

Journey towards eternity.  
Peter Wlast migration of the soul  
based on *The Book of idyllic poetry*

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When reading *Księga Poezji Idyllicznej* (*The Book of Idyllic Poetry*) one gets the impression that the carefully prescribed poems, despite the assurances of the author<sup>1</sup>, are representing a category of miscellany rather than an orderly collection of poetry. Sonnets, epigrams, hymns, prayers, prose, poetry and even romance — all written in different styles, and conventions, often contradicting each other — through which one can get the impression that *Księga* (*The Book*) is not a work of an outstanding artist but a product of mediocre, even schizophrenic mind. As a proof of this we can point out adjacent poems which are metric-worked including ambitious pairs of rhymes. We can feel almost tangibly the truth and talent in the pronunciation, as well as a kind of self-restraint, sarcasm and author's sense of humor. Other poems do not have these characteristics at all. They seem to be unintentionally grotesque and banal. The reason why we should categorize poetry contained in *Księga* (*The Book*) is that when we read it we can clearly see emerging topics important for Wlast, around which he circulates and seeks to explain. Reception of the masterpiece is sometimes entirely different and — what is more important — each one is correct. Stanisław Pigoń assessing all as worthless claimed that the Wlast's work is only a testimony of the ruin<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, Roman Zimand in

1 Piotr Wlast in the third point of *Uwagi do Niniejszej Księgi* (495 manuscript card) writes about the categorization of the poems in the manuscript. He claims that he did not use neither the chronological order on purpose nor 'categorization of essence' but the intention of explanation [of the poems — K. T.] though the rapprochement'.

2 Pigoń S., *Trzy świadectwa o Marii Komornickiej*, [in:] *Miscellanea z pogranicza XIX i XX wieku*, „Archiwum Literackie”, v 8, 1964.

*Klucze do Marii* P.O.W. writes that as the aesthetic concept of *Księga* (*The Book*) is concerned it must be assessed very positively<sup>3</sup>.

*Księga poezji idyllicznej* (*The Book of Idyllic Poetry*) certainly belongs to the genre of autobiographical works and is firmly adherent to the life of Peter Włast and *before* Maria Komornicka. It brings together the threads of the past which Włast is dealing with or just mentions them while designing his idyll. Uncertain times in which the manuscript<sup>4</sup> is created, make Peter Włast's thoughts go back to the moment when he was happy, or travel to the time in which he will be happy. His sentimental journey shows the image of an old man who is not distorted by his obligations towards society and excluded by the public. The old man, who is returning to the moments when he was a child<sup>5</sup> and who wants to become an Angel<sup>6</sup>. In this paper I will discuss two themes that appear regularly in *Księga* (*The Book*) — a journey into the past to the country of his childhood and the journey into the future — through the implementation of which Piotr Odmieniec Włast tried to give sense to his life, seek for self-liberation creating an alternative reality.

#### *Old child goes home*

Old man-child from the perspective of which Włast is writing reveals himself to us in the very first poem of *Księga* (*The Book*) — *Jakie to dziwne albo Bouddha Bénédictin* (*How Strange or Bouddha Benedictine*) — in which the narrator begins a conversation with God as follows:

Na obraz Swój stworzyłeś mnie, Boziu drogi,  
A ja tak lubię się spokojnie i gryzmolić,  
I być potulnym, cichym, dobrym dzieckiem,  
Które Matka, idąc pokojami,  
Łagodną ręką po głowinie gładzi,  
I które wszystkiemu rade,  
I któremu wszyscy radzi.

[KPI 1]

3 Zimand R., *Klucze do Marii* P.O.W. [in:] *Wojna i spokój*, London 1984.

4 *Księga poezji idyllicznej* emerges when the country is embedded in the war. The full title appears on the first cards of the manuscript: *W Grabowie podczas wojny. Księga poezji idyllicznej* (*In Grabów During the War. The Book of Idillic Poetry*).

5 Kralkowska-Gątkowska K., *Cień twarzy. Szkice o Twórczości Marii Komornickiej*, Katowice 2002, pp. 203–217.

6 Boniecki Edward in *Modernistyczny dramat ciała* (Warszawa 1998) writes broadly about Włast's desire to create the vision of Angel within him.

7 Every quotation with KPI abbreviation and card number refer to P. Odmieniec Włast / M. Komornicka, *Księga poezji idyllicznej* (*The Book of Idillic Poetry*), manuscript in the Museum of Literature of Adam Mickiewicz, sign. 346.

