

# Adam Mickiewicz's "Crimean Sonnets" – a clash of two cultures and a poetic journey into the Romantic self

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*The paper analyses Adam Mickiewicz's poetic cycle 'Crimean Sonnets' (1826) as one of the most prominent examples of early Romanticism in Poland, setting it across the background of Poland's troubled history and Mickiewicz's exile to Russia. I argue that the context in which Mickiewicz created the cycle as well as the final product itself influenced the way in which Polish Romanticism developed and matured. The sonnets show an internal evolution of the subject who learns of his Romantic nature and his artistic vocation through an exploration of a foreign land, therefore accompanying his physical journey with a spiritual one that gradually becomes the main theme of the 'Crimean Sonnets'. In the first part of the paper I present the philosophy of the European Romanticism, situate it in the Polish historical context, and describe the formal structure of the Crimean cycle. In the second part of the paper I analyse five selected sonnets from the cycle in order to demonstrate the poetic journey of the subject-artist, centred around the epistemological difference between the Classical concept of 'knowing' and the Romantic act of 'exploring'.*

## Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to present Adam Mickiewicz's "Crimean Sonnets" cycle – a piece very representative of early Polish Romanticism – in the light of the social and historical events that were crucial for the rise of Romantic literature in Poland, with Mickiewicz as a prize example. The "Crimean Sonnets" cycle was written in 1826 by the pioneer and most influential writer of Polish Romanticism, Adam Mickiewicz, who was sent into exile to Russia in 1824 for his patriotic activity. I shall begin with a theoretical introduction to the essay, in which I will provide a general outline of the Romantic movement in Europe, and then describe the historical and social context in which Polish

Romanticism originated, and which makes it so unique among other national Romanticisms. Finally, I will elaborate on the events from Mickiewicz's life that led him to compose the "Crimean Sonnets". After the theoretical part of the essay, I will turn to the analysis of the crucial ideological points of the sonnet cycle, and to commentaries on five sonnets that, in my opinion, remarkably illustrate these points. My goal is to present the Crimean Sonnets as a personal journey of the Romantic poet who discovers his real self through exploring a foreign, oriental culture and through facing his longing for home.

The subject of the sonnet cycle is a pilgrim-traveller, who through his geographical journey not only discovers a new culture, but – above all – meets his new identity that is being constantly created through new experience and realisations. In the first sonnet, "The Akkerman Steppes", we read: "I sail the expanse of the dry ocean", rather than, as in the first version, "I explored the expanse of the dry ocean". The difference between the act of exploring and the state of having already explored signifies the crucial epistemological distinction between Classicism and Romanticism. Furthermore, the form – the classical sonnet – is exploited and reformulated in a Romantic manner, and turns out to be a most intimate diary.

The Crimean Sonnets' subject initially resembles a child who expresses his wonderment at Crimean nature and culture, so different from those of Poland. Everything seems extraordinary to him: the religion, traditions, landscape: "There!... Did Allah put an ice wall there, / Did he mould a throne for angels from a frozen cloud?" ("View of the Mountains from the Kozlov Steppe"). Yet his guide, Mirza, often warns him that we cannot fully understand and see the secrets of nature (associated in Romanticism with the secrets inside a human soul): "Stretch not the hand out as you pass, for fear / The added weight of that might plunge you down. / And check your thoughts' free flight, too, as you go" ("The Road Along the Precipice at Chufut-Kale").

However, alongside such excitement the Polish pilgrim yearns for his home country, and this longing constantly clashes with his wonderment at the Crimean world. This is especially evident when he suddenly stops his caravan in anticipation of a voice from the homeland. The juxtaposition of these two extreme feelings is an environment where an authentic Romantic voice is born. Thus the Crimean journey turns out to be an impulse for a journey into one's self.

### **Romanticism – its philosophy and the poet's "mind's eye"**

The critic Przybylski broadly defined Romanticism as a journey beyond the physical, finite world of the Classicists, as only the eyes of the soul could attempt to penetrate the infinite<sup>1</sup>. With Romantic aesthetics, the poet's role was not only to depict reality, but to create his own literary world. His words were a revelation of intuitively captured truths, so he had to have an internal sense which allowed him to see more than the average person, a sense which can be called an "inner eye" or a "mind's eye". As the critic Witkowska writes, "The Romantic credo consisted of: afflatus, creative contrivance, imagination, originality, honesty, an element of aesthetic disharmony I 'the play of

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<sup>1</sup> Przybylski R., *Oświeceniowy rozum i romantyczna przepaść* [The reason of the Enlightenment and the Romantic abyss] in *Problemy polskiego romantyzmu* [The problems of the Polish Romanticism], ed. Maria Żmigrodzka. Wrocław 1981, p. 125. All translations of the Polish secondary literature are mine – O.L.

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contrasts, the club of the primitive, often identified with folklore, and a flamboyant understanding of genius"<sup>2</sup>.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, an English poet and philosopher, saw an important connection between this sense and the role of poetry defined as the act of the artist's creationism. He wrote that poetry brings to life a common universe of which we are a part and which we experience, and frees our inner eye from the veil of vulgarity, which hides from us the miracle of our existence. The creative "I" of the poet could thus function only thanks to the inner eye, identified by the Romantics with the strength of the mind or, to put it in Samuel Coleridge's terms, "imagination" (opposed to "fancy").

When it comes to the philosophical inspiration of the Romantics who understood the role of the poet in such a way, it can be traced back to Plato and an Italian Renaissance Neoplatonic philosopher, Marsilio Ficino. Plato wrote that the one and only, intrinsic, and invariable beauty, i.e., Platonic ideas, are to be seen only through the inner eye. The vision of the poet as a prophet and a mystic was introduced by Ficino, who claimed that observing the world with a "disembodied eye" enables one to go beyond the senses and memory, which in turn enables an ecstatic contemplation of Beauty. Following these ideas, the Romantics held that the "vulgar eye" made it impossible to arrive at the most significant secrets of nature and the spiritual world.

The Romantic idea of individualism was largely inspired by three pre-romantic books: – Rousseau's "New Heloise" and "Confessions", and Goethe's "Sorrows of Young Werther". In the "Confessions", Rousseau wrote: "I propose to set before my fellow mortals a man in all the truth of nature; and this man shall be myself. I have studied mankind and know my heart; I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence"<sup>3</sup>. These sentimental statements evince the Romantic individualism that came afterwards, induced by lack of universal understanding. They also consider feelings to be the highest epistemological instance. Rousseau acknowledges the internal as the basic criterion of what a human is worth, and reformulates Descartes' position on knowledge and the intellectual, or rational, way of arriving at it. According to the author of "Confessions", self-consciousness is not intellectual in its character (as it is for Descartes), but emotional. Thus Rousseau considered the subjectivity of arriving at knowledge to be a foundation for acknowledging the difference and distinct feature of each subject – later called the "Romantic spirit".

