

A FAILED POET AND THE PROBLEM WITH POETRY IN
ZYGMUNT KRASIŃSKI'S *NIE-BOSKA KOMEDIA*

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ABSTRACT

LARA SZYPSZAK: A Failed Poet and the Problem with Poetry in Zygmunt Krasiński's *Nie-boska komedia*
(Under the direction of Ewa Wampuszyc)

This thesis examines how Zygmunt Krasiński challenges the understanding of the Polish Romantic prophet-poet in his 1833 drama *Nie-boska komedia*. The four-act play demonstrates the possible failure of the poet who attempts to lead the nation with his words amidst a revolution between aristocracy and “the masses.” I analyze the ways in which Krasiński’s poet learns that poetry can be deceptive and lead him astray, ultimately making him ineffective in both “word” and “deed.” Throughout my analysis, I argue that Krasiński employs an identifiable Romantic literary form in order to challenge the Romantic notion that lofty Romantic ideas about Poetry (i.e. “word”) must be fully embraced in order to lead to action (i.e. “deed”); he uses the “content” of his play to argue that overindulging Poetry may cause damage when used to appeal to the masses on behalf of the Nation.

To my ever loving parents Charles and Karin Szypszak, for every ounce of faith and support

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Note on Citation and Translation

As a rule, all quotations will be provided in the original Polish with parallel translation.

Quotations in the original Polish from *Nie-boska komedia* are provided from the 1969 10th edition. Translations of Zygmunt Krasiński's *Nie-boska komedia* [*Un-divine Comedy*] are by Harold B. Segel with accompanying page numbers from *Polish Romantic Drama: Three Plays in English Translation*. Unless otherwise noted, all other translations are my own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
Chapters:	
I. Romanticism.....	10
II. Poetry: a Temptress and Duplicitous Beauty.....	15
III. The Poet: Neither Word Nor Deed.....	30
Conclusion.....	51
Works Cited.....	58

Mam dramat dotyczący się rzeczy wieku naszego – walka w nim dwóch pryncypiów: arystokracji i demokracji—tytuł Mąż. [...] Rzecz, sądzę, dobrze napisana. Jest to obrona tego, na co się targa wielu hołyszów: religii i chwały przyszłości! Bezimiennie powinno być wydrukowane. Nikt nie powinien domyślić się autora!

I have a drama concerning things of our era – it presents the struggle between two principles: aristocracy and democracy—the title is The Man. [...]I think it is well written. It is a defense of that, which tugs at many poor men: religion and praise of the future! It should be published anonymously. No one ought to guess the author!

Zygmunt Krasiński, November 21, 1833

INTRODUCTION

Many scholars understand the Polish Romantic Poet of the 19th century as both representative of the common man and protector of Poland's past and values, simultaneously fostering feelings of patriotism and heritage. According to many Polish Romantics, the poet's words are supposed to be a device in the education and enlightenment of the masses, eliciting visions of a possible future and elevating the poet to the status of "prophet-poet," engaged in the action he inspires of his people. Zygmunt Krasiński challenges this understanding in his 1833 drama *Nie-boska komedia* (*The Un-divine Comedy*). Written only a decade into the Romantic period in Poland, the play demonstrates the possible failure of the prophet-poet who attempts to lead the nation with his words amidst a revolution between aristocracy and "the masses." Krasiński's poet, portrayed as aristocrat rather than one of the people, instead learns that poetry can be deceptive and lead him astray, making him ineffective in both "word" and "deed."

Krasiński uses this four-act drama as a platform to address the social unrest that persisted during the 19th century between Poles and the partitioning powers. The overarching goal of this study is to show how he challenges the role of the Polish Romantic Poet in the struggle for Polish independence. Victor Erlich surmises that *Nie-boska komedia* "contains the most explicit and bitter critique of the Poet to be found in Polish—or indeed any Romantic literature" ("Conception of the Poet" 193). As my analysis will demonstrate, Krasiński suggests in the play that poetry is flawed, should not be trusted in its entirety, and is harmful to the Poet,¹ enticing him in his quest to bear witness to the "unseen world," and likely leading him to a dangerous

¹ I will explain the capitalization of the term "Poet" on pages 30-31.

precipice (both literally and figuratively) and his demise. Finally, Krasinski posits that the Romantic Poet must not attempt to live out poetry, nor should poetry be taken beyond a point of self-control and inner truth. Through the play, Krasinski brings to light the problems encountered by the Poet as a result of the mandates of Polish Romanticism by presenting the dangers that can emerge when the Poet over-indulges Poetry and gives himself over to Poetry to a precarious degree. He does not declare Poetry as a defunct weapon of choice, but rather suggests that its use should be limited and used within reason. In this respect, Krasinski takes a bold step in questioning the enthusiasm for Romantic Poetry that is often embraced and relished by the Romantics and, in the case of Polish culture, eventually subscribed to by the Romantics' readers.

