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STRUCTURAL UNITY IN "FOREFATHERS' EVE", PART III

Wacław Kubacki begins his book on *Forefathers' Eve*, Part III, by listing the views of a number of important critics concerning the structural unity of that play¹. The common conclusion of these critics is that structural unity is lacking. Kubacki disagrees with this, but his attempt at unifying the play through its "romanticism" seems only to confirm the conclusion with which he disagrees.

Kubacki's dilemma is not his alone: it is common to virtually all recent critics, who agree that there is unity in Mickiewicz's play but who cannot seem to define it. Not only do their solutions fail to convince the reader; the authors themselves are left with doubts. Wiktor Weintraub, for example, sees "the best approximate description" of the basic unity of the play in the fact that "a national spirit of prophecy pervades the entire drama"². But a few lines later we find out how disunified the play really is according to Weintraub: "There is no continuity between the scenes. Their choice seems arbitrary". Manfred Kridl sees the unifying principle in "the unprecedented heat of lyricism which permeates the whole work", but nevertheless he concludes that "from the literary point of view the elements of which the whole work is composed are heterogeneous" and there are "artistically irreconcilable elements"³. Wacław Borowy, in *Opoezji Mickiewicza* (1958), sees unity in the "wspólnota terenu — w tym sensie, że wszystkie [sceny] rozgrywały się w Polsce" (p. 164), yet this does not prevent Borowy from seeing the composition of the play as "fragmentaryczna, nie zamknięta i luźna" (p. 79). Other opinions concerning the structure of *Forefathers' Eve*, Part III, have been expressed in recent years, such as Juliusz Kleiner's theory of symmetry (in *Mickiewicz*, II, 1948, pp. 413—415), but none of them has been convincing enough to receive widespread acceptance.

The failure of criticism to present a clear, plausible and meaningful case for unity

¹ W. Kubacki, *Arcydramat Mickiewicza* (Kraków 1951), pp. 5—7. The critics referred to are Turczyński, Chmielowski, Kridl, Cybulski, Życzyński, Kleiner and Niemojewska.

² W. Weintraub, *The Poetry of Adam Mickiewicz* (S-Gravenhage 1954), p. 180.

³ M. Kridl, [in:] *Adam Mickiewicz — Poet of Poland* (New York 1951), pp. 21—22.

in *Forefathers' Eve*, Part III, has had practical consequences. In Poland, the majority of the productions of the play omit scene vii, as if it were somehow superfluous⁴. Outside of Poland, the recently published Potocki translation into English omits scene iv, with no explanation or apparent justification⁵.

The search for unity in a play which Mickiewicz considered to be his greatest creation is belated, but welcome. Unfortunately, critics have too often based their arguments on a non-textual approach, which invariably leads to vague, subjective conclusions such as the "spirit of prophecy", the "heat of lyricism", "romanticism", "commonness of terrain", or the "poetic world"⁶. The view of unity in *Forefathers' Eve*, Part III, as presented in this article, is intended to be specific in its statement and defensible on the basis of specific texts and dramatic elements. Perhaps this approach will not only help to settle an old point but will also make possible further, positive analysis of a play which has maintained its high reputation in spite of the inability of critics to see the play as an organized, unified whole.

Mickiewicz has been referred to as the "Poet of Transformation"⁷. The theme of transformation is certainly present in *Forefathers' Eve*, Part III. Gustav is transformed in the Prologue to Konrad. Konrad in his Improvisation promises to transform his people "into a living song". Poland appears in Father Peter's vision as transformed into Christ transfigured. The Senator is transformed into a lowly beast in scene vi. But the biggest transformation of all takes place in Konrad. What a difference between the haughty, blasphemous Konrad of scenes i and ii, and the humble, suppliant Konrad of scene viii.

The turning point, of course, comes in scene iii with the exorcism. This scene is usually interpreted in terms of the Catholic rite of casting out devils, a rite which has roots in the Bible. There are several biblical accounts of prophets, holy men, and especially Jesus, casting out evil spirits. In one incident, recorded in the Gospel of Mark, 5:12, the evil spirit names himself: "My name is legion". This is alluded to directly in scene iii, line 105, when the spirit says: "Legio sum". The use of Latin, of course, is intended to give a liturgical flavor to the scene. Indeed, there are several obvious parallels with the Catholic ritual of exorcism⁸, and therefore the scene can be discussed in the context of this rite.

⁴ This statement applies to post-war as well as to earlier stagings. Among the more famous performances, we know that Stanisław Wyspiański omitted both scene iv and scene vii in his production, while the director Leon Schiller included all the scenes, but he placed scene vi after scene vii. See J. Kreczmar, *Polemiki teatralne* (Warszawa 1956), pp. 177 and 223—224.