Immanuel Kant, like Rousseau, was aware that in order for new and true philosophy to be born, the old must be surpassed so as to reveal a new, secure way of arriving at metaphysical knowledge. Although the Kantian principles of knowledge do not have much in common with the Romantic philosophy of the German idealists, Kant put the subject in the centre of the process of gaining knowledge and observing the world and, by explaining the relativity of knowledge by its dependence on the experience and insights of the exploring subject, opened the 'gate' through which Romantic individualism could enter. The inability to understand metaphysics led the Romantics after Kant to seek moral responsibility and autonomy for the human will in the moral sense. An individual judging the world assumed the existence of a supra-rational means of knowledge. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Kant's pupil, built a Romantic and individualistic philosophy which defines "I" as the only noumenal

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<sup>2</sup> Witkowska A & Przybyłowski R., *Romantyzm* [Romanticism], Warsaw 2007, p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> Rousseau J.-J., *Confessions*, book 1. Translated by W. Conyngam Mallory.

reality that creates the world from the Self. The Romantic vision of an artist seen as a creator, uninhibited by reality and its norms and able to create anything, started with Fichte. If we interpret the Kantian system through the lens of Romanticism, it comes as no surprise that the German idealists, "seeing and acknowledging the abyss between things in themselves and impressions, went on in search for things in themselves, that is, the essence of the world, not in the world, but in the depths of the spirit recognising the world, in the Self"<sup>4</sup>.

The poet, thus, became one of the crucial themes of late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature, and we will find explicit references to this not only in secondary sources, but also in Romantic writings themselves. This phenomenon of such widespread self-referentiality had not occurred in any previous literary period. After Byron, a truly Romantic poet was indebted and expected to live in accordance with the philosophy he proclaimed, that is, in such a way as to make his life compatible with his poetic ideals, to make his existence an embodiment of these ideals. This explains the constant intertwining of public and private spheres, of his individual life and his public art. To sum up, the Romantic vision of a poet comprises three distinct characteristics: the aspiration to become a leader, the belief that the poet intuitively sees truths which are not to be seen by others, and the constant suffering from spiritual solitude.

### **The uniqueness of Polish Romanticism. "Crimean Sonnets": the story of Mickiewicz's Russian exile and a theoretical introduction to the cycle**

As a result of three subsequent partitions of Poland by the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Austria (1771-1795), Poland (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) would disappear from the political world map for the next 123 years. Its territory became divided between the three invading countries. Due to the partitions and the consequent loss of political, economic and cultural independence, the Polish language and traditions were generally suppressed, and students were forbidden to speak Polish in schools. These processes were called russification, germanisation and galicisation, respectively.

This was the situation and atmosphere in which Romantic ideas and writings of the English and German poets were introduced to the young generation of Polish poets, inspiring them. The gradual process of Romantic values appearing in their poems and novels and displacing those of Classicism was thus accompanied by a constant fear about the evanescence of the Polish tradition, spirit, and historical memory. The uniqueness of Polish literary Romanticism was mainly due to the frequent and regular presence of political themes and the sense of fighting for the country's independence that dominated Poland in that period, especially after the November Uprising in 1830. What was the prominent feature of Polish historical poetry before 1830? The Romantics, having divided reality into "the past" and "the present", wished to preserve the collective memory of the past, which they perceived as an inspiration. This desire to bring back the epoch of nature that was obscured by the present civilisation was visible especially in the most important cultural creations – philosophy and poetry<sup>5</sup>. The goal of Polish Romanticism during the period 1822-1830 was to question the principal Classicist values which seemed too cosmopolitan to help understand the Polish history.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, book 2, p. 374.

<sup>5</sup> After: Janion M. & Źmigrodzka M., *Romantyzm i historia* [Romanticism and history]. Gdańsk 2001.

Poland faced an important world-view dispute between the Classicists and the Romantics during 1818-1820. The dispute was started by the astronomer and Enlightenment philosopher Jan Śniadecki, who actually features as an 'Enlightenment scientist' in one of Mickiewicz's ballads, *Romanticis*. In 1819, Śniadecki published an essay *O pismach klasycznych i romantycznych* [About Classical and Romantic Works], which argued with the poet Kazimierz Brodziński's Romantic manifest *O klasyczności i romantyczności tudzież o duchu poezji polskiej* [About Classicism and Romanticism, Or the Spirit of Polish Poetry]. In it, Brodziński compared the two ways of Polish poetry evolution, describing Classicism as harmony and regularity, and Romanticism as an inspirational, imaginary and emotional way of writing, chosen by young artists who are influenced by passions and visions of infinity. Śniadecki radically criticizes Romantic tendencies, which he finds obscure and blasphemous.

Romantic aesthetics perceived itself in a Hegelian way<sup>6</sup>, seeing literature as a creation of the historical spirit, which naturally has to be judged with reference to the historical context. The first volume of Mickiewicz's "Lyrics" from 1822 is generally acknowledged as the first Romantic literary publication in Poland, and thus 1822 marks the beginning of the Romantic period in the country. In his preface to the first volume of his "Lyrics", Mickiewicz describes Romantic poetry as that which conveys "the attributes of the historical spirit, and the way of thinking and feeling typical for Mediaeval peoples"<sup>7</sup>. To sum up, in the early Romantic period the Polish poets wanted to find an understanding of their nation through a spiritual connection with the past.

The "Crimean Sonnets" were composed in a patriotically charged atmosphere. Written in 1826, before the November Uprising, they do not contain political allusions as such. Rather, through longing for his home country and the familiar, Mickiewicz poetically depicts his spiritual evolution as a man and a Romantic during his time abroad.

In 1815, Mickiewicz enrolled at the Imperial University of Vilnius (today Lithuania's capital, back then the most culturally and politically active city in Poland, along with Kraków). Vilnius was at the time a former territory of Poland which had become, because of the partitions, a part of Russia. In 1817, together with his friends, he created and was part of a secret student organisation, "The Philomath Society", which tried to tackle political issues and supported national literature. Polish students tried to preserve their national identity through public manifestations and poems. By that time Mickiewicz had already become famous for his poem cycle "Ballads and Romances", published in 1822; it is now considered the symbolic beginning of Romantic literature in Poland.

In 1823, because of the progressively growing political activity of the students and teenagers, the government led by anti-Polish authorities reinforced investigations against national activities. The Russian section was governed by Nikolay Novosiltsev, a senator and the tsar's proxy. The result of his investigation was extremely unfortunate for Mickiewicz and his friends: the organisation was discovered, and the students were arrested. The trial against them finished in 1824, and the Philomaths were exiled to Russia. During this exile Mickiewicz travelled to Crimea (the northern coast of the Black Sea) and there, in the mid 1820's, he conceived the poetic cycle "Crimean Sonnets",

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<sup>6</sup> Hegel G.W.F., *Selections from Hegel's Lectures on Aesthetics*, part III *Of the Romantic Form of Art*, in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 1886.

<sup>7</sup> Janion M. & Żmigrodzka M., *Romantyzm i historia* [Romanticism and history]. Gdańsk 2001, p. 44.

which was published in 1826. It seems important to note here that the poet's time in Russia was not a tourist or cultural journey, as many like to describe it. It was a psychologically difficult time of exile. Mickiewicz was not allowed to come back to Poland, which of course only intensified his feelings for his home and became an inseparable part of his journey.