Throughout the play, Krasinski employs a traditional Romantic form in order to deliver an anti-Romantic message, using the discrepancy between Romantic form and content as a way to call attention to the problems of Poetry. In his play, he makes use of Romantic elements of mysticism, grand expression of emotion, recognition of nature's power and magnificence, and he generates scenes and characters that are consistent with other great Polish Romantic works, such as idylls and maidens. However, beneath this outwardly Romantic form, his message is distinctly different from the Polish Romantic ethos. Placing *Nie-boska komedia* under the guise of Romantic form, Krasinski challenges the notion that lofty Romantic ideas about Poetry are to be fully embraced, using the content of his play to argue that these notions may cause damage when used to appeal to the masses on behalf of the Nation. I examine this form versus content device that is largely absent from secondary literature, and thus this thesis will present a new way of looking at the play and the way in which Krasinski has constructed his multi-layered challenge to Polish Romanticism.

I.

Zygmunt Krasiński was only twenty-one years old when he wrote *Nie-boska komedia*. Many scholars identify this play as his greatest work, and the high point of his writing career. As Monica Mary Gardner writes, *Nie-boska komedia* is “the finest that ever came from Krasiński’s pen. It stands alone among his creations” (92). Although Krasiński completed *Nie-boska komedia* in 1833, the play was not published until 1835 in Paris. Furthermore, Krasiński never saw the play staged during his lifetime due to censorship, and the first production was, in fact, not until 1902, despite the drama’s constant presence in the “Polish national consciousness” (Wickstrom 269). According to Adam Mickiewicz’s lectures on Slavic drama, *Nie-boska komedia* is categorically Slavic due to its supernatural elements that depart from British or French Romanticism (Mickiewicz in Gerould, Ploszewski 95). At the same time, the drama can still be understood beyond “Poland” and its partitions, drawing on themes of the supernatural world, political intrigue, and evocation of the spirits of dead ancestors from works by Shakespeare, Schiller, and Pushkin (ibid.). Yet, despite the play’s resonance in Poland even today, from schools to theater companies, the play remains largely unknown in the English-speaking world.

Krasiński initially titled the play *Mąż*, or *The Man*, emphasizing the role of the main character that ties together the four parts of the drama. However, Krasiński changed the title to its current form in 1834 before the manuscript was sent to print. He chose the title *Nie-boska komedia* as a reference to Dante’s fourteenth-century epic poem *Divine Comedy*, suggesting in this way a distinct circle of themes and places of action in the drama (Sudolski 149). Through this revised title, Krasiński signaled that the place of action is not the afterlife, but this Earth, and that the play addresses the problems of the individual and the human collective in the here and

now. Indeed, the play takes us from the lofty heights of mountains and precipices in the first half, to the inferno of a class revolution at the end of the drama.

A few years after publication of the play, in 1840, Krasieński wrote in a letter to Delfina Potocka,² the object of his affection, about the goals of *Nie-boska komedia* in comparison to classical literature and German philosophy:

Not long ago I read to you the second part of Faust. It is a poem, as you saw, that encompasses all of the history and destinies of humankind, but as an Idea, as developments in art. The Greek Helen and Romantic poetry are the main actors. The actions of all the great ages are articulated through the vicissitudes of art. Humankind is presented there as Literature! My idea is different. If my poem, which was conceived on this rock and which is written in your name, is to become, then, it will be a poem of will and deed, not art. In it, will and deed are left transported into the realm of art, and not art made artificial as in Goethe's work. I have already written part one of this poem, but alone it means nothing, and is only important when the first and third parts, the final ones, become its companions. That part, which alone does not mean much, is called The Un-divine Comedy. (March 20, 1840)³

Czytałem Ci niedawno drugiej części Fausta rozbiór. Poema to, widziałaś, że obejmuje całą ludzkości dzieje i przeznaczenia, ale pod formą Idei, ale pod formą rozwijań się sztuki. Grecka Helena i romantyczna poezja tam głównymi są aktorami. Wszystkich

² One might find Delfina Potocka's (1807-1877) vibrant biography intriguing in relation to various Polish artists and intellectuals. She was intimately involved not only with Krasieński, but also Frederick Chopin, the great pianist and composer. The connection between the two might offer an interesting reflection on the arts in Poland at the time, and what common inspirations each of these two émigré artists drew from their surroundings.

