

# ‘Souvenirs of blooming centuries to follow’ — the First Historic Journey of Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz

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Spring and summer of 1811 was extremely hot in Poland which Niemcewicz noted in his diary from that period<sup>1</sup>. The writer using the brake from public duties decided to travel around Poland. He wanted to explore the lands of Krakow, Sandomierz and Lublin. He left Warsaw in the evening on June 27. Description of that expedition is presented in his work entitled *Historical Journeys on Polish Land between 1811 and 1828 completed*. During these ten years Niemcewicz took nine travels, this was the first of them<sup>2</sup>.

When in June 1811 he was leaving Warsaw he had already made many journeys. In the spring of 1780 he accompanied Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski as his aide in a trip to Volyn, Podolia and Ukraine on which the prince went with his numerous court. Niemcewicz was delighted to take part in it as he recalled in his diary: ‘On this trip I visited the most beautiful, most fertile provinces of my homeland’<sup>3</sup>. As a young writer he also took an over two-year *grand tour* of Europe which, as noted by Czesław Niedzielski, was recognized as ‘an essential part of political education’<sup>4</sup>. Niemcewicz visited France, Italy and England but not at the courts and sophisticated societies because he did not have sufficient financial resources. Young writer was attracted mainly by splendid cultural life of visited European cities, especially the

1 *Pamiętniki Juliana Ursyna Niemcewicza 1809–1813*, v.1, Dresden 1871, p. 258.

2 Niemcewicz J.U., *Podróże historyczne po ziemiach polskich między rokiem 1811 a 1828 odbyte*, Petersburg 1858.

3 Niemcewicz J.U., *Pamiętniki czasów moich*, v. I, ed. Dihm J., Warsaw 1957, p. 127.

4 Niedzielski Cz., *O teoretycznoliterackich tradycjach prozy dokumentarnej. Podróż, powieść, reportaż*, „Towarzystwo Naukowe w Toruniu. Prace Wydziału Filologiczno-Historycznego”, v. XVII, part 1, Toruń 1996, pp. 35–36.

theater on which he spared his money eating in cheap inn<sup>5</sup>. When he was in Italy after ten years once again he wrote:

Dojrzałszy, usposobieński, niżlim był przed lat dziesięcią, postanowiłem nie zabawę dla siebie, lecz pożytek jaki dla kraju mego z podróży tej przynieść, przedsięwziąłem w ojczystym języku porządnie Włochy opisać<sup>6</sup>.

One of the most challenging journey which the writer took was sailing to America. After leaving the prison of St. Petersburg Niemcewicz wanted to return to the country. But he could not refuse Kosciuszko as he was suffering from leg paresis (it turned out that it was fake) and who persuaded him to go to America. And so in December 1796 they set off on a dangerous and tiresome journey to another continent. For Niemcewicz that journey proved to be the beginning of a new stage in life. He married abroad thereby obtaining American citizenship and led the life of 'the American farmer'. Nevertheless, this new role did not suit him well. First of all, he could not live away from his homeland and playing out of the political arena of events that could change the fate of the country. In spring of 1807 he returned to Poland.

Trips were therefore an essential elements of the writer's life. However, according to the enlightened traveling, did not belong to noble activities. Settled and stable lifestyle was of higher value as it enabled continuous engagement in public affairs<sup>7</sup>. But it was not compatible with Niemcewicz's temperament who being in his full strength could not find himself in the role of guardian of the family hearth. Travelling was in his nature but he always tried to do something useful for his country. After numerous international voyages Niemcewicz decided it was time to explore and describe Polish lands.

Report from the first historic trip begins as follows:

Zbiegiem niefortunnych okoliczności, długo po odległych miotanemu morzach, długo chętnie czy niechętnie wędrującemu po obcych krainach, los dotąd poznać dokładnie nie dozwolił znacznej części własnej ojczyzny. Skoro więc kilkoniedzielną w publicznych obowiązkach znalazłem przerwę, by dogodzić nienagannej rozumem ciekawości, ująć przed upałami murów stolicy, zażyć na koniec potrzebnego dla zdrowia ruchu, wybrałem się na zwiedzenie tej części Polski, która dla dawnych pamiątek, obfitych płodów kruszczowych i tylu innych powodów jest jedną z najbardziej obchodzących Polaka<sup>8</sup>.