The Crimean cycle, written only four years after the first Romantic literary piece had been published in Poland, still represents a very early and experimental period of this movement for Mickiewicz. "Crimean Sonnets" were published together with another cycle written before them – "Sonnets from Odessa". This work resembles a Petrarchan cycle and focuses on earthly love. From the moment the Crimean cycle was published, on the other hand, it was perceived as a truly original, innovative work, and it overshadowed "Sonnets from Odessa". Mickiewicz himself preferred "Crimean Sonnets", wanting all of them to be translated, versus only two of the Odessa sonnets. Placed after the typical love sonnets, the Crimean cycle seemed even more a revelation and a major shift in early Polish Romanticism, with the poems unveiling themselves as a diary of the poet's oriental journey. There is, however, a profound connection between the two cycles – the Crimean one begins with a quote from Petrarch's first sonnet from his "Canzoniere": "Quand'era in parte altr'uom da quel, ch'io sono" ["When I was partly other than I am"<sup>8</sup>]. By putting this very quote at the beginning of the second cycle, Mickiewicz suggests that we read the cycle with this sentence in mind—that is, to observe the subject and his spiritual change closely. Moreover, the quote binds the sonnets together, giving them the character of an integral story. Thus the sonnets from Odessa and Crimea resembles two chapters of one's biography.

Although the Crimean sonnets can be perceived as Mickiewicz's poetic diary from his days in Russia, this perspective does not fully represent the cycle's richness and the intensity of the change the poet undergoes. There are also some crucial differences between the actual journey and the one depicted poetically, amongst which the main one is the opposition of solidarity and solitude: "The poet's 1825 travel to Crimea was made in a company of Polish friends, despite the fact that the sonnets show a solitary traveller who has neither friends nor human ties to the world apart from memories of a beloved woman in Lithuania and contact with his native guide"<sup>9</sup>. There are many reasons why Mickiewicz decided to make the subject of his poems the only expatriate protagonist of the cycle. He wanted to emphasise the interaction between him and his guide Mirza, which is extremely important to the cycle, as the two *personae* represent two opposite points of view. Furthermore, the subject-poet's solitude was typical for literary figures of Romanticism, along with a sense of loneliness, uniqueness, exceptional sensitivity, and being an outsider: As Borowy puts it: "The 'pilgrim', 'traveller', 'foreigner' seems to wander around the Crimean land on his own; he abandons his fellow travellers from the vessel (...). The only company he has is the Tatar 'mirza', a guide with an august title, full of consideration but also courage, a representative of his country's beliefs and traditions, an eminent rhetorician of Eastern style, matronly and majestic like the mountains and ruins with which

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<sup>8</sup> Translated by A.S. Kline.

<sup>9</sup> Dixon M., *How the Poet Sympathizes with Exotic Lands in Adam Mickiewicz's Crimean Sonnets and the Digression from Forefathers' Eve*, Part III. In: *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Winter, 2001), p. 681.

he makes the Pilgrim familiar; Mirza emphasises the pathos of the fundamental things in everything he talks about"<sup>10</sup>.

Another notable fact about the Crimean cycle is the plurality of the subject's identity. He cannot be described by one adjective or called one name, as he presents himself as a sensitive poet (who can be equated with Mickiewicz), a confident Romantic, a pilgrim (in a spiritual sense), a traveller, an exile or refugee, and an outsider. "[The] Pilgrim - predictably enough for a poet - imagines himself as more sensitive than others who travel to the exotic land; he depicts himself making unusual contact with natives and native values"<sup>11</sup>. This just shows that the subject's identity is extremely sophisticated and complex, and all these characteristics are indeed visible in the eighteen sonnets, enabling the readers to take various perspectives on them.

As the cycle was written when Romanticism was still a relatively fresh and experimental movement in Mickiewicz's motherland, it comes as no surprise that some of its elements bear a resemblance to Classicism. The first one has been found by some critics in the cycle's internal composition. There have been a number of slightly varying analyses of this composition (by Próchnicki, Folkierski, Kleiner, and Zgorzelski among others), the most interesting by Zgorzelski who described it as a composition of groups of four and three sonnets which were always divided by one crucial sonnet, so that the cycle's organisation resembled the form of the sonnet: (4+1) + (4+1) + (3+1) + (3+1). Importantly, all scholars agree that we can distinguish four separated sonnets (the 1's in our scheme) which definitely stand out and mark a thematic shift between groups of sonnets as well as a shift in the form: "View of the Mountains from the Kozlov Steppes" (V), "Baydary" (X), "The Pilgrim" (XIV), and "Ajudah" (XVIII). Such an organised, mathematical way of structuring the cycle seems to be rather Classical than Romantic.

More importantly, so does the fact that the poet decided to put his poetry into the form of the sonnet – a form that was extremely popular in Classicism and that has a fixed number of verses per stanza as well as a thematic organisation that is suggested beforehand, namely that the quatrains should describe a problem or a scene and the tercets present a witty conclusion or solution to the poet's dilemma. And yet Mickiewicz chose this classical lyrical form to convey his Romantic truths to the world, to represent his Romantic way of seeing and exploring the world and himself. "With respect to the 'Crimean Sonnets', the same critic [Dmochowski] claimed that he was surprised that Mickiewicz would try to contain 'a subject that is so rich, so new and fresh (...) in the narrow, uncomfortable frames of the sonnet'"<sup>12</sup>. How was it possible? Did the form not restrain him from writing what he wanted? In fact, on the contrary – he exploited it beyond its boundaries and in a completely non-classical way. First of all, the poet did not obey its compositional rules, sometimes extending the number of verses per stanza (for example in "View of the Mountains from the Kozlov

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<sup>10</sup> Borowy W., *O poezji Mickiewicza* [On Mickiewicz's Poetry]. Lublin 1958, p. 221.

<sup>11</sup> Dixon M., *How the Poet Sympathizes with Exotic Lands in Adam Mickiewicz's Crimean Sonnets and the Digression from Forefathers' Eve*, Part III. In: *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Winter, 2001), p. 683.

<sup>12</sup> Kalinowska I., *The Sonnet, the Sequence, the Qasidah: East-West Dialogue in Adam Mickiewicz's Sonnets*. In: *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Winter, 2001), p. 644.

Steppes", about which I will talk later on in a separate section) or not complying with the thematic and stylistic shift between the octet and the sestet that is so typical for the Classical sonnet. Moreover, as Kalinowska writes, "The sonnet appealed to romantic sensibility as a literary form which, in spite of its appearance of rigidity, opened up its space to encompass either parallel or opposed vantage points. Because of its binary structure, it was well suited for the purpose of narrating a nineteenth-century travelogue. Finally, as a literary form whose origins were presumed to be oriental, it was a perfect medium for narrating an Oriental journey"<sup>13</sup>.