³ Given that *Nie-boska komedia* was not only written but also published several years before this letter, it seems that Krasieński could be referring to the drama as a part of a larger literary goal.

wieków czyny występują wyrażone przez sztuki koleje. Ludzkość tam jest Literaturą! W moim pomyśle inaczej. Jeśli to poema w imieniu Twoim zawiązane w głowie mojej na tym kamieniu będzie kiedy, to będzie ono poematem woli i czynu, nie sztuki. W nim wola i czyn w sferę sztuki przeniesionymi zostaną, a nie sztuka wysztuczona jak u Goethego. Już tego poematu jest część jedna, sama nic nie znacząca, dopiero ważna, kiedy pierwszą część i trzecią, ostatnią, za towarzyszkę dostanie. Ta część, która jest, a sama niewiele znaczy, zowie się Nie-boska komedia. (20 Marca 1840r.)

As evidenced in this letter to Delfina, Krasiński was concerned with the fundamental characteristics of his literary work. He was intentionally striving to create a “*poemat*”⁴ of “will and deed” rather than what he saw as the classical, overly literary nature of the portrayal of humanity in art. The problem of “word” versus “deed” that Krasiński was concerned with is not unprecedented. Though the understanding of “word” and “deed” is a characteristic of Romanticism well beyond the borders of Poland⁵ as a literary representation of the choice between thought and action, Polish Romantics often saw the political situation of partitioned Poland as a specific call to bring the relationship between word and deed into reality. Word and deed became important elements of Polish Romanticism and were addressed in several works by Krasiński’s contemporaries, such as in Adam Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* (Part II/IV-1822, III-1832, I-1860)⁶ and Juliusz Słowacki’s *Kordian* (1833-4).⁷ In both Mickiewicz’s and Słowacki’s plays, the authors portray a philosopher that characteristically thinks but does not *do*. The Poet writes,

⁴ “*Poemat*” is a long, narrative poem.

⁵ Treatment of “word” and “deed” is particularly evident in the works of French Romantics such as Victor Hugo and George Sand, and German Romantics, including E. T. A. Hoffmann and Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff.

⁶ For my discussion of *Dziady*, see p. 51 below.

⁷ Słowacki’s *Kordian* (1834) was written in direct opposition to Mickiewicz’s idea of the Poet as an individual savior, offering instead an evolving hero who emblemizes the failures of the politically immature, radical approach (Milosz 234-5).

but like the philosopher *does* nothing. While writers like Mickiewicz hoped to produce works that could transform word *into* deed, thus bridging the gap between the thinkers and the doers, these works tended to portray only one side of the coin.

One explanation for the source of Krasieński's views on Romanticism is his upbringing. Raised in a world of aristocratic family traditions, Krasieński held views about the political climate that contrasted greatly with his father's ideas of feudal patriotism. Krasieński developed much of his political and moral dogma by critically observing his father's ardent association with and support for Russian Tsar Nicolas I. At university, Krasieński found himself in conflict with the fellow students of different political leanings and social backgrounds, and was extremely sensitive to such social antagonism (Sudolski 149). While Krasieński's views drove a wedge between him and his father, they also fueled his writing. Michael Mikoś notes that Krasieński "saw clearly the looming struggle between the aristocracy and the revolutionary masses... [He] had no illusions about the fragility of despotic regimes and yet feared the emerging new order" that was coming with the national terror of "the people" (11). Krasieński's distinct understanding of Poland's tumultuous state allowed him to use his writing as a means of suggesting the possible failure of both lofty Romantic ideas of a Poet's ability and the proclaimed role as prophet-poet, and extreme revolutionary action blinded by the "true needs" and "desires" of the people (i.e. independence from occupying governments, preservation of Polish culture and language, and an overthrow of the aristocratic order). Stanisław Eile remarks that unlike Adam Mickiewicz who was "torn between martyrdom and revolution" (Eile 62), Krasieński was averse toward social violence and held a firm belief that devotion to the fatherland and Christianity are indistinguishable (64). In other words, Krasieński "associated Polish martyrdom with the tribulations of the early Christians" (Gonzalez 70). In this sense, partitioned Poland served – in

Krasiński's view – as a Christ of nations, a leader in a search for God's Kingdom on Earth (ibid.). Compared to the ideas of his contemporaries, however, Krasiński's idea of a secular messianism focused less on an individuated hero that would lead the Polish people to independence and Krasiński cast the Polish nation as martyr. Krasiński's beliefs about the indistinguishable ties between Polish martyrdom and Christianity are evident throughout the play through recognizable Christian symbolism and a contemplation of the Poet's place in the battle for Polish independence.

II.

