.
- <sup>7</sup> Maria Janion, „Zmierzch paradygmatu” [Twilight of the Paradigm], in Maria Janion, *Czy będziesz wiedział, co przeżyłeś* [Will You Know What You've Experienced] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic! 1996), 5–23.

próbuję dla własnego komfortu bandażować naszych ran. Bo nasza kultura jest ufundowana na powadze śmierci i nawet Boga nie interesuje nasz los, lecz poezja naszego cierpienia i naszego umierania. Dlatego zmartwychwstanie nie jest ani w Jego, ani w naszym interesie. Zmartwychwstając wyanieleni, czyści, wygodni – przestajemy być Polakami. Bo odwieczne życie polskie jest życiem upióra. Szkieletu, którego trzymają się jeszcze resztki mięsa i resztki życia. O takim prawdziwym życiu opowiada nasza historia i opowiadali nasi poeci. Czytajcie ich i zstąpcie do głębi – by żyć życiem nie ładnym i dostatnim, tylko krwawym, zaropałym i mrocznym, ale przez to wzniosłym i prawdziwym... (155)<sup>8</sup>

[Because one thing the Poles know how to do is to die – though never quite to the end either. Our mission is to shock Europe with our fetor, our corpse breath. And let this Europe not try to bandage our wounds for its own comfort. Because our culture is founded on the solemnity of death, and even God is not interested in our fate, but in the poetry of our suffering and our dying. Therefore, resurrection is neither in His interest nor in ours. By resurrecting the emancipated, clean, comfortable – we cease to be Poles. Because the eternal Polish life is the life of a phantom. A skeleton that is still clung to by remnants of flesh and remnants of life. This is the real life that our history tells about and our poets have told about. Read them and descend to the depths – to live a life not pretty and prosperous, but bloody, blighted and dark, but thus sublime and true...]

Nevertheless, in Goźliński's novel there is also another kind of reference to Romanticism. This is because the formula of *Forefathers' Eve*, which the author chose, activates two contexts: besides the patriotic and national one (activated by the third part), there is also, perhaps above all, the ritual one, inscribing itself – thanks to the omnipresence of ghosts and the atmosphere of horror – into the dark trend of Romanticism. This trend has always enjoyed the greatest popularity, although it seems to have owed this to its ability to satisfy the unsophisticated needs of not necessarily the most literarily sophisticated audience.<sup>9</sup> In Goźliński's rendition, this tradition has been in-

<sup>8</sup> A similar thought is expressed in Bronisław Świdorski's novel, *Asystent śmierci* [The Assistant of Death] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2007).

<sup>9</sup> In popular culture, Dark Romanticism is primarily associated with best-selling horror, but in reality it is a trend that considers the essence of human fate in a specifically perceived world. As Jarosław Ławski writes: „Istotą tego nurtu jest Przerazenie t y m światem, w którym nie tylko panuje śmierć, lecz także władza gwałtowności niespodziewanej śmierci, okrucieństwo nieodwołalności, zjawiającej się wnet i już teraz” [The essence of this trend is the Terror of this world, in which not only death reigns, but also the violence of unexpected death rules, the cruelty of irrevocability, appearing soon and already now]. Jarosław Ławski, *Śmierć wszystko zmiecie. Studia o czarnym romantyzmie II* [Death Will Sweep Everything Away. Studies on Dark Romanticism II] (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2020), 12. Central to this worldview, therefore, is fear and horror. The literary forms in which this world, overwhelmed by sudden change, standing on the brink of the abyss, is depicted, are also characteristic. As Ławski further writes: “[...] pisarz buduje alternatywny kontrświat, antyświat, który wstrząsnąć ma egzystencjalnie czytelnikiem (najczęściej w fantastyce,

terestingly updated. Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* takes place, as it were, on the border of two worlds, linking the physical and tangible world of the living, which is perceptible to the senses and comprehensible to the mind, with the world of the dead, which is inaccessible to rational and empirical cognitive methods. The building of this community in the ritual described in Part II of the drama is essentially another image of the Romantic epistemological "revolution". For the fullness of cognition always requires that "both halves of life" be taken into account, which for the man suspended between them like "in the middle of the sky" means that "the world has not expanded, but has gained in depth". In the forefathers of today, too, two spheres meet: the earthly, material, tactile with the virtual, digital, the Internet. And as there, it is only their combination that makes up a complete, though frightening, version of the world. The phantoms, wraiths and other fantastic creations crowding the pages of Romantic works revealed not only the complexity of the world, which ruptures and separates into two – closely parallel and extremely different – halves. They were also an expression of the fear awakened in man by the realisation that he knows neither the reality around him, nor even his own inner self, where Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde may lurk. And that is in the best case, because in the worst case one may even be larger and contain multitudes. It should be emphasised that this is about a specific kind of anxiety – one that is born out of a sense of split and duality, as Maria Janion writes:

Przekonanie o dwuwymiarowości rzeczywistości i dwoistości człowieka ma oczywiście – generalnie rzecz biorąc – swój rodowód romantyczny; ta druga rzeczywistość, rzeczywistość szaleństwa, stała się w romantyzmie właśnie domeną systematycznie eksploatowaną.<sup>10</sup>

[The belief in the two-dimensionality of reality and the duality of man has, of course, generally speaking, its Romantic pedigree; this second reality, the reality of madness, became in Romanticism precisely the domain systematically exploited.]

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ewokacjach cudowności, przedstawieniach groteskowych, ironicznych i absurdalnych]" [... the writer builds an alternative counter-world, an anti-world, which is meant to shake the reader existentially (most often in fantasy, evocations of the miraculous, grotesque, ironic and absurd depictions)]. Ławski, *Śmierć wszystko zmiemie*. [Death Will Sweep Everything Away], 16–17). Thus, it is clear that Goźlinski actively refers to the tradition of Dark Romanticism both on the level of content and form.

<sup>10</sup> Maria Janion, „Forma gotycka Gombrowicza” [Gombrowicz's Gothic Form], in Maria Janion, *Romantyzm i jego media. Prace wybrane, tom 4* [Romanticism and Its Media. Selected Works, vol. 4] (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 464.

Such a belief is most fully and directly articulated in the Gothic novel<sup>11</sup>, but as one of the central elements of the Romantic worldview it permeates the entire literature of the era. In the ghostly *Forefathers Eve*, set on the border of worlds, partly at night in a chapel where two spaces overlap, one can see not only Gothic decorations, but the deepest essence of Romantic thinking about the world and the location of the human individual within its complexity<sup>12</sup>. At the same time, the wraiths and doubles “populating” the pages of Gothic novels, but also of Romantic literature in general, are an excellent example of the internalisation of this fundamental human experience, who for himself becomes the terrain of “[...] bezwzględnej – i nieraz w najwyższym stopniu bolesnej – eksploracji”<sup>13</sup> [... ruthless – and sometimes to the highest degree painful – exploration].

Anxiety, but also fear, trepidation<sup>14</sup> and even panic are the most basic emotions accompanying such explorations; they are also the feelings haunting all

<sup>11</sup> Gothicism and Dark Romanticism are not, of course, synonymous terms, although they are undoubtedly strongly related, and there is a recurring conviction in the literature that Gothicism in a sense provided Dark Romanticism with the tools to depict the phenomena of interest, see Dorota Dobrzyńska, „Od romansu gotyckiego do czarnego romantyzmu” [From Gothic Romance to Dark Romanticism], in *Czarny romantyzm we współczesnej literaturze popularnej. Wybrane zagadnienia* [Dark Romanticism in Contemporary Popular Literature. Selected Issues], (Warszawa: Instytut Sławistyki PAN, 2020), 32–41; Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (New York: Meridean Books, 1956). For the Romantic fear analysed in this sketch, as interpreted by Paweł Goźliński, both of the aforementioned contexts are relevant: both Gothicism and Dark Romanticism – with a certain all-important addition. After all, Gothicism cannot be limited here to novels whose purpose was only to arouse fear, but must be seen (following the approach proposed in the works of Maria Janion, which are an important context for Goźliński) as a trend that allows for a specific depiction of the condition of the individual.

<sup>12</sup> An excellent example of dissecting the Gothic duality of the world into purely spatial categories is Manuel Aguirre’s text, „Geometria strachu. Wykorzystanie przestrzeni w literaturze gotyckiej” [Geometries of terror: numinous spaces in Gothic, horror and science fiction], trans. Agnieszka Izdebska, in *Wokół gotycyzmów. Wyobraźnia, groza, okrucieństwo* [Around Gothicism. Imagination, Horror, Cruelty], edited by Grzegorz Gazda, Agnieszka Izdebska, and Jarosław Płuciennik (Kraków: Universitas, 2003), 15–31.