The subject of the typical classical sonnet did not bear any marks of an individualised personality, but rather was an impersonal representation of a social opinion, generalised to some go-between of a nation and a higher – human or divine – power. Virtually always the subject of classical poetry addresses his words to a recipient whom he wants to influence. Mickiewicz's sonnets' subject, on the contrary, focuses on revealing his own feeling and process of transformation. It even seems as though no recipient was needed. Thus the expression of his confessions, not his rhetorical skills, became the main concentration point of the Romantic poetry. Also, the sonnets' themes changed from general and patriotic to individual and highly intimate. "[Romantic] lyric poetry underwent a metamorphosis from conventional to realistic, more specific. It gained suggestibility of a forthright, spontaneous and natural utterance"<sup>14</sup>. To sum up, by choosing a classical lyrical form for his Romantic poems, Mickiewicz manages to compose sonnets that go far beyond what the Classicists created in exactly the same way Romanticism as a movement goes beyond the epistemological border and stylistic rules that Classicism imposed on itself. The sonnet cycle as a whole presents a crucial epistemological difference between Classicism and Romanticism. The distance between *knowing* and *exploring* is especially visible in "The Akkerman Steppes", and the one between imposing on oneself a limit when exploring the nature of things and not doing so can be seen in "The Road Along the Precipice at Chufut-Kale" (both of which I will analyse in separate sections).

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 644-45.

<sup>14</sup> Zgorzelski Cz., *O sztuce poetyckiej Mickiewicza* [On Mickiewicz's poetic art]. Warsaw 2001, p. 27.



### **Sonnet 1: "The Akkerman Steppes" - an introduction to the whole cycle and the tension between the national and the foreign**

#### **THE AKKERMANN STEPPES**

I sail the expanse of the dry ocean,  
My cart wades through greenness, like a boat flounders,  
Midst waves of souging meadows, floods of flowers,  
I pass the coral isles of thistledown.

Night falls, no sight of a road or kurgan;  
I view the sky, search for stars that guide sailors;  
That distant shining cloud? Morning star which stirs?  
That's shining Dniester, the lamp of Akkerman.

Let's halt! How still! I hear the flying cranes,  
Which to no avail the falcon's eye follows;  
I hear the butterfly sway on grass canes,

The snake's slippery breast brushes plants as it crawls.  
So still I could hear, when my eager ear strains,  
A voice from Lithuania. – Onward, no one calls.<sup>15</sup>

#### **STEPY AKERMAŃSKIE**

Wpłynąłem na suchego przestwór oceanu,  
Wóz nurza się w zieloność i jak łódka brodzi,  
Śród fali łąk szumiących, śród kwiatów powodzi,  
Omijam koralowe ostrowy burzanu.

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<sup>15</sup>This and the other translations of the sonnets are by Michael J. Mikoś (*Adam Mickiewicz. The Sun of Liberty. Bicentenary Anthology 1798-1998, Polish-English Edition by Michael J. Mikoś* (Warsaw 1998)).

Już mrok zapada, nigdzie drogi ni kurhanu;  
Patrzę w niebo, gwiazd szukam, przewodniczek łodzi;  
Tam z dala błyszczący obłok - tam jutrzienka wschodzi;  
To błyszczący Dniestr, to weszła lampa Akermanu.

Stójmy! - jak cicho! - słyszę ciągnące żurawie,  
Których by nie dościgły źrenice sokoła;  
Słyszę, kędy się motyl kołysa na trawie,

Kędy wąż śliską piersią dotyka się zioła.  
W takiej ciszy - tak ucho natężam ciekawie,  
Że słyszałbym głos z Litwy. - Jedźmy, nikt nie woła.

"The Akkerman Steppes" is the first sonnet of the Crimean cycle. Its original version started with the line "I explored/learnt the expanse of the dry ocean"<sup>16</sup>. Later, Mickiewicz decided to change it to "I sail the expanse of the dry ocean". This signifies a difference between having already explored and the act of exploring here and now. Whereas the draft version pointed to something that is finished, to a completed act of exploration or learning, the later one, by exhausting the meaning of "entered", tries to define the beginning of the poet's geographical, and metaphysical, journey. Instead of using the verb "sail" (meaning "to explore"), which signified a completed action and pushed the whole poem back into the past, he wrote "entered", thus setting the first moment of the sonnet and leaving it open to change. Literary time becomes united with the real time of the journey. "The poem is not an epic relation of the now finished journey but an account of present observations and feelings that the subject, the tourist-pilgrim, is experiencing now"<sup>17</sup>. The artist had entered the dry waters of the open sea but he did not do anything or understand anything there, let alone complete his metamorphosis. Thus the crucial difference between the act of exploring and having already explored signals the main epistemological difference between Classicism and Romanticism.

The whole first quatrain lyrically portrays Mickiewicz's gradual immersion into Crimean nature. "The expanse of the dry ocean" is of course a metonymy of the steppe. This is not the case in the second stanza, however. Here the poet acknowledges the falling dusk and the need to arrive at a safe place. He looks at the sky searching for a star that could guide his way. Perhaps the stellar road points at

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<sup>16</sup> The first version of the sonnet is cited and discussed by Zgorzelski in Mickiewicz Adam, *Wybór poezyj, tom drugi* [Selected poems, book 2], ed. Czesław Zgorzelski (Wrocław 1986), p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> Zgorzelski Cz., *W środku niebokręga* [In the middle of the sky]. Wrocław 1971, p. 91.

the one stable point that has not changed, despite him moving from Poland to the Crimea. At first he cannot find a barrow or a road, and yet he is not terrified to be lost, as the comeliness of the nocturnal oriental world quickly draws his attention away from his inability to find a path. This fascination is endured by the pause created by the space between the quatrain and the tercet, which, too, usually in the sonnet means an ideological and/or thematic transition. This pause reflects the clash of two polar emotions that the Pilgrim feels – astonishment by the foreign beauty of Crimea, and longing for his home country.

The long pause is interrupted by the subject's sudden cry "Let's halt!" In the quiet of the Crimean night he manages to hear (or think he hears; the difference between these is of no importance, or even not noticeable, for Romantic poetry) the sounds made by fauna and flora typical of the Polish, thus familiar and not foreign, landscape. The initial fascination by the oriental view which overcame the poet is now beclouded by longing for home and a sudden powerful feeling. What has intensified this new emotion is the stillness of everything around the subject that, as opposed to loud music or any kind of noise, makes a mind wander away from the present position on the body.

In the second tercet, which closes the sonnet, the subject explicitly confesses that he was trying to hear a sound from his home country, be it a human voice or a movement of nature: "So still I could hear, when my eager ear strains, / A voice from Lithuania. – Onward, no one calls". Followed by suspension points, it creates a pause almost equally strong to the one between the octet and the sextet. The sonnet concludes with the poet's supplication to continue the journey, which literally should be translated as "Onward, no one calls". Such a determined outcry seems at the same time a sign of Mickiewicz's resignation and regret at not being able to hear anyone calling him from home, and a desperate decision to go further (perhaps in case he proves unable to stop himself from trying to return home). Not being able to return home because of the poet's situation of the political exile gave him no choice but to immerse himself further into the Crimean world.