Each of the play's four acts begin with a sort of prophetic prologue that gives an abstract background of the matter at hand and foretells the nature of the ensuing dramatic events. The content of these prologues is essential to understanding the moral and allegorical implications in each act. Their poetic tone is consistent with that of Shakespearean rhetoric in its use of dramatic declarations to Poetry herself, and metaphors of woman's beginnings. The intention of such strategy is reinforced by Krasiński's second epigraph to the play, quoting the famous soliloquy from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "To be or not to be, that is the question."⁸ The four acts can be broken into two parts in which the first two acts of the play are devoted to a fantastical realm that challenges the traditional idea of Poetry's role in Romantic literature, while the latter two acts function as an expression of revolutionary Romanticism, as well as a critique of this revolution. The lead character, "The Man," is present throughout, while the themes of

⁸ The first epigraph is an anonymous quote: "To the errors accumulated by their forebears they added those which their forebears never know – indecision and timidity. And so it came to pass that they disappeared from the face of the earth and only a great silence remains after them." ["Do błędów, nagromadzonych przez przodków, dodali to, czego nie znali ich przodkowie – wahanie się i bojaźń; – i stało się zatem, – że zniknęli z powierzchni ziemi i wielkie milczenie jest po nich."] The second epigraph, from *Hamlet* (1603) is not translated into Polish in publications, but rather kept in the original English.

each act are distinct in relation to the notion of the Romantic Poet. While this study follows the chronological order of the play rather closely, the chapters are organized thematically.

In the following analysis of the play, I will examine the ways in which Krasiński critiques the role of the Polish Romantic Poet in the struggle for Polish independence through “word” and “deed.” However, before I delve into my main argument, the first chapter will establish an understanding of Polish Romanticism and the Polish Romantic hero, both in a general sense as it relates to other Polish Romantics’ idea of the Romantic hero, and as it relates to Krasiński’s play and own hero. Chapter Two is an examination of how Poetry, as represented by the female figure of a Maiden, is not positive and genuine, but rather a deceitful and dangerous seductress. Krasiński utilizes the Maiden as a way to demonstrate the discrepancy between form and content of Romantic Poetry. Krasiński characterizes Woman as both inspiration and the cause of the fall of man, and draws from the story of Genesis to further his argument about women and Poetry as temptation and the source of original sin. The goals of Chapter Three are to define Krasiński’s Poet as a failure in both “word” and “deed.” I examine the origins of the Poet and his “power,” and demonstrate how revolution serves as a mode in which the Poet might find his place in either “word” or “deed,” but how he fails in “deed” just as he does in “word.” The concluding chapter of this study will use selections from Adam Mickiewicz’s work as a way to demonstrate how Krasiński’s conception of the Romantic Poet differs from that of his well-known contemporary.

CHAPTER 1: Romanticism

While Romanticism itself is not unique to Poland, Polish Romanticism is often considered to have many qualities unique to it. Czesław Miłosz, for example, notes:

The struggle against the classical rules of good taste, which began in Poland (as in France) around 1820, concealed from its inception, political undertones. Contrary to the brand of Romanticism which in many countries was identified with a withdrawal of the individual into his own interior world, Romanticism in Poland acquired an extremely activist character and was clearly a consequence of many ideas of the Enlightenment (*History* 201).

Though Miłosz may overstate the unique nature of Polish Romanticism, as is clearly evidenced by the 1848 revolutions in countries across Western and Central Europe, many of which also held values shaped by the Enlightenment, Poland's loss of statehood and its deep affection for the past differentiated its Romantic literature from that of other countries. Polish Romanticism garnered a unique quality by drawing inspiration from Polish history before the partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century.⁹

The literature of the Polish Romantic period directly reflects its values: Poland's constant struggle for independence, her self-proclaimed messianic role, and a preservation of Polish heritage. Michael Mikoś asserts that the Romantic poets in particular “sustained the nation

⁹ One particular technique rested in reviving the traditions of the *szlachta*, the old aristocracy from the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Poets and prose writers portrayed the traditions of this period positively as a method of inducing a longing for the independent Poland of the past and its culture. An example of this literature is Adam Mickiewicz's 1834 epic poem *Pan Tadeusz, czyli ostatni zajazd na Litwie. Historia szlachecka z roku 1811 i 1812 we dwunastu księgach wierszem*, translated into English as *Sir Thaddeus, or the Last Lithuanian Foray: A Nobleman's Tale from the Years of 1811 and 1812 in Twelve Books of Verse*.

during its supreme trials, proving once more that the pen is mightier than the sword” (8). Three writers in particular, Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849), and Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859), known as the three Polish Romantic “bards” dominated the Polish Romantic period. In his statement, however, Mikoś is quick to generalize these authors as having the same understanding about the power of poetry, and he ignores the Romantic literary works that argue otherwise, as this study will show in regards to Krasiński’s *Nie-boska komedia*.