5 Niemcewicz J.U., *Pamiętniki czasów moich*, op. cit., p. 221.

6 Ibidem, v. II, p. 63.

7 Niedzielski Cz., op. cit., p. 32.

8 Niemcewicz J.U., *Podróże historyczne...*, op. cit., p. 1.

Niemcewicz like the mythical Odysseus begins after numerous wanderings his journey back home. On the one hand, he comes back home in the literal sense as the first expedition ends in writer's native land — in Neple. On the other hand, house to which he returns is the Polishness sought after by wandering in 'the depths of the past'<sup>9</sup> and confronted with the current state of the country. From this perspective Niemcewicz's *Historical Travels* fits to the era of romantic voyage-writing. None other than romantics privileged that, as noted by Janina Kamionka-Straszakowa, 'deep travel into your own history and traditions, to the center of nationality inside your own, individual and collective consciousness and identity'<sup>10</sup>. Niemcewicz also travels to the center but not as romantic but as a man of the Enlightenment trying to describe reasonably the observed reality on his journey. Let us, therefore, discuss the course of the writer's first historical expedition.

The center of all Niemcewicz's historical journeys is the capital. She is the starting point of every trip. The purpose of the first trip was to visit the lands of Krakow, Sandomierz and Lublin which from 1809 belonged to the Princedom of Warsaw. There is no coincidence that Niemcewicz begins his travels from that historic part of the country which he considers, as we remember, as one of 'the greatest importance for the Pole'<sup>11</sup>. The selection of this region for the first historic journey is a kind of civic duty. The writer, however, does not intend to visit only large, historic cities. He does not select the place of visit. During the trip he goes through numerous little-known towns or villages and about each visited village he notes down some observations.

Niemcewicz chooses to travel alone. His only companion is a coachman who is ordered to ask for directions while he ponders upon the expedition:

[...] zleciwszy woźnicy memu pilnie pytać o drogę; sam zanużyłem się w myślach, uprzedzając wcześniej rozkosze, które mnie w podróży tej czekały<sup>12</sup>.

The first settlement which the writer visited was Raszyn associated by him with ancient Thermopylae. He reminds the battle against the Austrian army which took place there only two years earlier, on April 19, 1809. He is struck by the sight of rural girls dancing the French quadrille on the site of the recently fought battle. For Niemcewicz, who was a staunch opponent of

9 Ibidem, p. 13.

10 Kamionka-Straszakowa J., *Podróż*, a word [in:] *Słownik literatury polskiej XIX w.*, ed. Kowalczykowa A., Bachórz J., Wrocław 1991, p. 700.

11 Niemcewicz J.U., *Podróż historyczne...*, op. cit., p. 1.

12 Ibidem.

foreignness<sup>13</sup>, this view is even more annoying. He regrets that ‘the youth quickly forget the past, do not take heed for the future, and like to enjoy only the present moment’<sup>14</sup>. His *Historic Travels on Polish Soil* are just to preserve the Polishness threatened by foreign influences. The description of the first village — Raszyn is the exemplification of all Niemcewicz’s historical travels. It is an announcement of constant confrontations of the past with the present and the history with the current situation.

At the beginning of the trip some complications crept into view namely Niemcewicz and the coachman got lost. The writer had planned a trip route but not in the smallest detail. Surely he knew which village he wanted to visit but also he allowed some deviations from the path in order to visit places that were not recognized in the initial travel plans and which seemed to him, however, interesting and worth describing. When it turned out that they detoured too much by going in the wrong direction Niemcewicz’s servant advised him to take a shortcut known to him. And so they came to the village of Parola not contained on any communication route. There he spent night in the miller’s house as it turned out — best friend of the servant. This, for obvious reasons, raised the writer’s suspicion that the servant planned all. There were plenty of flies in the room so the guest had to sleep outside. The first night when traveling was not the quietest:

Uradzono spać na podwórzu, posłano mi pod gruszką około płota, w sąsiedztwie rozmaitych bydła domowych; nieproszone wizyty świń, krów, wykakających siano spođe mnie, acz zmordowanemu, nie dały mi oka zmrzyć. Przepędziłem tę noc, jak przed kilku tysiącami lat babilońscy pasterze: to jest na uważaniu gwiazd<sup>15</sup>.