Włast in taming non-empirical things through natural familiarity with them which is a characteristic of childhood says to the Creator ‘Dear Gosh’. By that he puts himself in the position of a little child — what is important without any gender category — who being a divine descendant wants only a quiet life, sensitivity, maternal love, joy and possibility to enjoy the world around him. At the same time the narrator points out that he is already an old, tired man, a poet, whose only joy is derived from work:

O, mój BOŻE, mój najdroższy BOŻE!  
 Nie przynoszę tak wielkiego wstydu,  
 Będąc sobie, przez jakie pół wieku,  
 Boską iskrą zamkniętą w zmęczonym człowieku,  
 Starym dzieckiem, zgiętym nad robotą,  
 Bo mu wtedy myśl z żywszą ochotą  
 Po mózgowej krążyć może cieśni.

(KPI 2)

The narrator is thoroughly at the age of Piotr Włast and highlights subtly to the reader that the character of the child is only an implementation of the well-known topos literary fun thanks to which it is easy to confess about your life. He returns quickly to the infantile and indulgent treatment of higher issues (addressing God: ‘O, omnipotent, immense DAD’ [KPI 2]), which we have seen already in the psalms from the turn of the century and which was criticized legitimately by the experts from the period.

It can be assumed that it is only a prelude to dealing with God which came into being on the following pages of the manuscript. Meanwhile, Włast mentions cherishing family quarrels and humiliations with which he did not reconcile. In *Żale Parcelanta* (*The Grievances of Parcelant*) the narrator speaks directly about the loss of farms: Cychry and Grabowska Wola (estates belonged to Komornicka’s father) in which as he thought he would be a manager if not for the disease and premature death of his father, and cultural transformation which he had made:

O, moje bory, rodzinne bory,  
 Wycięte, gdy się tulalem chory  
 Pod znakiem ciemnej, burzliwej pory!  
 Wycięte przed dniem mej męskiej mocy,  
 Gdy mógłbym sycić wami swe oczy,  
 Rozumieć woń i szum wasz proroczy!

[KPI 14]

[...] O, tajemnicze Bogiń ustronia,  
 Gdzie przez Księżyce srebrzone blonia  
 Mknął Duch Powstańca na duchu konia!

O, dzieciom straszne duchów siedliska,  
Gdzie Charakternik, wśród uroczyska,  
Wieszczym natchnieniem w gwiazdy się ciska!

[KPI 15]

‘WszechGrabów’ becomes synonymous with paradise on earth, magical place embedded with mystery. A meeting place of ghosts from different cultures and fantastic creatures of myths and fairy tales. In Grabowski woods remained Włast’s memories. Dark, mysterious forests which for a small child were the personification of fears for the adult poet are fascinating. They evoke memories of ‘idyllic auroras of evenings’ nights he spent creating on the bosom of nature and mornings indicated by cooing pigeons. Nature has always been important for Komornicka. It served magical function in her works — characters of Maria P.O.W. found their peace, tranquility, joy, and sometimes even rescue in the nature. In 1897 in Warsaw Komornicka alone wrote in a letter to Zofia Villaume: ‘Forests! Forests! I’m all longing for nature’<sup>8</sup>. That Fragment comes from the period when Komornicka began rich artistic and literary life traveling through the world and ‘visiting’ it. This is the ‘lust for life’ period of the poet for which Piotr Włast is looking for in *Nostalgia*:

Lecz co raz! w nozdrza wpada zadumane  
Zapach dni dawnych, powiew dawnych nocy,  
Gdy hymn mi grały pulsa rozhukane,  
A świat otwierał się żądz żywych mocy!

[KPI 17]

All times referred to by the P.O.W. are moments in life of the young Komornicka in which she desired to reach the peaks and was already after her debut (well-received by the critics and the environment). As she did not have to worry about money she traveled the world, looked for inspiration, published and enjoyed her life. A detailed description of this period we find in *Listy* (*The Letters*) of Komornicka — especially to her mother with whom she was connected by a strange bond.

Anna Komornicka in the conception of her daughter seemed to have almost godlike powers<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, she has such strong influence on her daughter that Maria always looked for acceptance of all her plans from her mother. The mother was also the first to become acquainted with

8 Komornicka M., *Listy*, ed. Boniecki E., Warsaw 2011, p. 110.

9 Komornicka A., *Maria Komornicka w swych listach i mojej pamięci*, [in:] Komornicka M., *Listy*, op. cit.

Komornicka's newly established works and with her opinion the poet agreed the most.