Polish Romantic literature was heavily influenced by European Romanticism, which included the rejection of such Enlightenment values as order, harmony, balance, and rational thinking. Instead, European Romantics tapped into the irrationality, spontaneity, and transcendental nature of the personal and individual. Writers such as Sir Walter Scott in England, Friedrich Schiller in Germany, and George Sand in France eagerly embraced themes of a deepened appreciation for nature and its beauty, placing emotion over reason, a preoccupation with an exceptional hero-figure, and an artist whose “creative spirit” transcends all rules and formulas. These European Romantics were fascinated with the past and were attracted to myth, folklore, and mysticism (Moore and Strachan, 1-8). Polish Romantic literature, especially in its early stages, readily adopted these themes of irrationality, imagination, nature, ideals of freedom, and was especially driven by emotion, mysticism, and folklore.

After the November Uprising of 1830-31, however, Polish Romanticism began to develop into a literary movement unlike that in other countries.¹⁰ Censorship in partitioned Poland, particularly under Russian authority, targeted references to Poland as a state and scorned mention of Polish traditions. Consequently, censored literature of this time automatically became political, regardless of its content. Historian Norman Davies contends that literature was

¹⁰ The November Uprising was an unsuccessful armed rebellion against the occupying authority of the Russian Empire sparked by Nicholas I’s intention to use the Polish army in suppressing the July 1830 revolution in Paris. The uprising spread to parts of Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine.

mobilized in Poland as “the most convenient vehicle of political expression” in a state where political activity of a national nature was continuously suppressed (154). As a result, literature was clearly a moral force in partitioned Poland. Following the November Uprising, in what is referred to as the “Great Emigration,” many Romantic writers and intellectuals (including Mickiewicz and Krasiński) had to leave Poland due to their politically subversive ideas or forced into exile. These writers-in-exile responded to the state of their homeland from abroad in a form of intellectual resistance, particularly from France, and their works became increasingly concentrated on the political struggle for the independence of Poland. Polish Romantic literature became increasingly concerned with the notion of messianism and the political struggle for freedom and Poland’s independence, and the issue of national identity and ideology came to the foreground. The loss of statehood in particular was “the decisive factor in formulating a completely different understanding of the nation and the individual, society and the state, as well as the destiny and function of culture, above all, literature” (Czerwinski 357). Davies suggests that the strongest Romantic metaphor of all is “Poland, Christ of Nations,” a concept idealized, sublimated, and projected into religious mysticism (177). Polish Romantic writers had unique views on how the salvation of Poland might come about, and emphasized certain elements over others. While Mickiewicz’s brand of Romanticism centered on secular messianism and revolution, Krasiński’s Romantic ideas and values were founded on an understanding of Christianity, which held that the future of Poland was entirely in God’s hands. Consistent with Christian principles, Krasiński believed only God could be the one to lead man to perfection (Czerwinski 360). Such a system of beliefs lends itself to a subdued notion of the Poet and his role in bringing about independence for Poland. Krasiński imbues *Nie-boska komedia* with these tones of martyrdom while also drawing upon Christian symbolism in order to suggest that the

Poet might not have any such power, despite his connection to the divine sphere. In contrast, while Mickiewicz's Poet would bargain with God for the "power over souls" ("rząd dusz"),¹¹ Krasiński's Poet would ask why he has been tempted with the idea of such power through poetry.¹²

During the latter half of the Romantic period in Polish literature, the theme of mysticism flourished and writers developed the idea of the "prophet-poet." This prophet-poet was intended to function as a "spiritual leader" of the people and the nation in the fight for independence. According to Romanticism in general, there are particular individuals who are said to have the ability to access a world other than the material one in which we exist. The Romantic Poet has this ability to transcend the material world; he is seemingly directed by the divine in an endeavor to describe the indescribable and provide a link between these two worlds. Typically, within definitions of Polish Romanticism, the Romantic Poet is "the hero as the shaper of history," and "the belief in the privileged endowment of the poet, and the vatic imperative among poets needing for fulfillment only the proper concatenation of events" persists in the Romantic ethos (Segel, "Perspectives" 264). In Poland, the poet is also a hero that must perform a near impossible feat and bring an entire nation to arms in the struggle for independence. Miłosz argues that "the poet was hailed [by the Polish Romantics] as a charismatic leader, the incarnation of the collective strivings of the peoples; thus, his biography, not only his work, entered the legend" (203). The expression of great emotion was an especially dominant driving force of this struggle in Romantic Poetry, with an enthusiasm for a Poet's triumph of pen over sword in contrast to the rationalism so characteristic of Enlightenment literature and neoclassical poetry. However, as time progressed, this idealistic notion that in such a battle the pen might

¹¹ See the "Improvisation" in Part III of Mickiewicz's *Dziady*.