⁵ *Forefathers* (London: The Polish Cultural Foundation, 1968). W. Weintraub mentions the fact in his introduction, but he attempts no explanation.

⁶ See S. Skwarczyńska, *Studia i szkice literackie* (Warszawa 1953), pp. 234—238, for a description of how the four parts of *Forefathers' Eve* are bound together singly and collectively by the different conceptions of the poetic world.

⁷ W. Borowy, *Poet of Transformation*, [in:] *Adam Mickiewicz — Poet of Poland*, pp. 35—36.

⁸ See J. Kallenbach, ed., *Adam Mickiewicz, Dziady. Część trzecia* (Kraków 1920), p. 99.

But exorcism is an extremely powerful and rarely employed means of transformation. Much more ordinary and well-known (to the Catholic, and therefore to Mickiewicz) is the Sacrament of Penance, or Confession. There are several indications that scene iii should be viewed not only as an exorcism but primarily as confessional absolution.

Exorcism concerns diabolical possession, while Confession is related to sin. Now the word *grzesznik* 'sinner', and the related adjective *grzeszny* and verb *zgrzeszyć* appear all throughout scene iii. Father Peter, on entering the room, says in line 3: "Pokój temu domowi, pokój grzesznikowi!" (Peace to this house, peace to the sinner!) Later he tells the spirit in line 88: "Bóg ciebie złowił w tym grzeszniku" (God has trapped you in this sinner). The spirit, in speaking of his terrible role as temptor, tells Father Peter in lines 147–148: "Wierz mi: gdy pazurami grzesznika odzieram, / Nieraz ogonem, ah! ah! — lzy sobie ocieram". (Believe me: after having flayed the sinner with my claws, / Many a time have I wiped away my tears with my tail). Further on in their discussion he tells Father Peter that he saw a sinner in prison (line 155) and says of the prisoner in line 161: "Grzesznik chory" (The sinner is sick). Father Peter asks in line 165: "Jak ratować grzesznika?" (How can the sinner be saved?). In his message to Konrad after the completion of the exorcism, Father Peter calls him sinner (line 187), and compares Konrad's thought to a sinful queen who has been dethroned (lines 189–190). Then he prays for Konrad, referring to himself as "grzesznik stary" (an old sinner) in line 196. The choir of angels begins its song with these words of lines 202–203: "Pokój temu domowi, / Spoczynek grzesznikowi" (Peace to this house, / Rest to the sinner). Then in line 207 the First Archangel says: "Panie, on zgrzeszył, przeciwko Tobie zgrzeszył on bardzo" (Lord, he has sinned, he has sinned greatly against you). The final line of the scene reads: "Pokój grzesznemu sierocie" (Peace to the sinful orphan)⁹.

Another aspect of scene iii is the quality of moral imperative which pervades the entire scene. There are five structural divisions in the scene, and each of these sections conveys a message which can be summarized in a use of the imperative form. These commands are not merely suggested, but are expressly stated in the text¹⁰. Now moral imperative is less associated with exorcism and diabolical posses-

⁹ The frequent usage of *grzesznik* takes on particular significance when we consider that this word, used ten times in scene iii, is used only twice in the remainder of *Forefathers' Eve* (Part III, i:330; Part IV, 1151), and only nine other times in all the rest of Mickiewicz's literary works. Similarly, the word *grzeszny*, used twice in scene iii, is used with the same meaning in only one other place by Mickiewicz. See the *Słownik języka Adama Mickiewicza*, ed. Konrad Górski and Stefan Hrabec, vol. 2 (Warszawa 1964), pp. 569–570. We should also take into account these words used in scene iii: *pokuta* 'penance', lines 185, 192; *wyspowiadać się* 'to confess', line 127; *litość* 'mercy', lines 179, 227, 229; *miłosierdzie* 'clemency', line 195; *przebaczyć* 'to forgive', line 222; *darować* 'to pardon', line 210.

¹⁰ The commands are from the corporal to the prisoner (line 56: *idź do swojej celi*), from the evil spirit in Konrad to Rollison (line 79: *pójdź tu*), from Father Peter to the spirit (line 174: *idź tam i tamędy*), from Father Peter to Konrad (lines 181, 189: *módl się*), and from the angels to God

sion than with sin and confession. Once again, the indication is that Mickiewicz, while utilizing the externals characteristic of exorcism, wanted us to view the scene as an enactment of confessional absolution.