This funny plot throws some light on the reality in which people used to travel in nineteenth-century Poland. Another time due of the terrible rain and the lack of any inn on the area Niemcewicz could not visit the Castle in Pieskowa Skała. Unfortunately, in the *Historical Travels* the author very rarely places in the foreground his adventures and hardships associated with the travel which is so interesting to the modern audience. It focuses primarily on describing the route, visited sites removing his person to the shadow.

As it was already mentioned, the writer chose to travel without companions. This does not mean that the whole expedition was carried out in so-

13 The writer gave this impression many times. He led the fight against the French fashion in the comedy *Pan Nowina, czyli dom pocztowy* (*Mr. News or Post Office House*) (created 1811, Published Warsaw, 1815).

14 Niemcewicz J.U., *Podróże historyczne...*, op. cit., p. 2.

15 Ibidem, p. 2.

litute. For an open and talkative Niemcewicz one of the most important aspects of travel was an opportunity to talk with people. Information derived from them are hard to find in the annals. On his way he met long unseen friends, for example his companion in the Kosciuszko Uprising — Plewiński who joined and accompanied him on a trip to another village. Another time Niemcewicz joined the governor Potocki to visit Wieliczka together:

Acz już podziemia te dawniej widziałem, sądziłem jednak, że w towarzystwie jego lepiej i dokładniej je obejrzę<sup>16</sup>.

Back to the place where he have been, confrontation with the experience of the past, memories of good or bad feelings with the present ones is an important aspect in the context of the discussion on traveling. The perception of the visited place changes depending on whether you are alone or in the company. However, it seems that Niemcewicz decided to join the governor Potocki because of quite mundane reasons. He hoped that thanks to the visiting the mine in the company of an officer he could see more than during private wandering around the mine.

The main highlight of Niemcewicz's journey are church institutions. The author does not overlook any church or monastery on the path of his journey. He considers them as monuments of historical memory and he sees clergy men as the guards of this heritage. Visiting dilapidated Olkusz and local church he says:

Tym to przybytkom Boga winniśmy jedynie świadectwo czasów zeszłych; nierząd, obcy nieprzyjaciele wytępiali żyjących, niszczyli ich gmachy i majątki, rzadko atoli targnęli się na pańskie świątynie i mieszkania już zmarłych<sup>17</sup>.

He explores religious orders, examines graves, checks the status of church libraries, asks to take care of Kadłubek's image engraved in stone when he visits the priest's cell. He often meets a religious holiday or indulgence. He is very moved by a mass in a church in the town Książ, humble people's faces singing the old hymn of the melody unknown to Niemcewicz from other parts of the country. The atmosphere of this mass awakens hopes for a change of the fate of the country in the author:

Trudno, by długie dolegliwości i tyle módl gorących nie zmiękczyły niebios, by nieba te nie miały tyle i tak długo cierpianych klęsk nagrodzić na koniec bytem szczęśliwym!<sup>18</sup>

16 Ibidem, p. 54.

17 Ibidem, p. 41.

18 Ibidem, p. 30.

Echo of the romantic provincialism is very clear here, though usually Niemcewicz tries to explain rationally the reasons of the collapse of the country for which people and their actions are responsible<sup>19</sup>.

The writer is aware of how much space is devoted to church institutions but believes that this will keep a piece of dying inheritance.

Może zbyt zastanawiam się nad klasztorami, ale kto wie, jeżeli nie opisuję je ostatni, kto wie, jak wiele zostaje im lat trwałości<sup>20</sup>.