<sup>13</sup> Aguirre, „Geometria strachu. Wykorzystanie przestrzeni w literaturze gotyckiej” [Geometries of terror: numinous spaces in Gothic, horror and science fiction], 462.

<sup>14</sup> These concepts are not, of course, synonymous. On the grounds of philosophy, psychology or sociology, a distinction is most often made between fear and anxiety, taking as a differentiating element the concrete cause that causes fear and the indefinite, sometimes irrational reason for anxiety. See Małgorzata Szatan, „Strach a lęk w ujęciu nauk humanistycznych” [Fear and anxiety in terms of the humanities], *Studia Gdańskie* 31 (2012): 325–342. However, this is not a fixed distinction. For example, Jean Delumeau equates anxiety with fear, and uses the term “trepidation” to describe fears devoid of a clear address, arousing indefinite anxiety. See Jean Delumeau, *Strach w kulturze Zachodu XIV–XVIII* [Fear in We-

the characters in Goźliński's novel. Regardless of their gender, age and, above all, the role they play in the story, whether they are executioners or victims – they all experience them (usually in extreme intensity). We read about the main character, Sybilla Podhorecka, early in the novel that “zamiast skóry, która powinna chronić przed szkodliwym wpływem środowiska, oddziela ją od świata warstwa niepokoju” (27) [instead of her skin, which should protect her from the harmful effects of the environment, a layer of anxiety separates her from the world]. This indefinite anxiety sometimes crystallises – under the influence of dramatic events unfolding before the reader's eyes – into a very concrete fear, as when, on Hallowe'en, she searches for her daughter at night and “nic nie czuje. Oprócz lęku. To nie jest zwykły niepokój bez znaczka i adresu. Ciemność, wilgoć, spadanie w dół – doskonałe warunki, żeby się zacząć bać o własne dziecko” (84) [feels nothing. Except anxiety. This is no ordinary anxiety without a stamp or address. Darkness, dampness, falling down – perfect conditions to start fearing for one's own child].

Goźliński is also fond of exposing the physical aspect of anxiety and fear. These feelings are a curse of the mind, they are born in the recesses of the psyche, but manifest themselves very somatically. Thus, for example:

Mateusz Knapik nawet nie próbuje wylapywać słów nadlatujących z gabinetu profesora. Jest zajęty własnym strachem, który mu wypełza spod skóry i skleja plecy z koszulą. (111)

[Mateusz Knapik doesn't even try to catch the words coming from the professor's office. He is preoccupied with his own fear, which crawls out from under his skin and glues his back to his shirt.]

Zaciśnięte usta, rozszerzone źrenice, przyspieszony oddech, pot na skroniach. Tak wygląda starch. (223)

[Clenched lips, dilated pupils, accelerated breathing, sweat on his temples. This is what fear looks like.]

Tego też Rozumowski nie jest pewien. Ani tego, czy w ogóle usłyszał te cztery słowa zniekształcone zaśpiewami wiatru i łomotem kropel o karoserię. Bardziej prawdopodobne, że odpowiedział mu je skurczony ze strachu żołądek i podrażniona wątroba. (82)

[Rozumowski isn't sure about that either. Nor whether he heard the four words at all, distorted by the singing of the wind and the rumbling of drops against the car body. It's more likely that they were prompted to him by a stomach contracted with fear and an irritated liver.]

Anxiety seems to be a fundamental human experience, dominating both the psychic and physical spheres, and – translating this into Romantic categories – one could also say: both in the temporal and metaphysical world. All the human wraiths filling the pages of Goźliński's novel, although so different from one another and although the reasons why they lead their lives "in the world still, but no longer for the world" are completely different, have perhaps only one thing in common – they are afraid. Also, the only proper or literal phantom in this novel (the soul of writer Jan Żebrowski, who slips into the body of Diva Dio), confesses:

Coś się dzieje. Coś, co sprawia, że powinienem czuć przyspieszone tętno, galopadę serca, pot przeciskający się nawet przez warstwę hydroksychlorku glinu. Do tego duszność, ból jak po niespodziewanym ciosie w mostek, zawroty głowy, dreszcze i mdłości. Oraz lęk przed śmiercią, który wlewa się w oczy czarną falą i skleja organy zimną galaretą. Tak, to wszystko powinienem czuć. A jednak nie czuję. Potrafię tylko nazwać: panika (35).