It is the contention of this author that the first five scenes of *Forefathers' Eve*, Part III, follow the outline of the rite of confession, with Konrad as the penitent and Father Peter the confessor. There is thus nothing at all arbitrary in the placement of scenes: each part of the rite must take its assigned place. Before looking at the play, let us review the essentials of the rite of Confession.

The first step in the Catholic rite of Confession is the examination of conscience, when the sinner ponders over his faults and decides what to tell the priest. The second step is the actual telling (confession) of his sins to the priest. The third element is the firm resolve to amend, that is, the sinner promises God not to repeat the sin or sins. The fourth step is the absolution of the priest, which is conferred by making the Sign of the Cross over the penitent and saying the words of forgiveness. The final step in Confession is that of penance-making. In the early Church and the Middle Ages this often meant pilgrimages or long periods of fasting, but in recent centuries it has come to mean for the most part the recitation of prayers.

Before there can be a confession of guilt, there must first be a sin. The story of Konrad's fall into sin is told in the Prologue. The speaker is the Guardian Angel, who is supposed to be Konrad's protector from all types of evil and temptation. But it is a common religious belief that temptations are sometimes sent by God to test the faith of the believer, and the Guardian Angel acknowledges the chastising nature of his mission in lines 35—38: "I, the son of immortal glory, / Adopted at that time the form/ Of a loathsome and infernal ghost, / Out to frighten and flog you". The sinner falls and remains unrepentant, and his Guardian Angel returns to heaven sorrowing over his success. The stage is now set for the enactment of the confessional rite.

Scene i corresponds to the examination of conscience. Konrad is silent and pensive all throughout this scene, and at one point, in lines 441—442, a direct, unequivocal reference is made to his examination of conscience: "But why does Konrad sit quietly gloomy, / As if he were counting his sins before confession [do spowiedzi]?" Prior to this statement by his fellow prisoner, Suzin, Konrad has spoken only twice in the scene (lines 9 and 374—377), he has been addressed twice (lines 169—176 and 378—388), and he has figured in two stage directions (after lines 28 and 404). But once this crucial statement has been made, the remainder of this scene revolves almost exclusively around Konrad. The sinner has ended his quiet meditation and is making the transition from self-scrutiny (examination of conscience) to self-revelation (confession).

(line 210: *ale tym daruj*). The entire scene, consisting of 254 lines, contains no less than seventy-four uses of the imperative, including fifty-seven commands in the second person (*mów, patrzcie*, etc.), seven in the first person plural (*położmy, leśmy*, etc.), two in the third person (*niech pomodli się, niech wslawi*), and eight substantival commands (*Pokój! Litość!*).

Scene ii, the Improvisation, is the actual confession. Konrad, alone with God as the penitent is alone with the priest, admits, in line 292, doing what every penitent should do: "I have opened to You the depths of my heart". There is a reference in line 247 to the beating of the breast, which is associated with a sinner's acknowledgement of guilt. The greater part of the Improvisation is addressed directly to God (confession by nature involves direct address), and specific mention is made of what Konrad knows are his two sins: *bluźnierstwo* 'blasphemy' (line 242), and *pycha* 'pride' (line 294).

Scene iii is the absolution of the priest. We should not be surprised that Mickiewicz chose the path of expressing the absolution through an exorcism. Artistically, exorcism is more dramatic than the simpler and more common absolution. Theologically, both exorcism and Penance involve relieving the soul of an evil burden. Furthermore, there is another link. Penance is traditionally understood as a renewal of the baptismal cleansing, and in the Catholic rite of Baptism there are no less than three exorcisms.

In his conversation with the evil spirit residing in Konrad's soul, Father Peter learns of a "sinning" prisoner who needs "consolation". Asked how this is to be done, the spirit answers: "Bread and wine". These are his last words, and he is immediately forced to leave Konrad's soul. Father Peter, of course, interprets these words as referring to Communion, the Eucharist. Now, we must remember that before the reforms and renewals that have taken place this century in the Catholic Church, most Catholics considered Confession and Communion to be almost a single unit: Confession was basically a preparation for Communion, and Communion could be received only after one had confessed. Satan's words are not spoken about Konrad, but they are said at the very moment of the liberation of Konrad's soul. The inference is clear: Konrad has confessed, he is pardoned, and he is to complete the process by receiving Communion.

Lines 184—189 of scene iii represent the attempt of the priest to elicit a firm resolve to amend. The evil spirit has been dismissed, and Father Peter cautions Konrad to beware the return of the spirit and to shun blasphemy:

FATHER PETER

Those words of foolishness, an agony
to wise lips,
That they be counted as your penance,
That you forget them —

KONRAD

They are already hammered in.