It is among the monuments of the historical memory of the past that he is looking for signs constantly confronts it with the current situation. Historicity is the starting point for his departure the historicity is also the foundation of complex descriptions. The lands of Krakow, Sandomierz, Lublin, which the author chose for his first trip are historical areas particularly marked in the history of the country. Present time as compared the past turns to be sometimes depressing. Wandering to places once prideful often turns into a journey through the ruins of their former glory. The image of fall show especially castles and palaces which apart from churches and monasteries are the main point Niemcewicz's journey. The author regrets upon the ruins of the castle in Chęciny where 'windows and doors, it is all that remains of the building where many Piast kings lived'<sup>21</sup>; over the ruins of the Tęczyński Castle that building 'is abandoned, deaf and blind'<sup>22</sup>; over dilapidated Wiślica where the Casimir the Great created Statutes of Wiślica and in the time of Niemcewicz everything that remains from noble past of the city are beautiful brick cellars in each of the houses. Unfortunately, 'anywhere else on the place of ancient mud huts brick buildings rise, in our places mud huts replace the buildings'<sup>23</sup>. Even in Krakow after the departure of governor Potocki who was visiting the city strikes 'emptiness and sadness'<sup>24</sup>. The stay in Kielce leads the writer to the following conclusion: 'sad ruins shoot out because with us without ruins nothing can be!'<sup>25</sup>. Noteworthy is the description of the ruins of the Palace of Bożęcín which fate is a metaphor for the fate of his homeland:

19 See Deszczyńska M., *Koncepcja dziejów w „Podróżach historycznych po ziemiach polskich...” Juliana Ursyna Niemcewicza*, [in:] *Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz — pisarz, historyk, świadek epoki*, ed. Wójcicki J., Warsaw 2002, p. 294.

20 Niemcewicz J.U., *Podróże historyczne...*, op. cit., p. 30.

21 Ibidem, p. 26.

22 Ibidem, p. 43.

23 Ibidem, p. 73.

24 Ibidem, p. 67.

25 Ibidem, p. 24.

Było to porzucone, obumarłe ciało, bez straży, kruki i sępy szarpały je, ile mogły. Ten los był kraju całego<sup>26</sup>.

The theme of the ruin occurs in works of many contemporary writers, not only domestic<sup>27</sup> but also in the post-partition Poland took a special meaning. According to Teresa Kostkiewiczowa 'it served as a kind of justification about disastrous situation and putting her in order the arbitrarily established history'<sup>28</sup>.

Gloomy landscape of destruction and the collapse writer opposes to the times when Poland was a superpower<sup>29</sup>. He reminds victorious battles, rulers, eminent families of Szydłowiecki or Tęczyński. Among the heroes of the past King Casimir the Great is repeatedly mentioned in the description of the first trip and regarded as the ideal ruler of the Enlightenment<sup>30</sup>. There are also King Władysław Lokietek and Queen Jadwiga. The writer refers to King Zygmunt times so close to him. Historical but legendary characters whose traces Niemcewicz is looking on his journey crowd then cards of his works. The inspiration for it is usually history but in the case of the novel *Jan z Tęczyna* (*John of Tęczyń*) it seems that it is the journey that inspired him to write it. The writer admired 'strangely beautiful' portrait of a young Tęczyński located in the Krzeszowski Palace. Then he became the hero of very widely read novel entitled *Jan z Tęczyna* (*John of Tęczyń*)<sup>31</sup>.

Niemcewicz enriched the description of the visited places with extracts from chronicles (Surowiecki, Miechowita, Sarnicki, Długosz) or insertions of other documents to which he had access during the trip (e.g. bills of governors of Krakow from 1558). The writer does not omit anything because he says that 'all of those happy times means a lot for the Pole'<sup>32</sup>, every detail can make a difference for future generations.

Reference to the credible source is used not only to verify the reliability of the recipients but also to arouse the interest in the described lands and their fate. The author tries to present the best impression as possible of the

26 Ibidem, p. 14.

27 What should be noted here is a well known enlightenment poem by Constantin François de Chateaubriand Volney entitled *Rozważaliny, czyli uwagi nad rewolucjami narodów*. See Deszczyńska M., op. cit., pp. 290–295.