[Something is happening. Something that makes me think I should feel my heart rate accelerating, my heart galloping, sweat squeezing through even a layer of aluminum hydroxide. Plus shortness of breath, pain like after an unexpected blow to the sternum, dizziness, chills and nausea. And the fear of death, which pours into my eyes in a black wave and glues my organs together with cold jelly. Yes, all this I should feel. And yet I don't feel it. I can only name it: panic.]

Żebrowski can no longer feel fear (probably mainly because he no longer has his own body to reflect this emotion), but he can still name the feeling. Anxiety, fear and panic become the basic element that unites not only people of different states, conditions and professions<sup>15</sup>, but also the world of the living and the (almost) dead.

The sense of duality as well as analyzing the two-dimensionality of the world through one's own body/persona is typical of Gothicism. Exposing the physical, corporeal dimension of fear Goźliński's novel seems to activate this Gothic idea.

In this contemporary detective story, exposing the physical, corporeal dimension of fear seems to activate in a specific way the convention, or perhaps rather the idea of Gothicism, since one can see in this measure the connection, typical of Gothicism, between, on the one hand, this sense of duality

<sup>15</sup> This fear also has a unifying power, occurring above the divisions that polarise Polish society after all: „– Nie ma powodu do paniki. – Chciał powiedzieć „niepokoju”, ale znów język mu się omsknął. W oczach młodego widzi wolny już od politycznych pretensji, ideologicznych podziałów i historycznych resentymentów strach” (142) [– There is no reason to panic. – He wanted to say “anxiety,” but again his tongue slipped. In the eyes of the youngster he sees a fear already free of political pretensions, ideological divisions and historical resentments].



and the tearing of reality from the individual, and, on the other, the analysis of the two-dimensionality of the world through one's own persona, albeit limited by the body. This is not the place here to delve into genrological considerations that would allow us to dock the genre of modern *Dziady*, because the term detective novel cannot be considered precise,<sup>16</sup> unless we content ourselves with stating that: "Detective fiction is literature animated by dead bodies",<sup>17</sup> which, incidentally, in the case of Goźliński's novel (also in the aspect analysed here) seems particularly apt. However, it is worth recalling the interesting distinction proposed by Dennis Porter between "detective stories" and "mythic crimes".<sup>18</sup> The former focus on crimes, but more as puzzles to be solved than (as is the case with "mythic crimes") as timeless examples of human struggles with evil, explaining the meaning of their existence and featuring heroes "[...] designed to illuminate human limits and hidden cosmic purposes".<sup>19</sup>

In this sense, Goźliński's *Dziady* seems to constitute a surplus to the purely criminal formula, and this surplus precisely represents the Gothic concept of reality and a human being existing in it, which is most fully manifested in the specific fear and anxiety that build up the depicted world and the personality of the characters in this novel. It would probably be an exaggeration to count Goźliński's novel among the "myths of crime", but it is certainly not the work that - referring to Roger Callois' essay - could be reduced to an intellectual riddle, the accuracy of reasoning and the dithering of possibilities. The very fact of reaching for the formula of Mickiewicz's arch-drama, which holds a special place in Polish culture, but also in the consciousness of Poles, can be seen as a sign of rather "mythical" than only "detective" nature of the crimes described here.

Although the criminal intrigue and frenetic crimes intensify, of course, the feeling of anxiety, it accompanies (in various forms) essentially everyone in Goźliński's novel. Jadwiga Knapik, an unremarkable (except perhaps that her son is one of the crime assistants, possessed by the Ghost King) and average inhabitant of an average block of flats, confesses:

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ewa Mrowczyk-Hearfield, „Badania literatury kryminalnej – propozycja” [Crime literature research – a proposal], *Teksty Drugie*, no. 6 (1998): 87 - 98.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Heise, "Time and Space," in *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction*, eds. Janice Allan, Jesper Gulddal, Stewart King, and Andrew Pepper (London: Routledge, 2020), 219.

<sup>18</sup> See Ewa Mrowczyk-Hearfield, „Badania literatury kryminalnej – propozycja” [Crime Literature Research – A Proposal].

<sup>19</sup> Denis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime. Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 12.

– Trochę był zdenerwowany, prawdę mówiąc. Stres, wie pani, ja go rozumiem, bez passispasminy nie położę się ani nie wstanę. A on się zaparł, że żadnych leków. Nawet z antybiotyków brał tylko czosnek. (135)

[– He was a little nervous, to tell the truth. Stress, you know, I understand him, without passispasmina I will not lie down or get up. And he insisted on no drugs. Even of the antibiotics he took only garlic.]