FATHER PETER

That you, sinner, may never decipher
them yourself,
That God ask you not about their meaning — —
Pray; [...]

In the lines immediately following this last passage Father Peter goes on to talk of the penance and even mentions one that was practiced in Old Testament times: sackcloth and ashes ("w żebraczej odzieży", "okryta popiołem"). But the penance is not performed at this point by Konrad. Instead Konrad is prayed for in scenes iv and v by Ewa and Father Peter¹¹. This assuming of Konrad's burden is admitted by Father Peter in iii: 199: "But I will assume all the burden for his guilt". Moreover, both Ewa and Father Peter make direct references to their own confessing, as if it were they who had confessed, and not Konrad:

EWA

Are you complaining, rose, of being plucked
from your native stem?
I didn't take you for my own pleasure,
But crowned with you the temple of the
Blessed Mother,
And after confession [po spowiedzi]
yesterday I watered you with tears.
(iv:77—80)

FATHER PETER

Lord! what am I before your presence? —
Dust and nothingness;
But when I have confessed [wyspowiadał]
my nothingness to You,
I, a speck of dust, will speak with
the Lord.
(v:1—4)

These prayers on behalf of Konrad are in keeping with a general theme that runs throughout the play, that of praying for the prisoners¹².

Konrad's own personal performance of penance comes at the end of scene viii, when he offers a ring to be sold for the poor and for Masses on behalf of the souls in purgatory. This serves to complete the action of Konrad's Confession, and it also brings the play proper to a conclusion.

Thus far we have used the Confession rite as the framework for the first five scenes and the very end of scene viii. Scenes vi, vii and viii are also patterned along the lines of Confession. Thus, while the analogy is not as complete as in the first part,

¹¹ This is not a radically new interpretation of these two scenes. Most critics agree that Ewa and Father Peter speak in these scenes for Konrad: these two characters present the counterparts to Konrad's Improvisation, and are, in a sense, different personifications of his spirit. Typical is the statement made by George Rapall Noyes in the editor's note to D. P. Radin's translation (London, no date): "By his blasphemy against God, Konrad is exposed to the danger of perdition. From this he is saved by the prayers of the devout maidens, Eva and Marcellina, and of the humble priest, Father Peter" (page iii).

¹² Prologue: 3—5, 116; i: 297—307; ii: 316; iii: 202—254; iv: 2—20; v; vii: 109; viii: 614—633.

the structure of the two halves of the play is basically parallel. In the first part, the sinner is Konrad, while in the second part, the sinner is Nowosilcow.

Scene vi opens with Nowosilcow's temptation. The Senator's dream is a dramatic portrayal of his sin, represented symbolically by the fall from favor and the fall from bed. The presence in this scene of devils and of Beelzebub himself, the specific references to hell (lines 8, 42, 90), and the bestial state of Nowosilcow's soul all serve to make us aware of the extent of Nowosilcow's fall.

Scene vii corresponds to scenes i and ii in that it provides the counterparts to Konrad's examination of conscience and confession. But unlike those scenes, this one portrays a non-repentance and a non-confession. In the first place, Nowosilcow is not even present in the scene: we should recall that Konrad's 'presence' became so overpowering towards the end of scene i that it drove everyone else off the stage during the Improvisation. Secondly, the methods employed in scene vii are indirect. Since Nowosilcow does not appear, someone else will have to make his non-confession for him. This is done in Adolph's tale, the story of a prisoner held captive and tortured because he will not confess¹³. It is interesting to note that in the first half of scene viii Nowosilcow seems to be obsessed with the idea that a confession should be made. It is as if he knows what is the cause of his downfall.

The result of Konrad's confession in scene ii is his pardon in iii, his salvation in iv and v, his complete transformation in viii, and, we might add, his glorification in ix. The result of Nowosilcow's non-confession in vii is the death of the Doctor, his *alter ego*, and the twofold prophecy of his doom by Father Peter in viii. Scene viii, then, portrays Nowosilcow's non-absolution (the immediate punishment) and his non-penance (the prophecy of ultimate doom). It also carries further the non-confession through a conversational switch that takes place in the scene. In the first half of the scene Nowosilcow is condemning everyone around him, including Kanisyn and his son, Rollison and his mother, the footmen, Pelikan, the Doctor, Father Peter and Prince Czartoryski. This is the exact opposite of confession, where the penitent condemns himself. Then in the Ball scene, the roles are switched and Nowosilcow is himself condemned by the very ones he had condemned, and in this way the opposite of confessional forgiveness is achieved.