The sonnet, when it comes to its composition, is formally divided into two quatrains that deal entirely with the subject's Crimean experience, while the tercets talk about Poland. This geographical difference is, more importantly, followed by a metaphysical one – while the octet deals with the physical, the sextet talks about the metaphysical, spiritual. The subject does not yet draw spiritual attention to the Crimean world (as he will in later sonnets), apart from a rather superficial amazement by its beauty. That is because the process of exploring it is radically interrupted by him remembering his familiar environment.

"The Akkerman Steppes", the first poem of the "Crimean Sonnets" cycle, touches upon a wide variety of themes that will be later fully explored: the poet's spiritual journey into his Romantic self, the difference between Classicism and Romanticism, the dissimilarity of the Polish and Crimean landscapes, their clash in the subject's mind, his attempt to understand the new world he is in and to find a mental balance, which is inevitable as he wants to reach the same balance in his poetry. Most importantly, "The Akkerman Steppes" sets up the main tensions of the cycle, namely the epistemological one between knowing and exploring, and the metaphysical one between the familiar and the foreign.

Lenczewska, Olga. "Adam Mickiewicz's 'Crimean Sonnets' – a clash of two cultures and a poetic journey into the Romantic self". *Readings* 1.2 (2015)

### **Sonnet 5: "View of the mountains from the Kozlov Steppes" - a fascination by foreign culture and the Pilgrim-Mirza relation**

#### **VIEW OF THE MOUNTAINS FROM THE KOZLOV STEPPES**

*The Pilgrim and Mirza*

*Pilgrim*

Did Allah put there a frozen sea barrier

Or cast a throne of icy clouds for angels?

Did the Divis from this land mass build castles,

Not to let the east stars' caravan enter?

What glow on the peak! Stamboul aflame yonder!

Did Allah, when Night spread out her dun mantles,

For the worlds sailing on nature's sea swells

Hang up this lantern under the sky's border?

*Mirza*

I was in that land. The winter sits there,

I saw stream beaks and brook throats drink from its nest.

I breathed, snow came out; I climbed up to where

Eagles do not reach, where cloud stallions rest,

I passed a bolt doze in the crib of cloud air,

Lenczewska, Olga. "Adam Mickiewicz's 'Crimean Sonnets' – a clash of two cultures and a poetic journey into the Romantic self". *Readings* 1.2 (2015)

Above my turban only a star's crest.

That is Chatyr Dag!

*Pilgrim*

Ah!

### **WIDOK GÓR ZE STEPÓW KOZŁOWA**

Pielgrzym i mirza

*Pielgrzym*

Tam? czy Allah postawił ścianą morze lodu?

Czy aniołom tron odlał z zamrożonej chmury?

Czy Diwy z ćwierci lądu dźwignęły te mury,

Aby gwiazd karawanę nie puszczać ze wschodu?

Na szczycie jaka łuna! pożar Carogrodu!

Czy Allah, gdy noc chylał rozciągnęła bury,

Dla światów żeglujących po morzu natury

Tę latarnię zawiesił wśród niebios obwodu?

*Mirza*

Tam? - Byłem; zima siedzi, tam dzioby potoków

I gardła rzek widziałem pijące z jej gniazda;

Tchnąłem, z ust mych śnieg leciał; pomykałem kroków,

Gdzie orły dróg nie wiedzą, kończy się chmur jazda,

Minąłem grom drzemiący w kolebce z obłoków,

Aż tam, gdzie nad mój turban była tylko gwiazda.

To Czatyrdah!

*Pielgrzym*

Aa!!

The fifth sonnet introduces an extremely innovative technique of Mickiewicz's: dividing the sonnet's form into a highly syncretic drama-like dialogue between the two protagonists of the Crimean cycle. Presenting the sonnet as a dramatic scene functions as a way of directly separating and highlighting two polar points of view – the Pilgrim's and Mirza's. The decision to modify and exploit the lyrical form in which the poet operates is a prime example of the Romantic period's influence on European literature in general. Moreover, not only is the poem divided into a dialogue (with all consequences, such as the existence of two subjects and two points of view), but it also consists of 15, instead of the typical 14, lines (or even 16, if we count the Pilgrim's final exclamation "Ah!" as a separate one).

What becomes evident already at the first reading is that while the Pilgrim, seeing the miracle of Crimean nature for the first time, is amazed by it, tries to comprehend it, and thus poses many questions, Mirza (the Pilgrim's guide and a Tatar nobleman, naturally native to the oriental land) admits that he has visited the place himself and defines it from a completely different point of view than that of the poet-foreigner. The obvious dissimilarity between the Pilgrim and Mirza is of paramount importance to the cycle's epistemological investigations, as Mirza becomes a sort of inspiration and example for the Pole. As I mentioned in the theoretical introduction to the "Crimean Sonnets", the sonnets' main subject – the Pilgrim – was deliberately designed to be the only traveller present in the poems, unlike Mickiewicz, who was accompanied by a few friends whilst travelling through Crimea. As noted by Megan Dixon, "Just as it was a deliberate choice to write the Sonnets as the solitary journey of a Polish Pilgrim (instead of as himself, accompanied by friends), so it is now a choice that the poet has designed Mirza, the Pilgrim's companion, to perceive a greater humility and sensitivity in the Pole than in other Westerners, allowing the poet to experience the native's sense of awe in this stronghold of purity"<sup>18</sup>. Therefore the two figures represent different points of view on the oriental land.

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<sup>18</sup> Dixon M., How the Poet Sympathizes with Exotic Lands in Adam Mickiewicz's Crimean Sonnets and the Digression from Forefathers' Eve, Part III. In: *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Winter, 2001), pp. 683-84.

In "View of the Mountains from the Kozlov Steppes" the Pilgrim's senses do not strain to catch a voice from Lithuania as they did in the first sonnet. Instead, the subject is wholeheartedly devoted to experiencing the impression the mountains invoke in him. This amazement is depicted in the text in a number of hyperbolic questions addressed to Mirza: "Did Allah put there a frozen sea barrier / Or cast a throne of icy clouds for angels? / Did the Divis from this land mass build castles, / Not to let the east stars' caravan enter?" It seems as though he cannot find words to express what he has just seen in a calm, objective manner. Even at the very end of the poem he is not able to behave more like Mirza, but utters a short, surprised "Ah!" Every question the Pilgrim asks reveals his fantasy and eagerness to describe Crimea as a magical land: he uses words such as "sea barrier", "throne", "castles", "afame", "lantern", which then turn out to be, in Mirza's response, typical elements of the oriental landscape: "winter", "stream beaks", "snow", "cloud", "star's crest". Thus we can see both the conceptual and the linguistic discrepancy between the octet and the sestet of the sonnet. Of course Mirza's story is poetic and melancholic, too, but it does not convey the magical elements which can be easily spotted in the quatrains.