Only chemical pity can drown out fears and anxieties for a while. It is refused by Mateusz Knapik, who lives, as it were, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and despises the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. This turn to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, clearly demonstrated in the novel in a number of ways (plot based on *Forefathers' Eve* and Słowacki's genesis thought, quotations from Romantic works woven into the text of the work, discussion of the twilight of Romanticism conducted with the participation of one of the characters), forces us to reflect on a certain unspoken analogy. Texts representing Dark Romanticism, operating with horror and frenzy, in which sinister fantastic figures appear, were in their original Romantic context a way of expressing fear and uncertainty in the face of an alien and unknowable world, but also, and perhaps above all, in the face of the complexity of one's own self, which, for the Romantic was the greatest challenge. Anxiety activated, but also, to some extent, tamed in Gothic novels was a response to the conceited certainty of the Enlightenment, excluding everything that cannot be known by reason and empirical means.<sup>20</sup> The awe-inspiring world of modern grandfathers, full of metaphorical wraiths, but also with one as literal as possible, is a response to the temptations of modern rationalism. As the novel's main character says of the elusive assassin with the significant nickname of the Ghost King:

Jaśniej? Na tym właśnie polega wasz problem. Bo wy chcielibyście wyciągnąć go z mroku i poświecić reflektorem w oczy. A jedyny sposób, żeby go dopaść, to iść za nim, w ciemność. (163)

[More clearly? That's where your problem lies. Because you would like to pull him out of the darkness and shine a spotlight into his eyes. And the only way to get him is to go after him, into the darkness.]

On the declarative level, the diagnosis of the place and role of the Romantic tradition in contemporary Polish culture comes out unfavourably for the epoch of the Poets-Prophets in Goźliński's novel. However, analysing this

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<sup>20</sup> In any case, this is how one could summarise the "official" cognitive position of the classics, who all the same (at least some and at least in France) admitted the existence of this unknown and inaccessible realm (hence the term *je ne sais quois*), but having no methods and tools for its cognition, consciously chose to limit their cognitive efforts to what is certain, accessible to reason and the senses.

work through the prism of the omnipresent motif of fear in it, one can see a completely different regularity. Perceived in this way, Romanticism confirms its position as a kind of “threshold of modernity”, which it owes to the discovery of man – anew, to the limits of endurance, to the very interior.<sup>21</sup> The very question of perceiving Romanticism as the moment marking the beginning of the modern world is, of course, debatable and provokes various research positions – and this diversity does not come down only to the final verdict granting or denying the Romantics’ precursorship in many areas of modern reflection, but also to specific trends of thought, themes and problems that are considered to potentially open the way to “modernity”.<sup>22</sup> Treating specifically targeted Romantic fear as one such element is, of course, only a proposal, but it is worth noting that it corresponds strongly with the position of Maria Janion, who wrote:

Romantyzm, stawiając swoją „hipotezę życia duchowego” (Przyboś), odsłaniając nowy horyzont poznawczy, wznosząc nowożytny paradygmat kultury – to znaczy nowożytny obraz świata, uświadomił człowiekowi naszych czasów jego kondycję jako dwuznaczną i rozdwojoną, wymagającą ciągle od nowa wysiłku moralnego i poznawczego, by nieskończona wolność nie przemieniła się w nieskończoną niewolę.<sup>23</sup>

[Romanticism, putting forward its “hypothesis of spiritual life” (Przyboś), unveiling a new cognitive horizon, erecting a modern paradigm of culture – that is, a modern image of the world, made the man of our time aware of his condition as ambiguous and split, requiring moral and cognitive effort again and again, to prevent infinite freedom from turning into infinite slavery.]

Romantic fear (Gothic, dark, phrenetic) may be a sign of what inevitably and, we should add, transnationally connects us to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of course, the Romantics did not invent fear or trepidation, as these feelings are as old as humanity. However, as historians point out, fear, or rather the fear that has been haunting man since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is of a different nature from that inherent in earlier eras, associated rather with disasters, disease, witches, Satan and hell, strangers or dissenters,

<sup>21</sup> The topicality of Romantic anthropology and the concept of the subject has been pointed out in the discussion of the Romantic tradition in Poland. See Magdalena Rabizo-Birek, *Romantyczni i nowocześni. Formy obecności romantyzmu w polskiej literaturze współczesnej* [Romantic and Modern. Forms of the presence of Romanticism in Polish contemporary literature] (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2012), 464.