*Księga* (*The Book*) in which Włast 'makes an effort to give meaning to his suffering and prevent despair, trying to save his dignity, identity and image of himself as a poet and mystic'<sup>10</sup> also deals in some way with his mother, leaving the image of the passive, angelic form known from fairy tales<sup>11</sup>.

We must not forget that in the times of writing of *Księga* (*The Book*) Peter Włast was completely dependent on the family. He lives in the estate of his brother and his mother does not want to see him. He writes: 'I cannot go where want to because I have neither papers nor money'<sup>12</sup>.

In *Księga* (*The Book*) the mother is the beloved and the hated figure at the same time shown as implacable guardian of virtue. She becomes a kind of Cerberus for Włast who wanted his mother's sensitivity more than anything in the world yet he dreamed of getting out from under her wings. We read about it in *Szerechmere*:

Matka mu się przetwarza —  
Wielolica,  
To przyjazna, to wraza —  
O, niezgłębiona  
Pra-tajemnica!

And further:

Matko! Jak wiele masz twarzy?...  
Straszysz mnie ciągłą zmianą.

[KPI 131]

In fact, in old man-child's story mother has two faces. On the one hand, Włast shows her as eternally suffering, realizing the theme *stabat mater dolorosa* — a woman whose constant concern is her own child. To this must be added: the baby greatly aware of its guilt. The child to whom the blame for suffering of the mother is constantly reminded:

O jak mnie serce boli,  
Matko moja!  
Za to łamanie twej niebiańskiej woli,  
Za twoje dawne cierpienie!

And:

O, Matko, Matko, Matko, jak źle ci było

10 Helbig-Mischewski B., *Strącona bogini. Rzęecz o Marii Komornickiej*, Cracow 2010, p. 427.

11 Komornicka M., *O ojcu i córce* [in:] *Baśnie. Psalmodie*, Warsaw 1900.

12 Komornicka M., *Listy*, op. cit., p. 451.

Na świecie!  
O Matko, ja dziś jeszcze od tego  
Umieram!

[KPI 132]

Another face is the old matron always disgusted, requiring mandatory submission to her will:

Mamo!...  
Nie rób tej miny!  
Ach, jej, jej, jej, jaki ja nieszczęśliwy,  
Gdy przez środek twarzy  
Ściągniesz sobie tę falde  
Podejrliwości, szyderstwa, uporu!

[KPI 133]

Rozsiałaś się, roztoczyłaś,  
Pycha ci rozdyma twarz i oczy kragli –  
Brylantowe koronki pierś podnosi mocna –  
Włos kręci się samowolnie ponad czołem,  
Które marszczy się kapryśnie i upornie!  
Co za pycha!...

[KPI 134]

This is the first moment when the author speaks directly about his suffering which is caused by the relationship with the mother. She during childhood aspired to angelic being in the eyes of the young female writer, in the mind of a young boy which Włast will identify at this point becomes a terrible figure, huge and frightening, intimidating the boy with pride, confidence and physiognomy. It reminds subsequent implementation of this topos by Alan Parker in *The Wall*. In the final part of the poem Włast emboldened by the outbursts towards his mother confesses, better than any retained letter shows, that this relation was tragic for the poet — the confession impossible for Maria, but not for Piotr:

Ja się nigdy nie ożenią z żadną,  
Skoro każda jakimś twym profilem!  
...chyba że tę spotkam, co obliczem  
Ciebie Mamo, nie przypomni w niczem!

[KPI 136]

Mother's strength is so huge that it makes every woman that the narrator will meet along his way marked by the stigma of an almighty mother. Therefore, the child rejects flirting and having relationship with women unless he meets the one that will not have any maternal element within.

O, gdzie jesteś, Ty, która mej Matce,  
 Niebłaganej Stróży mej cnoty,  
 Wyda wojnę Bogiń o me serce,  
 O najgłębsze duszy mej tęsknoty!  
 Jacyż Hypoerboreowi Władce  
 Kryją Cię, miłości triumfalną,  
 Gdy, w śmiertelnej uczuć wszechrozterce,  
 (jakbym się naradzał po raz wtóry)  
 Z własną Matką toczę walkę walną –  
 Z przekształtami Macierzyńskiej chmury!...

[KPI 136]

Interestingly, Włast so desirous of freedom remains passive. He is aware of the toxicity of his mother but the fight goes on within him and on the pages of *Księga Poezji Idyllicznej* (*The Book of Idyllic Poetry*). Only through the pen he is in the position to object his mother who does not accept other women. And it is the other woman who has to fight with his mother for her son's heart. His savior is treated as an unknown goddess which will bring him salvation.