To conclude, the sonnet resembles a scene from a drama, where the two roles are firmly divided. In between the poet undergoes a change, becoming more and more interested in Crimean nature and forgetting about his homeland, and thus changing from a traveller to a Pilgrim, who admires the power of Chatyr Dag in a way that is typical for a naïve exaggeration of a man from the East.

#### Sonnet 14: "The Pilgrim" – a crisis of national identity

##### THE PILGRIM

At my feet land of beauty and abundance,  
Bright sky overhead, by my side a fair face;  
Why does my heart escape to that far-off place  
And, alas, to times of far greater distance?

Lithuania! Your humming woods sang sweeter chants  
Than Salhir's maids, Baydary nightingales;  
I was happier walking through your marsh byways  
Than through ruby mulberries, gold pineapple plants.

Lenczewska, Olga. "Adam Mickiewicz's 'Crimean Sonnets' – a clash of two cultures and a poetic journey into the Romantic self". *Readings* 1.2 (2015)

I'm so far! Now lured by a different pleasure!

Why, distracted, do I sigh constantly

For her whom I loved in my youth's summer?

She is in the dear land that they took from me,

Where all things tell her of her faithful lover –

Tracing my clear footsteps, does she think of me?

## **PIELGRZYM**

U stóp moich kraina dostatków i krasy,

Nad głową niebo jasne, obok piękne lice;

Dlaczegoż stąd ucieka serce w okolice

Dalekie, i niestety! jeszcze dalsze czasy?

Litwo! piał mi wdzięczniej tve szumiące lasy,

Niż słowiki Bajdaru, Salhiry dziewice;

I weselszy deptałem twoje trzęsawice,

Niż rubinowe morwy, złote ananasy.

Tak daleki! tak różna wabi mię ponęta;

Dlaczegoż roztargniony wzdycham bezustanku,

Do téj którą kochałem w dni moich poranku?

Ona w lubój dziedzinie, która mi odjęta,

Gdzie jój wszystko o wiernym powiada kochanku;

Depcąc świeże me ślady czyż o mnie pamięta?

"The Pilgrim" introduces a dramatically different perspective on the Crimean land than the sonnet "View of the Mountains from the Kozlov Steppes" did. In the latter the poet was amazed by the new nature and the sites he was beginning to explore, and he put aside thoughts of home, which allowed



his fascination by the oriental to reach a climax. In this sonnet, however, the subject becomes suddenly overwhelmed by the diversity of things he feels, and missing home is now a dominant sensation. The subject is self-conscious and already in the first stanza acknowledges the discrepancy between what he sees and what he feels, asking rhetorically: "At my feet land of beauty and abundance, / Bright sky overhead, by my side a fair face; / Why does my heart escape to that far-off place / And, alas, to times of far greater distance?" "The traveller and foreigner definitely, openly and explicitly calls himself a 'Pilgrim', and the questions he asks himself are dictated not by despair but by the placid melancholy and nostalgia ('I sigh constantly') of a man who knows and accepts his fate – a fate of an eternal Pilgrim"<sup>19</sup>. This Romantic fate of a wanderer and a foreigner was a result of the political exile with which the sonnets' author had been punished for his patriotic activity.

He is alone, without Mirza. He explicitly states what is on his mind, ignorant of Eastern splendour; he no longer lies to himself, does not deafen in the bottom of his heart what rises inside of him beyond the fascination by the Crimean land. The levee he built around his longing for the homeland finally broke, and the once suppressed feelings flooded his mind with all the truth and honesty of an authentic feeling. The recollection of his time in Lithuania makes him remember the person to whose voice he was listening intently – the woman he loved for so long, Maryla Wereszczakówna, but could not marry, as she coldly chose a richer man: "Why, distracted, do I sigh constantly / For her whom I loved in my youth's summer?". She comes into sight in his thoughts as a personification of the country in which he saw comeliness and felt love for the first time. Lithuania brings to his mind the love of his younger days. He also states his reason for being in Russia, not mythologising and romanticising it any more: "She is in the dear land *that they took from me*". Although other sonnets before "The Pilgrim" already foreshadow the great clash of Mickiewicz's two opposite feelings and build up to what we read in this poem, in terms of chronology "The Pilgrim" was the first sonnet to be written. In this one poem the main tension of the whole cycle is rooted; this is where the main problem, the story of the internal drama of a poet – the son of the Lithuanian land who travelled through an unknown country – was sketched.

The sonnet can be usefully compared to the first one, namely "The Akkerman Steppes". There, too, the subject's longing for his homeland is explicitly stated. Yet "The Akkerman Steppes" only introduces us to the Crimean cycle, so it comes as no surprise that the subject is unsure whether he wants to begin to explore the unknown or try to return. He still thinks he hears voices from Lithuania, probably not being accustomed to staying that far away from home. Yet, while in the first sonnet Lithuania is mentioned for the first time in the tercets, as though the poet was still trying to obey some Classical sonnet rules, in "The Pilgrim" the apostrophe to the motherland is introduced already in the fourth verse. Even more significantly, "The Akkerman Steppes" ends with the poet's decision to go on, continue his journey and forget about Lithuania: "Onward, no one calls". Quite the contrary, "The Pilgrim" ends with a melancholic rhetorical question and the subject's thoughts wandering away from Crimea to his home and Maryla. Therefore we see that, unlike in "The Akkerman Steppes", recalling Lithuania in "The Pilgrim" does not finish within the sonnet's boundaries and thus has greater significance for the cycle.

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<sup>19</sup>Brzozowski J., *Odczytywanie znaczeń. Studia o poezji Mickiewicza* [Reading the Meanings. Studies on Mickiewicz's Poetry]. Łódź 1997, p. 75.

Lenczewska, Olga. "Adam Mickiewicz's 'Crimean Sonnets' – a clash of two cultures and a poetic journey into the Romantic self". *Readings* 1.2 (2015)

To sum up, "The Pilgrim" is the most explicit sonnet of the whole cycle. It is the only one in which Mickiewicz reveals the real motive of his journey, and the one in which the clash between longing for his homeland and fascination with the Crimea is so strongly visible and tightly linked with each other. Moreover, the number of exclamations and rhetorical questions point to the emotional state of the subject-poet, who becomes more authentic than he was when poetically describing Crimean nature and culture.

### **Sonnet 15: "The Road Along the Precipice at Chufut-Kale" - poetic struggle between the Romantic desire to learn about all nature's secrets and the inability to do so**

#### **THE ROAD ALONG THE PRECIPICE AT CHUFUT-KALE**

*Mirza and the Pilgrim*

*Mirza*

Say a prayer, drop reins, turn your face to one side,

On horse's legs the rider's mind must rely;

Bold horse! Look, he stops, sights the chasm from on high,

Kneels, catches the edge of the rock in stride,

Stays suspended. Don't look down, the sharp eyed

Won't to the bottom, as in Cairo's well, spy,

And don't point, your hands have no wings to fly;

Your thoughts shouldn't go there, for the thought tossed outside,

A small boat's anchor into the plumbless pit,

Will fall with bolt's speed, will not reach sea depth

And will pull the boat to the chasm of chaos.