<sup>22</sup> Michał Kuziak, „Romantyzm i nowoczesność?” [Romanticism and Modernity?], in *Romantyzm i nowoczesność* [Romanticism and Modernity], ed. Michał Kuziak (Kraków: Universitas, 2009), 5–13.

<sup>23</sup> Maria Janion, *Gorączka romantyczna. Prace wybrane* [Romantic Fever. Selected Works], vol. 1 (Kraków: Universitas, 2000), 32.

travel, death and a whole host of other phenomena that accompany man both daily and on festive occasions.<sup>24</sup> Jean Delumeau also notes that from the beginning:

[...] strach ma charakter dwoisty. Jako właściwość naszej natury jest głównym obwarowaniem, gwarancją wobec zagrożeń, niezbędnym odruchem pozwalającym organizmowi wyrwać się tymczasowo śmierci. [...] Ale jeśli przekracza dawkę możliwą do zniesienia staje się patologiczny i powoduje zablokowania.<sup>25</sup>

[...] fear has a dual nature. As a property of our nature, it is the main bulwark, a guarantee against threats, a necessary reflex that allows the organism to temporarily break out of death. [...] But if it exceeds the tolerable dose it becomes pathological and causes blockages.]

The specific kind of fear developed and explored by the Romantics, i.e. fear of the self, but also fear of the complexity and unknowability of the world, has essentially similar functions. Although its intensity seems at times to exceed the limits that are bearable by the human psyche, in a particular way it can also perform that saving function that the researcher writes about in relation to fear as a primal instinct. This “positive” dimension can be explained by the general assumptions of Terror Management Theory (TMT<sup>26</sup>). The Romantic figure of the phantom, existing on the border of worlds, with a dual ontological status, grows in the first place from the painful awareness of the dualism of human existence: the rift between the weak, mortal body and the immortal spirit, along with immortal thought. The way to master the anxiety that arises from this contradiction and from the realisation of one’s own mortality becomes culture, allowing the individual to be placed in a broader and more meaningful context:

Przekonania, idee i kulturowo wypracowane sposoby rozumienia człowieka i zamieszkiwanej przezeń rzeczywistości pozwalają nadać życiu znaczenie i umieścić istotę ludzką w głębokiej strukturze sensu, w której staje się ona kimś znaczącym, ważnym i cennym.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Jean Delumeau, *Strach w kulturze Zachodu XIV–XVIII* [Fear in Western Culture XIV–XVIII]; Zbigniew Osiński, *Lęk w kulturze społeczeństwa polskiego w XVI–XVII wieku* [Fear in the Culture of Polish Society in the XVI–XVII Century] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DIG, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Delumeau, *Strach w kulturze Zachodu XIV–XVIII* [Fear in Western Culture XIV–XVIII], 14.

<sup>26</sup> Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski, “Terror Management Theory of self-esteem and cultural worldviews. Empirical assessments and conceptual refinements”, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, no 29 (1997): 61–139.

<sup>27</sup> Marzena Rusaczyk, “Teoria opanowywania trwogi: wprowadzenie do elementów aktualnego dyskursu i prezentowanych tekstów” [The theory of mastering trepidation: an introduction to the elements of the current discourse and the texts presented], in *Teoria opanowywania trwogi. Dyskurs w literaturze amerykańskiej* [The Theory of Mastering Trepidation

[Beliefs, ideas and culturally developed ways of understanding human beings and the reality they inhabit help to give life meaning and place human beings in a deep structure of meaning, in which they become someone significant, important and valuable.]

Romantic culture is ideally suited to the construction of just such a higher order, which gives the individual's existence and even his ultimate death a deeper meaning. The fear of death allows the individual to escape from literalism and the necessity of dying into the world of superadded meanings and historiosophical constructions, and is a prerequisite for activating the saving power of culture.