How much demonic character is the mother we can learn from the poem entitled *Strzyża*. After taking a look at it we consider this a not so much ridicule of initiation ritual through its childish form as a metaphor for the ultimate deprivation of son's manhood, or as emphatically says Brigitta Helbig-Mischewski even castration<sup>13</sup>.

The father is the one who brings the son to the adult world and initiates him as in *Dziwny sen* (*A Strange Dream*) where during the symbolic journey through the Hill of Death two wanderers encounter the spirits of the ancestors, powerful forms of Forefathers and elders one of which seems Great-Grandfather to the boy. Here we are dealing with an example of the creation of the world by Włast which remains in opposition to the past reality in which the dream of a deep bond between son and father constantly appeared.

Dreams cannot come true because initiation is premature. The boy is not honored to face the highest figure of the divine circle — way is blocked by the Guard and the boy returns to the Father disappointed and melancholic. He indeed appears in *Księga* (*The Book*) very often and always in a form of highly idealized, unapproachable being. He is a guide to his son, the guardian of the Mystery which Włast sought throughout his life and about which he had extensive visions and premonitions.

13 Helbig-Mischewski B., op. cit., p. 442.

*A journey to the idyllic universe*

Wlast's projections which run far into the future — beyond the moment of death — are the hope to save the ailing poet's spirit. Reading the works of prophetic tone one gets the impression that *Księga* (*The Book*) was created for a specific purpose — to buy him a place in the Paradise. According to the philosophy of Buddhism and Hinduism in which the poet was fascinated death is only the beginning of the journey. Christianity with which Wlast's ethics remained linked closely recalls the moment of passing away as the beginning of eternal life. Throughout all the creations of Komornicka and later of Wlast Vedic and Christian motifs coexist and interpenetrate each other — it is no different in *Księga* (*The Book*) which *Przedmowa* (*Preface*) ends with the following words:

Gdy Nieba cud się otwiera,  
Nie czuję stóp swoich rany;  
W ustach już smak Devakhany

[KPI karta nienumerowana]

These three verses explain a lot. Wlast wanders many ways in his life. He made many trips — the real and the symbolic ones. All he wants now when he already gained knowledge about the flow of time is peace, freedom from the disease, regaining autonomy of existence and serious treatment. He realizes, however, that in this life he lost all what he cared for. The wounded poet can be saved from pain only by crossing the border of death and entering Heaven which God the Father opens before him. Devakhana in Peter Wlast's terms is an Indian implementation of temporary paradise — a place of angelic transformation of the spirit to the next character. Wlast is completely sure about this. Adoption of the Hindu vision of the timely existence (unimaginable from the Christian perspective cycles lasting twelve thousand years)<sup>14</sup> is the only way to explain Wlast's past life for him. Only the knowledge that the soul of the poet is at the very beginning of the road to the absolute can save his honor and legitimize his existence as God's chosen one. In *Preludium Starców* (*The Prelude of the Elders*) Wlast writes that life here and now 'is barely the beginning of acquaintance' [KPI 12]. We meet for a moment — we continue the rest of existence in the 'depths of eternity.' This applies not only to the living but also poets and wise-men whose 'works, themes / Or names I read on the grave' [KPI 12].

Wlast presupposes the existence of a second, divine world to which the road is sometimes long and toilsome a world which was really born. The

14 See Jakimowicz-Shah M., Jakimowicz A., *Mitologia indyjska*, Warsaw 1982, p. 166.



existence on the earth has become for a fifty-year old poet an eternal wandering. Komornicka/Włast travels longer as young full of life Ahaswera from 'Głos'<sup>15</sup> (*The Voice*) but the original — Ahaswerus. According to the poet means to get the chance to move to a better more developed version of the world is asceticism and 'ascetic techniques'. Therefore the narrator says that 'only students of ASKEZA are able to understand [*Księga Poezji Idyllicznej* (*The Book of Idyllic Poetry*) — K.T.] properly' [KPI 496].

Philosophical projections of ways to perfect universe are described by Włast in the cycle *Hymny Nadziei* (*Hymns of Hope*) where the narrator takes the role of a teacher, poet-prophet proclaiming general truths which should be put into practice by humanity. He talks about the need for mutual love and respect. About individual bond which connects people with the Creator, about the need to rejoice in being a child of God, about purity and innocence<sup>16</sup>. *Hymny* (*Hymns*) are not like poetry, they are rather connected to poetic prose with the notion of the stream of consciousness in addition ineffectively in places. It must be added that they are the longest poems in the whole *Księga* (*The Book*) (the author divided them into 15 parts and in some of them he added extra division) but none of the remaining ones are so intense in reading (mainly by chanting repetition and of undisturbed circulation around one selected plot).