*The Pilgrim*

Mirza, I did look down! Through the earth's slit

I saw – what I saw, I will tell – after death,

For the mortal's tongue has no words for this.

**DROGA NAD PRZEPAŚCIĄ W CZUFUT-KALE**

*Mirza i Pielgrzym*

*Mirza*

Zmów pacierz, opuść wodze, odwróć na bok lica,

Tu jeździec końskim nogom swój rozum powierza;

Dzielny koń! patrz, jak staje, głąb okiem rozmierza,

Uklęka, brzeg wiszaru kopytem pochwycy,

I zawisnął - Tam nie patrz, tam spadła źrenica,

Jak w studni Al-Kairu, o dno nie uderza.

I ręką tam nie wskazuj - nie masz u rąk pierza;

I myśli tam nie puszczaj, bo myśl jak kotwica,

Z łodzi drobnej ciśniona w nieźmierność głębiny,

Piorunem spadnie, morza do dna nie przewierci,

I łódź z sobą przechyli w otchłanie chaosu.

*Pielgrzym*

Mirzo, a ja spojrzałem! Przez świata szczeliny

Tam widziałem - com widział, opowiem - po śmierci,

Bo w żyjących języku nie ma na to głosu.

"The Road Along the Precipice at Chufut-Kale" is a very significant sonnet for the Crimean cycle. It poetically portrays and compares the classical and romantic approaches to the unknowable, the transcendental, that is, the mystery of nature. While Classicism acknowledged that human beings are not able to see or understand everything that happens on Earth, the Romantics did not see that barrier and were eager to explore what the Classicists considered unexplorable. Romanticism widened the borders of the world, it let poets look at the infinite and write about the supernatural and transcendental. "A Romantic understood that he could describe the inconceivability of the world and his own anxiety mainly in the sphere of lyric poetry. That is why so many artists of that time would complain about difficulties in expressing the inexpressible"<sup>20</sup>.

The sonnet is divided into a drama-like dialogue between the Pilgrim and Mirza – a formal innovation that we have already seen in "View of the mountains from the Kozlov Steppes". This literary technique helps Mickiewicz to explicitly present two polar viewpoints. Mirza talks in three stanzas, the Pilgrim just in the last one – the balance typical of the classical sonnet is gone. In the octet and the first tercet Mirza, in this case the voice of Classicism, advises the traveller to be extremely careful when passing near the abyss and not to let himself stay unfocused even for a moment, as such a mistake can have fatal consequences. The whole speech does not, naturally, refer just to the physical pass through the precipice; it has also another, metaphysical meaning which concerns human epistemological abilities. Especially the two verses "And don't point, your hands have no wings to fly; / Your thoughts shouldn't go there, for the thought tossed outside" underline human imperfection and inability to grasp the transcendental.

Nevertheless, the Pilgrim confidently looks into – to put it into Mirza's words – "the chasm of chaos", the titular precipice, not listening to his guide's advice. This is, however, not just a look into the chaos but an act of wandering beyond "the earth's slit" into some kind of transcendence. This transcendence has no name for a reason – as the sonnet itself explains, it is impossible to find a proper "word" for it in the human "tongue".

So the poet looked into the abyss. He not only looked into it, but felt it and interpreted it. Even though struggling to express the inexpressible in their poetry, he had the courage to look at the transcendental. In "The Road Along the Precipice at Chufut-Kale" it is the newly explored, oriental Crimean world that give the poet this courage. However, in this sonnet he does not even attempt to describe what he saw, as he immediately acknowledges it as improper for and incompatible with human language. And yet the Pilgrim's final words - "what I saw, I will tell – after death, / For the

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<sup>20</sup> Zgorzelski Czesław, *O sztuce poetyckiej Mickiewicza* [On Mickiewicz's poetic art]. Warsaw 2001, p. 20.

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mortal's tongue has no words for this" – could be the first or the last words of the "Crimean sonnets" cycle, so strongly do they reflect the poet and his internal transformation.

**The last sonnet: "Ajudah" - finding the balance between his nostalgia and fascination with oriental culture, and defining the poet's ultimate mission**

#### **AJUDAH**

I like to watch leaning on Ajudah's face

How foaming billows pressed in black ranks grow

Or at other times like silvery snow

Whirl in millions of rainbows with splendid grace.

They strike against the shoal, break into wave sprays,

Like an army of whales the shore overflow,

Seize the land in triumph, in retreat they go,

Toss shells, pearls, corals behind in their grace.

So it is, o young Poet, in your heart!

Passion often gives threatening storms a start,

But when you raise your lute, it leaves you unscarred,

In the oblivion of deep waters will drown

And the immortal songs will scatter down

From which on your brow ages will weave the crown.

#### **AJUDAH**

Lubię poglądać wsparty na Judahu skale,

Jak spienione bałwany to w czarne szeregi

Ścisnąwszy się buchają, to jak srebrne śniegi

W milionowych tęczach kołują wspaniale.

Trącą się o mieliznę, rozbiją na fale,  
Jak wojsko wielorybów zalegając brzegi,  
Zdobędą ląd w tryumfie i, na powrót zbiegi,  
Mieć za sobą muszle, perły i korale.

Podobnie na twe serce, o poeto młody!  
Namiętność często groźne wzburza niepogody;  
Lecz gdy podniesiesz bardon, ona bez twej szkody

Ucieka w zapomnienia pogrążyć się toni  
I nieśmiertelne pieśni za sobą uroni,  
Z których wieki uplotą ozdobę twych skroni.

In Mickiewicz's sonnet cycle we may observe a clash of two themes that together constitute the poet's internal experience during his Crimean journey – fascination with the beauty of oriental nature, and longing for the fatherland and everything that seems familiar. The poet attempts to balance those two images (so different geographically and emotionally) in a way which does not let his nostalgia blur and becloud the lyrical reportage. The true beauty of the sonnets is thus conveyed in this very harmony between the imaginary element and the emotional element. I would go so far as to claim that the ability to create such harmony is the essence of Romantic poetics, the goal of which is, indeed, to express the suffering of the Romantic individual and great admiration for history and its manifestations in nature. In the last sonnet of the Crimean cycle, "Ajudah", Mickiewicz accomplished the difficult task of uniting a description of the artist's self and the image of the Crimean mountains and waters through creation of an analogy between these two themes. What is more, the sea was described in the first two stanzas (quatrains), while reflection upon the poet's fate is in the last two stanzas (tercets), which points to a harmonious way of thematic organisation typical for the sonnet genre. Moreover, because "Ajudah" closes the cycle, it offers a moment of poetic reflection and conclusion to the journey, and by then the emotions which made it difficult to unite the description of nature with the longing for home with auto-thematic observations have faded away. Earlier in the cycle, for example in the "Pilgrim", the artist struggled to balance these themes: "At my feet land of beauty and abundance, / Bright sky overhead, by my side a fair face; / Why does my heart escape to that far-off place / And, alas, to times of far greater distance?"