Contemporary *Dziady* by Paweł Goźliński, unfortunately, does not provide enough material for one to be able to analyse the "Romanticism" of fear appearing on its pages and its destructive-saving function in more detail. However, the unmistakable intensity of imagery inscribed in the framework set by concepts such as anxiety, fear, terror or trepidation, as well as the attempts to thematise the aforementioned feelings that appear in this work, allow us to state beyond any doubt that this is a theme so important that it must prompt us to propose a slightly modified reading of the whole, different from the most common ones. After all, reviewers and readers of Goźliński's novel have usually drawn attention to the highly critical way in which the author portrays the Romantic tradition and the tendency of Poles to succumb to national myths and wraiths:

Goźliński, doktor od romantyzmu, uczeń samej Marii Janion, daje nam kryminał z akcją, która czasami godna jest autorów najlepszych thrillerów [...], lecz przede wszystkim daje nam zanurzony w wyborowym sosie groteski obraz Polski, niepostrzeganej – wciąż lub znowu – wydostać się z okowów romantycznego sposobu postrzegania świata, a może raczej postrzegania go za pomocą romantycznego paradygmatu.<sup>28</sup>

[Goźliński, a doctor of Romanticism and a student of Maria Janion herself, gives us a detective story with action that is sometimes worthy of the authors of the best thrillers [...], but above all he gives us a picture of Poland, dipped in an elective sauce of the grotesque, unable – again and again – to get out of the shackles of the Romantic way of perceiving the world, or perhaps rather perceiving it through the Romantic paradigm.]

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tion. Discourse in American Literature], ed. Marzena Rusaczyk (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar" 2008), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Przemysław Poznański, "Upiory romantyzmu / Paweł Goźliński „Dziady”. Recenzja” [Ghosts of Romanticism / Paweł Goźliński *Dziady*. Review]. *Zupełnie Inna Opowieść* (Completely Different Tale, [zupelnieinnaopowiesc.com](http://zupelnieinnaopowiesc.com)), November 13, 2015. <https://zupelnieinnaopowiesc.com/2015/11/13/przemyslaw-poznanski-upiory-romantyzmu-pawel-gozlinski-dziady/>.

Without questioning the validity of such a reading, it is worth noting, however, that appreciating the omnipresent images of anxiety and fear in the novel, seeing in them something more than just the reverse of the bloody and terrifying events in which the plot abounds, reveals another interpretive possibility. After all, in this susceptibility to Romantic ideology, which is characteristic of Poles but has been described many times before, one can see not only an expression of national obsession, a tendency to ignore rational arguments in favour of (preferably national) myths, but one of the (practised for decades) ways of dealing with trauma and fear of one's own mortality. Viewed in this way, the macabre presence of the Romantic tradition in Goźliński's novel need not be read merely as an indictment of the national blemish on Polish mentality, but rather as a certain universal feature of human existence in general – described masterfully by Romantic authors and treated over and over again with the same Romantic medicine.

*Translated by Anna Wylężałek*

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## Romantische Angst oder Angst vor Romantizismus? Über Paweł Goźliński's *Dziady*

**Abstract:** Die außergewöhnliche, von Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Totenfeier*) inspirierte Kriminalgeschichte von Paweł Goźliński wird oft als eine Art Abrechnung mit dem Romantizismus interpretiert, die die Verwicklung der Polen in verschiedenen Mythen und ihr Balancieren an der Grenze des nationalen Wahnsinns beschreibt. Eine Analyse des Motivs der Angst und Furcht im romantischen Kontext ermöglicht jedoch eine alternative Interpretation des Romans. Romantizismus, wenn man ihn aus dieser Perspektive betrachtet, stellt eher eine Art Schwelle zur Moderne dar, die das moderne Denken über die menschliche Natur insgesamt bestimmt.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Romantizismus, zeitgenössische polnische Literatur, Theorie der Beherrschung von Angst, Paweł Goźliński



## Lęk romantyczny czy lęk przed romantyzmem? Wokół *Dziadów* Pawła Goźlińskiego

**Abstrakt:** Niezwykły kryminał Pawła Goźlińskiego „inspirowany” Mickiewiczowskimi *Dziadami* był zazwyczaj odczytywany jako swoisty rozrachunek z romantyzmem, ukazujący uwikłanie Polaków w różnego rodzaju mity i ich balansowanie na granicy narodowego szaleństwa. Analiza motywu strachu i lęku w powieści w kategoriach romantycznych pozwala na ujawnienie innej możliwej interpretacji – romantyzm oglądany z tej perspektywy to raczej próg nowoczesności determinujący nowoczesne myślenie o naturze ludzkiej w ogóle.

**Słowa kluczowe:** romantyzm, polska literatura współczesna, teoria opanowywania trwogi, Paweł Goźliński