¹² I discuss this contrast further in the concluding chapter of this study. See pages 51-55.

defeat the sword became increasingly questionable. Polish Romantic authors themselves posed questions about the power of their own Poet-hero in combat. In *Nie-boska komedia*, Krasiński is one of the first Romantics to suggest the probable failure of the prophet-poet who attempts to lead the nation with his words amidst revolution, and to whom Poetry can be deceptive. Through the play, Krasiński presents a discourse not only on the Poet and Poetry, but also on the poetics of Romanticism as a whole.

CHAPTER 2: Poetry: a Temptress and Duplicious Beauty

Through the character of the Maiden, or *Dziewica*,¹³ in *Nie-boska komedia*, Krasiński succeeds in materializing the abstract, utilizing the metaphysical embodiment of Poetry and her interaction with the Man and his wife in order to critique the content of Polish Romanticism.¹⁴ The Maiden serves as a vehicle for Krasiński to demonstrate the problem of form versus content in Romantic Poetry, showing that the beauty which the Maiden (i.e. Poetry) conveys externally does not match the evil contained underneath. The prologue to Act I constitutes a philosophical digression on the nature of Poetry and exploits a binary discourse on “Woman” as both inspiration to man and the cause of his fall. Krasiński’s entire treatment of Poetry is cast as a negative discourse on women. Poetry inspires and seduces the Poet with her beauty and physical embodiment of the ethereal, and then brings about his downfall through temptation and deceit. Underlying these opposing characteristics of the female is the Biblical paradigm of Genesis, examining Woman’s origins and her own fall into temptation. Krasiński draws on the story of Eden and the errors of Woman in order to show the disruption between the ideal ethereal being and the sins of Woman banished to Earth, and all women thereafter. He develops the Man’s wife, Maria, as a foil to the Maiden. Maria represents truth and demonstrates devotion and sacrifice, yet also gives in to temptation and draws the Poet away from his role as prophet-poet. Both the Wife and the Maiden are tugging the Man from either side, creating a kind of love

¹³ In the Polish text, the Maiden is referred to as *Dziewica*, which has several meanings and implications. Both “maiden” and “*dziewica*” mean virgin. The matter of virginity is further indicated by the white gown (in which the Maiden is dressed) traditionally worn on the wedding day and symbolic of sexual purity.

¹⁴ The feminine grammatical gender of the word *poezja* in Polish permits Krasiński to grammatically embody Poetry in the form of a woman, and allows for a multifaceted vision of Poetry as a temptress.

triangle that symbolizes a choice between the two worlds (the metaphysical and the natural) and the fight between good and evil.

Krasiński presents his ideas about the nature of Poetry in Act I, initially using the opening prologue to point out the potential for evil, misguidance, and the duplicitous and negative nature of Poetry. In the prologue, which is written in the form of a sermon, Krasiński clearly conveys his intentions for and judgments of the hero-Poet at the hands of Poetry and sets the philosophical grounds for the play as a whole. In the remainder of the act, the Man is seduced by the Maiden, and must choose between remaining with his wife or following Poetry. After his marriage at the very start of Act I, and upon seeing the spirit, the Man is restless, mourning the loss of Poetry after his marriage, and calls for a separation from his mortal wife and a reunion with Poetry toward which his soul is drawn. He laments: “O God, did You yourself sanctify the union of two bodies? Was it You that pronounced their inseparability, though their souls repulse each other, go their own ways and leave the bodies like two corpses alongside each other?” (182-3) [“Boże, czyś Ty sam uświęcił związek dwóch ciał? Czyś Ty sam wyrzekł, że nic ich rozerwać nie zdoła, choć dusze się odepchną od siebie, pójdą każda w swoją stronę i ciała, gdyby dwa trupy, zostawią przy sobie?” (12)] The Man becomes dangerously consumed by the Maiden, abandoning his duty as a husband and father in order to pursue Poetry. The Man and his wife increasingly grow apart as the baptism of their son, Orcio, approaches, and his wife asks only that he love their son, even if he no longer loves her as he ought.¹⁵ At the baptism, the Wife decides Orcio must be baptized a poet “so that [his] father may love [him] and not abandon [him].” (186) [“Bądź poetą, aby cię ojciec kochał, nie odrzucił” (20).] Significantly, the Man is absent from the ceremony, chasing the Maiden to the cliffs and hoping finally to “cross over the abyss” and “[leave] the world of men behind.” (187) [“Ja przesadzić nie zdołam przepaści. —

¹⁵ THE MAN: “I feel that I ought to love you” (184). [MAŻ : “Czuję, że powinienem cię kochać” (15).]