28 Kostkiewiczowa T., *Horyzonty wyobraźni. O języku poezji czasów Oświecenia*, Warsaw 1984, pp. 243–244.

29 Martyna Deszczyńska (op.cit., p. 295) notes that building the description through the phenomenon of contrast we find also in Volney. The issue of the impact of Volney on Niemcewicz is yet a separate article.

30 Bartkiewicz K., *Obraz dziejów oświeceniowych w świadomości historycznej w Polsce doby oświecenia*, Poznań 1979, pp. 105–113.

31 See Dihm J., *Wstęp do*: J.U. Niemcewicz, *Jan z Tęczyna*, ed. Dihm J., Wrocław 1954, pp. LVIII–LIX.

32 Niemcewicz J.U., *Podróże historyczne...*, op. cit., p. 46.

visited places. The comparison of historic times with present ones shows continuous variation of history which the readers witness through reading. Constant references to 'blooming centuries' of Poland function persuasive in a way — it has to arouse a sense of pride of being a Pole in the audience, a sense of national identity.

In this bleak landscape of ruins emerge, however, some exceptions — the fruit of human labor, ingenuity and entrepreneurship which testifies to the continued rebirth of nature. The role of man is to recognize and wisely utilize what nature bestows on him. At the beginning of the journey Niemcewicz draws attention to Szydłowiec not saved by history but with 'all the gifts'<sup>33</sup> of the nature and thanks to the new owner has the opportunity to return to its former glory. He is also impressed by Krzeszowice the village which 'humanity and effort thanks to the efforts of Princess Lubomirska from Czartoryski M.W.K. today has become a very useful and pleasant place'<sup>34</sup>. The Duchess has used the gifts of nature and arranged in beautifully located Krzeszowice therapeutic baths<sup>35</sup>. Another therapeutic baths Niemcewicz finds near Krakow in Szwooszowice. They belong to a 'reasonable, careful, but not wealthy IMP Radwanski'<sup>36</sup>.

During his first journey Niemcewicz also visits mines and factories. Their descriptions are very comprehensive and detailed, enriched with excerpts from various sources and guides followed by the writer. This reveals Niemcewicz's interest on industrial and economic affairs. Sometimes he suggests a solution that would contribute to the development of the given place. Any signs of progress and prosperity enjoy the writer in particular. They are a model and show the way of the proceedings. In the political situation it was very important. The products of human work emerging from the ashes gave hope for a rebirth of the lost country from the ruins.

Noteworthy is also the way of describing Niemcewicz's travel. As noted by Hana Voisine-Jechova:

33 Ibidem, p. 5.

34 Ibidem, pp. 41–42.

35 Visiting places in healing villages was very popular among the Poles who were frequent visitors to the Lower Silesian health resorts (Mazzini M., *Dziewiętnastowieczne podróże Polaków do dolnośląskich wód*, [in:] *Dziedzictwo Odyseusza. Podróż, obcość i tożsamość, identyfikacja, przestrzeń*, ed. Cieśla-Korytowska M., Płaszczewska O., Cracow 2007, pp. 323–336.

36 Ibidem, p. 68.



Podróży nie opisuje się prawie nigdy w momencie, kiedy są realizowane, i pewien odstęp czasu prowadzi zawsze do modyfikacji tego, co się widziało. Pod tym względem mają one pewne cechy wspólne z pamiętnikami<sup>37</sup>.

The Niemcewicz's relation in *Historical Travels* is not typical for a diary. Niemcewicz shapes the description of his wanderings in such way that the reader has the feeling of experiencing of events and preserving them on the pages of the book. This is due to an unusually scrupulous descriptions, recalling of details presenting the reality with faithful accuracy. The author exposes also the moments of movement: trips to the village and the arrival to the next one. A recurring theme is the description of the way that leads to another place on the map of Niemcewicz's wandering as well as weather conditions (he often travels in dense rain). The movement has to do with the passing of time and showing the narrator not only by what he saw, as the Hana Voisine-Jechova claims, but also the conditions under which the given monument is visited were characteristic of romantic travel, subjective<sup>38</sup> whereas in the classical works the writers sought to provide objective information which was allowed due to the time between the travel and the creation of the relation about it.