The way Crimean waters are depicted is strictly linked to Mickiewicz's meta-poetic reflections. One can even describe "Ajudah"'s structural organisation as a crystal where every element of nature's

characterisation reflects upon the second part of the poem. "In this sonnet there is a similarity between the image of the nature, constructed here in an epic way, and the internal life of the "I" who observed this nature as well as the objectivised protagonist ("young Poet")"<sup>21</sup>.

Thus the sea represents the poet, the movements of the waves his passion, and the pearls and corals shuffled by the waters the songs, that is, the artist's writings in general. Critic Stanisław Tarnowski wrote: "This imaging through feelings is a great beauty of the Crimean sonnet cycle"<sup>22</sup>. These words powerfully reflect the merging of the two themes of the Crimean journey as well as the ability to find an inspiration for reflections on the poet's role and his immortality in nature. This very word, uttered in the last stanza ("immortal" in Mikoś's translation: "In the oblivion of deep waters will drown / And the immortal songs will scatter down, / From which on your brow ages will weave the crown" [vv. 12-14]), is an example of classical themes (here: "Non omnis moriar") in Mickiewicz's poems. At the same time this sonnet, because of both its form and its allusions to Horatian themes, points to Mickiewicz's ultimate inability to free himself from the Classical tradition.

The most significant message of the sonnet is that about the essence of poetics: "So it is, o young Poet, in your heart! / Passion often gives threatening storms a start, / But when you raise your lute, it leaves you unscarred, // In the oblivion of deep waters will drown / And the immortal songs will scatter down". These tercets comprise both a condensed image of the Romantic artist, and a Horatian theme, as they deal with the struggles (called in the sonnet "passions") that a Romantic writer has to face. These passions "break upon the heart and brain", that is, obstruct a calm and peaceful life, and cause the poet to be unsure about his role, poetic goal, and unable to find a place for himself in the reality where he must exist. Yet – according to Mickiewicz – to pick up the lute, i.e. to make an attempt to write and follow one's destiny, is enough to live a normal life, and to transfer one's potential into lyrical works. Therefore thanks to properly ensconced passions the Romantic poet will be happy and will not be forgotten by future generations.

In the last sonnet the poet "is able to clearly and accurately judge his poems with Olympian peace and an awareness of his masterly achievements"<sup>23</sup>. Yet this is not the most important thing in "Ajudah". Its message, superficially pointing only to the poet's auto-definition, is in fact outstandingly original and significant because it answers the question: in what way should a Romantic artist live so that his distinctness will not cause him pain but, instead, turn into an artistic inspiration? The poem's composition reflects a similar concept of juxtaposing a lyrical image of nature with an emotional act of pondering. Only the balance between passions (including longing for home) and fascination by oriental landscapes enables the poet to truly exist in our world. Tomasz Zan very accurately called the Crimean sonnet cycle "the true story of the poet's heart"<sup>24</sup>, not only to express Mickiewicz's nostalgia and his outstanding skills, but also to describe the role of the Romantic poet and to point out the extremely thin line between genius and madness.

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<sup>21</sup> Makowski S., *Świat Sonetów Krymskich Adama Mickiewicza* [The World of Adam Mickiewicz's Crimean Sonnets], Warsaw 1969, p. 163.

<sup>22</sup> The quote comes from: *Adam Mickiewicz. Wybór poezji* [Adam Mickiewicz. Selected Poems], book 2, ed. Czesław Zgorzelski, Wrocław 1986, p. XXXI.

<sup>23</sup> Zgorzelski Cz., *O sztuce poetyckiej Mickiewicza* [On Mickiewicz's Poetic Art], Warsaw 2001, p. 379.

<sup>24</sup> Zan's letter to Mickiewicz, July 1827 in: *Żywot i korespondencja Tomasz Zana* [The Life and Correspondence of Tomasz Zan], Kraków 1863, pp. 6-8.

### A few final remarks

In the essay I presented Mickiewicz's Crimean journey and his "Crimean Sonnets" cycle as an environment which caused a spiritual change of the poet. This cycle, albeit created during a very early stage of the Polish Romanticism, represents a crucial point in the development of the movement in Mickiewicz's country and presents ideas that are very different to the "Sonnets from Odessa" written by Mickiewicz only a few years earlier and published together with the Crimean cycle. It was precisely the clash between the artist's native Polish culture and the new, oriental Crimean world that led Mickiewicz to understand his destiny and role as an artist; thus his physical journey was accompanied by a spiritual one, which is the true theme of the cycle.

Already in the first sonnet, "The Akkerman Steppes", a Romantic attitude towards exploring the world and human nature is pointed out by Mickiewicz, who wrote "I sail the expanse of the dry ocean", instead of, as in the first version, "I explored the expanse of the dry ocean". Such difference between the act of exploring and having already explored signifies the crucial epistemological difference between Classicism and Romanticism. While in the first sonnet the pilgrim-traveller longs for home and does not make a proper attempt to observe and understand the Crimean nature and culture which would enrich him later, he quickly becomes fascinated with them, as is visible in the fifth sonnet, "View of the Mountains from the Koslov Steppes". This poem is also a prime example of Mickiewicz's attempts to exercise and reformulate the sonnet as a Classical and rigid lyrical form, as it introduces a drama-like dialogue between the two "protagonists" of the cycle, a native guide Mirza and the Pilgrim – the poet himself. The fourteenth sonnet, "The Pilgrim", depicts the poet's crisis of identity and his great feeling for home which surpass even the fascination by the Crimean land. Furthermore, in "The Road Along the Precipice at Chufut-Kale", which directly follows "The Pilgrim", the subject finally fully discovers his Romantic nature by an epistemological act of ignoring Mirza's advice and looking into the abyss, which is a metaphor for the transcendental knowledge sought by the Romantics. Yet it is Mirza who, through his great admiration of the Crimean culture and his different way of seeing the Crimean phenomena, triggers the metaphysical attitudes of the Pilgrim. The sonnet significantly ends with the poet's lament about not being able to put what he saw into the "mortal's tongue" - a problem of expressing the inexpressible which often appeared in Romantic literature. Finally, in the last sonnet, "Ajudah", the Pilgrim discovers a way to fulfil his destiny and live a happy life: he needs to "raise [his] lute", that is, make an attempt to create poetic art which would try to convey his feelings and transcendental knowledge. He also discovers that only a balance between passions (including longing for home) and the fascination by oriental landscapes enables the poet to truly exist in our world. In this way his two feelings that were superseding each other finally become balanced and unified.

Looking at the message from "Ajudah", we may say that Mickiewicz's decision to compose "Crimean Sonnets" meant following his destiny. The cycle started as an unbalanced combination of a mournful reflection about longing for the poet's home and an expression of excitement about the unknown; it ended as a discovery and the poet's vocation through the juxtaposition of the two extreme feelings: longing for homeland and becoming fascinated by a new, oriental land. This juxtaposition of feelings as well as of two poetic *personae*, the Pilgrim (poet) and the foreign Mirza, in the end triggered the birth of a Romantic artist.



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