Świat ludzi zostawiłem z tyłu” (21-22).] Poetry has led him to the edge of a cliff, tempting him to leap in order to realize his goal of achieving the divine. Just before he jumps, however, the Maiden is stripped of her beauty and revealed as an apparition. The Man realizes that he has been deceived.

I.

While Krasinowski casts the Maiden as unquestionably evil, her external form is lovely and enticing. In this way, Krasinowski displays how the sounds and presentation of Poetry are deceptively beautiful to the Poet. Krasinowski thus simultaneously demonstrates the problem of form versus content of Polish Romanticism through the Poetry as Maiden, whose form is attractive but wicked underneath. The metaphor parallels Krasinowski's overall method in the drama of utilizing Romantic form but adopting a different content than his contemporaries that demonstrates the problem of the Poet being seduced by and giving in to the temptations of Poetry, as I will demonstrate below. The appearance is deceptive to the reader as well, who must recognize that the content of Poetry harbors a message contrary to that of its Romantic structure.

Krasinowski begins the prologue by establishing the figure of Poetry as powerful and ethereal with an ability to enchant the natural world:

Stars circle your head. Beneath your feet the waves of the sea. On the waves a rainbow rushes before you and disperses the clouds. Whatever you behold is yours. Shores, towns, and peoples belong to you. The heaven is yours. It seems as though your glory has no equal. (179)

Gwiazdy wokoło twojej głowy – pod twoimi nogi fale morza – na falach morza tęcza
przed tobą pędzi i rozdziela mgły – co ujrzysz, jest twoim – brzegi, miasta i ludzie tobie
się przynależą – niebo jest twoim. – Chwale twojej niby nic nie zrówna. (3)

Through the personification of Poetry and the description of her interaction with nature, she is endowed with a body. Yet, her connection to the ethereal world is also recognized, given her relationship to the heavens and the power she holds over nature. This first excerpt from the prologue embodies Romantic themes of the transcendental, the emotional, imagination, and a worshiping of nature, as evidenced by Poetry's control in the natural world and connection to the supernatural. The characteristics given here to Poetry are beautiful and represent romantic notions that the Poet envisions and worships.

The Maiden is materialized following the opening oration, as a guardian angel with evil spirits hovers above the Man (*Maz*¹⁶) and his bride during their wedding. The spirits proceed to send forth one of their own disguised as a maiden: "Now devils are urging me on and ordering me to pretend to be a saint" (181). ["Teraz gnają mnie czarty i każą świętą udawać" (9).] The reader is left to infer further that this "Maiden" (*Dziewica*) is "Poetry" itself, arguably a projection of the Man's poetic aspirations, and for him the incarnation of Poetry. The evil spirit takes the form of the Maiden by commanding nature and collecting body parts and articles of clothing from the cemetery below:

Flowers, pluck yourselves and fly into my hair.... O freshness and charm of dead
maidens, poured out in the air, floating above the graves, fly to my cheeks! Here a black-
haired maiden crumbles to dust. O shades of her curls, overhang my forehead! Beneath
this stone are two blue eyes from which the light has been extinguished. To me, come to

¹⁶ The main character is given three names throughout the play. I address these changes and their connotations in Chapter Three. See pages 32-33.

me, O fire that once glowed in them! Behind that grate a hundred tapers burn; today a princess was buried. O satin dress, white as milk, tear yourself from her! (181)

Kwiaty, odrywajcie się i lećcie do moich włosów.... Świeżość i wdzięki umarłych dziewczic, rozlane w powietrzu, płynące nad mogiłami, lećcie do jagód moich. -Tu czarnowłosa się rozsypuje – cienie jej puklów, zawiśnijcie mi nad czołem. – Pod tym kamieniem zgasłych dwoje oczu błękitnych – do mnie, do mnie ogień, co tlał w nich!- Za tymi kraty sto gromnic się pali – księżnę dziś pochowano – suknie atlasowa, biała jak mleko, oderwij się od niej! (9-10)

The construction of the Maiden's body and the acquisitions she makes are all from the dead, but the pieces put together make a beautiful woman in the eyes of the Man. The Maiden has chosen elements to construct the ideal image of a woman that would attract and be irresistible to any man. The exterior beauty of the Maiden, a false "saint," fools the Man. He sees a beautiful maiden, her divinity, and the white dress, the blue eyes, the curled hair, all like the maidens and princesses in their graves from which the Maiden collected her body parts. "Your brow is bright," he remarks, "your hair intertwined with flowers, O my beloved... Light flows all about you" (185). ["Twe czoło jasne, twój włos kwieciem przetykany, o luba... Światło leje się naokoło ciebie" (17).] She always has flowers in her hair, adding elements of true and natural beauty to her appearance, further seducing the Man. What the Man sees of the Maiden is enticing and beautiful, yet that exterior form simultaneously blinds him to the truth, as he fails to see the deception until it is almost too late.