Moving from one place to another is accompanied by a change of the surrounding landscape which reinforces the impression of the variability of history. The transition from one reality to another is sometimes sudden as it is at the exit of mining areas around Kielce:

Dotąd w padolach między czarno zarosłymi górami, wśród stosów węgla, wśród szeroko rozproszonych żużli, stękanie miechów, dźwięk szczękających młotów, huk rzucających się wód na koła uderzały słuch mój. Nie spotykało oko, jak lejące się roztopionych kruszców potoki lub iskrzące się czerwone szyny, kształcone silnymi ramiony w narzędzia śmierci człowieka lub jego pożytku. Zbliżając się do Jędrzejowa, miło mi było widzieć otwarte i wesołe pola, zielone lasy, wszędzie uprawę i bujność<sup>39</sup>.

Image of civilization, dynamic growth that is both overwhelming and increases anxiety Niemcewicz collides with idyllic views that wake a sense of security. Description of the landscape must be sufficiently suggestive that the reader not only feels the atmosphere of the visited place but also emotions and feelings that accompany the traveler. Niemcewicz like a typical

37 Voisine-Jechova H., *Podróż jako doświadczenie, marzenie oraz poszukiwanie sensu*, [in:] *Dziedzictwo Odyseusza*..., op. cit., p. 126.

38 Voisine-Jechova H., op. cit., p. 126.

39 Niemcewicz J.U., *Podróże historyczne*..., op. cit., p. 28.

man of the Enlightenment<sup>40</sup> looks in the Polish countryside for similarities with landscapes known from his foreign travels. Świętokrzyskie Mountains reminded him of the Apennines in Italy and Appalachians in America. He writes about the surroundings of Ojców: 'At this point it seems that a human being is transferred in the midst of the Alps or the Swiss land'<sup>41</sup> but when sent to the convent of the Carmelites he says: 'Switzerland cannot be proud of beautiful location'<sup>42</sup>. Polish landscape outweighs the beauty of the most beautiful foreign places.

The last point of the first Niemcewicz's historic trip is Neple — his hometown. The description of the place evokes the mythical Arcadia:

Neple, mieszkanie Ignacego Niemcewicza, w najpiękniejszym są położeniu. Dom na wzgórku, w przepaści pod nim u dołu płynie rzeka wężykiem; za nią odkrywa oko w niezmiernej przestrzeni rozwinięte pasmami pole, smugi, włości i gaje, wieże miasta Brześcia, stołecznego województwa mego, uwieńczają horyzont<sup>43</sup>.

The first historical journey came to an end. Niemcewicz like the mythical Odysseus arrives home not only in the literal sense. All this historical journey was a trip back home. It was a journey into the glorious past, into days when the lands he visited were as an inseparable entirety. In the plan mythical a journey to the cradle of the homeland integrates land seized by the conqueror. At the end of the relation of the first historical expedition the writer places a quote from *The Bible*. The last words read:

I rzekł Pan do niego: „Tać jest ziemia, którą przysiągł Abrahamowi, Izakowi i Jakubowi”, mówiąc: „Nasieniu twemu dam ją. Widziałeś ją oczyma twymi, ale nie przejdziesz do niej”<sup>44</sup>.

You can wander that earth, touch her, to see, to describe, but it is a land plundered by the conqueror, snatched from the nation who lived on it.

40 According to HanaVoisine-Jechova (op. cit., pp. 126–127) in the classicism everyone was convinced of the community of taste and what was different was seen as a sign of barbarism. In the romanticism they were not looking for similarities in the visited places but the differences and what is specific and unusual.

41 Ibidem, p. 34.

42 Ibidem, p. 44.

43 Ibidem, p. 89.

44 Ibidem, p. 90.

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