An important agent in both confession and non-confession is, of course, Father Peter. His main roles in the confession are to absolve (iii) and to offer atonement (v). Both these roles are reversed in the non-confession. Instead of being the judge and absolver, Father Peter appears in scene viii as the accused under trial. Indeed what we have is a re-enactment of the original Holy Thursday trial. Nowosilcow is the new Pilate, the despicable foreign ruler. (Compare Father Peter's answer to Nowosilcow in viii: 301 with Jesus' answer to Pilate in Matthew, 27:11.) The Doctor is

¹³ See especially lines 112—120 and 173—174. Mickiewicz is playing on the twofold meaning of *spowiedź* 'confession'. In contrast to the voluntary, spiritual, truly revealing sacramental Confession, there is the coerced, political, false confession which is sought from the prisoners.

the new Judas, who is sent forth from the chamber to do his dirty business and in whose death are involved some silver coins. Father Peter, of course, is Christ: he is silent before the judge; he is struck in the face; Bajkow says of him: "Let him prophecy" (cf. Mark, 14 : 65); and he repeats two statements of Jesus made while the Redeemer was on the cross (compare viii : 306 with Luke, 23 : 34, and viii : 308 with Luke, 23 : 43).

Father Peter, who was the prayerful atoner in the penance, becomes the terrible prophet of doom in the non-penance. Two prophecies of doom (viii : 574—609) constitute the non-penance as parallels to the two prayers for salvation (iv and v) which made up the penance.

It should be noted that the end of scene viii has a particularly strong dramatic effect, for the actions of both confession and non-confession culminate in rapid succession. Nowosilcow is pronounced doomed by Father Peter, while Konrad appears in a redeemed and transformed state. This juxtaposition also serves to underline the non-confession's quality of being a shadow of the confession, so that there are not two stories, one about Konrad and another about Nowosilcow, but rather there is the one account of Konrad and Nowosilcow. This unifying of the two seemingly disparate "halves" of the play would appear to be one of the chief benefits from viewing the play as an enactment of a confession and a non-confession.

The confession analogy also adds to our understanding of the central role played by the Improvisation. According to this view, the Improvisation is not the sin, as has been supposed by critics such as Borowy (*O poezji Mickiewicza*, p. 132), but rather it is the confession of the sin, and as such, it is a saving act. This positive role of the Improvisation is given special force through the contrast between the fates of Konrad and Nowosilcow: as Konrad's confession leads to his forgiveness and rebirth, so Nowosilcow's lack of confession leads to his condemnation and death.

If the confession analogy seems to answer some of our questions about Mickiewicz's play, it would also appear to raise newer ones. What effect, for example, would this interpretation have upon the staging of the play? At least part of the answer to this question is that, if the audience understood the play in terms of the confession analogy, directors would no longer have so free a hand in omitting or transposing scenes. This suggests a more comprehensive answer: that perhaps the major change to be expected is not in the area of staging, directing and acting but in that of audience participation and understanding.

In addition to this "dramatic" question, there is also the more literary question of the reason for Mickiewicz's choice of confession as a device. Critics of the biographical school might look for the answer in the circumstances under which Part III was written, and they might emphasize that Mickiewicz was guilt-stricken over his failure to reach Poland and help his struggling compatriots. Historically- or socially-minded critics may look for some message which Mickiewicz was seeking to convey to his countrymen. But the most likely answer is that Mickiewicz was doing nothing more than making a perfect artistic choice, for in confession he found an

appropriate vehicle for all his aims: here was a religious rite, known generally to his readers, specifically Catholic and therefore closely associated with Poland, a ritual of rebirth, and perhaps most importantly, an established procedure which made possible the unification of the play along other than classical lines and the presentation of Mickiewicz's central vision in a framework superbly harmonious with that vision.

JEDNOŚĆ STRUKTURALNA „DZIADÓW” CZĘŚCI III

STRESZCZENIE

Jedność strukturalna została w III części *Dziadów* osiągnięta przez symboliczne niejako ustanowienie spowiedzi z Konradem jako penitentem oraz nie-spowiedzi z Nowosilcowem jako nie-penitentem. Dramat rozwija się następująco: grzech Konrada (Prolog), rachunek sumienia (scena I), spowiedź (scena II), rozgrzeszenie i postanowienie poprawy (scena III), pokuta (scena IV i V), grzech Nowosilcowa (scena VI), brak spowiedzi (scena VII), brak rozgrzeszenia i pokuty (scena VIII). Główną rolę odgrywa Wielka Improwizacja, jest bowiem spowiedzią Konrada, która prowadzi do przebaczenia i odrodzenia, ale jest również brakiem spowiedzi Nowosilcowa, co sprowadza nań potępienie i śmierć.

Przełożyła *Janina Kosińska*