Włast has not exhausted the subject though. The poem *Jestem nowy* (*I'm New*) should be treated as a continuation of the projection of the poet. The narrator conducts prophetic considerations:

Nowy jestem!...: gdybym nie był nowy,  
Toby mnie PAN BÓG wcale nie stwarzał:  
Po cóż by się powtarzał?!

[KPI 234]

The new Man born from an embryo of eternity recalls immediately the fragment from *Hymny* (*Hymns*): 'One am I, the only begotten Son of the FATHER, and you too, and each of us, because each separate, NONE IS IDENTICAL LIKE THE SECOND' [KPIs 201]. This statement somewhat cuts off Peter Włast from the work of Maria Komornicka who was comparing other people to cattle<sup>17</sup> in her letters and in her poems — to the oysters lying on the seabed. Włast underwent reincarnation in his life. He became, after Maria Komornicka, a 'higher form' — reincarnation the rebirth of the 'grandfather in the grandson' — and from this perspective he prefers to speak. He cuts off directly from the

15 Komornicka M., *Ahaswera*, „Głos”, Warsaw 1900.

16 For a broader perspective see: Helbig-Mischewski B., op. cit., pp. 462–465.

17 Komornicka A., *Maria Komornicka w swych listach i mojej pamięci*, [in:] Komornicka M., *Listy*, op. cit., p. 32.

family when in *Nowy duch*<sup>18</sup> (*The New Spirit*) he expects the coming of the Father who, as a reward for good, pure life will take the poet with him. It proclaims for Krzys (Jan Komornicki the elder brother of Maria) and Ela (Aniela the younger sister) that what was important to them in this life in the world of Papa will not matter and will not be worth of the reward:

Mój Krysiu, czy też Sąd  
Cenzurkę ci da czystą?  
Bo Papa blisko stąd  
[...]  
A Chemia, Elo, twa,  
Czy w lzy się nie rozpłynie,  
Gdy Papy wielka gra  
Twą małą grę ominie

[KPI 415]

Włast says Simple because he can afford it. He knows that he has nothing to lose. He puts in opposition the 'great game' and 'the little game' which can be read as the equivalent of life in eternity (Christian and Hindu philosophies) and life without the vision of rebirth in the universe (here interpreted as a lack of Włast's asceticism). Life seen as a game metaphor — is dependent on the fate (distribution). However, according to Włast players decide how the game will look like and how and when to lay off cards they have. And the stakes are high.

A ty się śmieję i ciesz  
Z powrotu Papy, Piotrze!  
Bo On ci – sercu wierz! –  
Twe lzy wygnać otrze,  
Wzniesie cię na sto wież.

[KPI 415]

In the real world Piotr Włast loses. But in reality created by him he is the only one obtaining the grace of the Father. One and only, who through the exercise of body and mind deserves exaltation. Further references to the Papa-God finding the 'RIGHT PLAYER' [KPIs 415] which will sit in the celestial circle of bigger game associate strongly with Christ, who in the day of the Resurrection after the Ascension is seated at the right hand of the Father. It is said in *Wyznanie wiary* (*The Confession of Faith*) that Jesus will come again to earth to judge the living and the dead. In *Nowy duch* (*The New Spirit*) we read:

Lecz malcom spokój daj;  
Kto inny je przegrzmoci.

18 One of the poems from *Na cichym froncie* (*On the Silent Front*) cycle.

Ty Starym baśnie baj,  
Z fantazji swoich kroci,  
Co pachną im jak maj

[KPI 415]

The poet suggests that Piotr about whom he narrates (alter ego) is going to, or at least would like to, play the role of the judge and compensate for the suffering he had experienced from the family. His father, however, dissuades him from doing so as he claims that the son should be a bard and storyteller in the new universe. That he should charm with talent and experience the role in which he was not valued in his terrestrial life.

Włast embodying in *Księga* (*The Book*) the dream of emigration of the soul has hope for publishing his work. That is why he creates two copies of it carefully caligraphing and decorating cards of the manuscript. However, during his life he learns that there is no chance for the publication and the return to the society. *Księga poezji idyllicznej* (*The Book of Idyllic Poetry*) is a testimony of ruin<sup>19</sup>, a testament of Piotr Włast's creativity who later saves only loose observations and literary-critical notes. He never returns from the last poetic journey. He dies alone a few years after the war.

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19 Stanisław Pigoń is the author of the formula.

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