Having taken on the human female form, the Maiden is imbued with specific characteristics of a mortal woman: the ability to create life, and the obligation to nurture those

born to her. She also possesses the qualities of the ethereal: she is spirit-like, emitting and creating unnatural beauty, and moving between the boundaries of both the metaphysical and physical worlds. As Krasiński laments in the prologue:

You play inconceivable raptures in the ears of others. You bind and unbind and hear as though it were a garland, a plaything for your fingers. You press out tears and dry them with a smile and then again you strike the smile from the lips of the smiler for a moment, for several moments, perhaps forever and ever. But what do you feel yourself? What do you create? What do you think? Through you flows a stream of beauty, but you are not beauty yourself. Woe unto you, woe! The child that weeps at its nurse's bosom, the field flower that knows not its own fragrance, has more merit before the Lord than you. (179)

Ty grasz cudzym uszom niepojęte rozkosze. – Splatasz serca i rozwiązujesz gdyby wianek, igraszkę palców twoich łyzy wyciskasz – suszysz je uśmiechem i na nowo uśmiech strącasz z ust na chwilę – na chwil kilka – czasem na wieki. – Ale sam co czujesz? – ale sam co tworzysz? – co myślisz? – Przez ciebie płynie strumień piękności, ale ty nie jesteś pięknnością. – Biada ci – biada! – Dziecię, co płacze na łonie mamki – kwiat polny, co nie wie o woniach swoich, więcej ma zasługi przed Panem od ciebie. (3-4)

With the ability to affect human emotion, Poetry, in Krasiński's conception, has the capability of both healing and inflicting pain upon the same individual. The Maiden's duplicitous nature is thus revealed. Poetry does not feel remorse nor reflect upon her villainous behavior as she takes advantage of the beauty she is initially described as possessing in order to deceive the Poet.

While Poetry's form may be beautiful, her inner-self and content are not. Although Poetry may

initially seem pleasant in form, beneath is an evil power. The evil and deceptive nature that lie within Poetry is so wicked that even the naïve and unlearned child, and the flower that does not have the ability to recognize its own endearing quality, are superior and have more of a right to address the ethereal world. In this way, Krasieński declares nature as the bearer of true beauty, stripping Poetry of the main quality that draws her followers into temptation: a supreme level of magnificence.

The Wife's ability to see the Maiden makes Poetry tangible in the material world, and we know that in the world of the play, the Maiden is not just part of the Poet's imagination. The Wife's ability to see truth also reveals the true nature of Poetry that rests beneath the beautiful image, beyond which the Poet cannot see. His wife sees evil and envisions a vulgar form, describing the Maiden to her husband as follows: "It's a phantom pale as a corpse. Its eyes have no light in them and its voice is like the creaking of a cart on which a corpse lies... a shroud in rags falls from her shoulders... I smell sulphur and the stench of the grave" (185). ["Najświętsza Panno, ratuj mnie! — to widmo blade jak umarły — oczy zgasłe i głos jak skrzypienie wóz, na którym trup leży... Całun w szmatach opada jej z ramion... czuję siarkę i zaduch grobowy" (17).] The discrepancy between what the Man and his wife see is evidence of Poetry's deceptive qualities about which Krasieński writes in the prologue: "...through [the Maiden] flows a stream of beauty, but [she is] not beauty [her]self." ["Przez [Dziewicę] płynie strumień piękności, ale [ona] nie [jest] pięknoscią" (3).] The Wife sees this maiden not as a beauty, but rather as an ugly figure that tempts her husband based on falsehoods. If the reader keeps in mind that the Maiden is constructed from cemetery "remnants," the ability of the Man and his wife to see two different images becomes indicative of Poetry's deceitful nature, the Poet's blindness to the truth, and also of the fact that the wife is clear-eyed, and not easily deceived. Megan Dixon argues that since

the Wife “is capable of seeing the truths to which the Man is blind, she cannot be entirely dependent on the Man’s imagination” (446). Therefore, Dixon argues, Maria’s influence should be considered as a guide who reveals to the Poet the things he does not know or see (ibid.). The duplicity of Poetry is demonstrated by these differing visual perceptions of the Maiden. More important, however, is the Wife’s ability to see truth, and the truths to which the Man is blind. When the Wife tries to make her husband realize the illusion, the Maiden cries out: “She who holds you back is an illusion. Her life is transient, her love like a leaf that perishes amid a thousand faded leaves” (185). [“Ta, która cię wstrzymuje, jest złudzeniem. — Jej życie znikome — jej miłość jako liść, co ginie wśród tysiąca zeschniętych” (17).] Though the Maiden is the real illusion, further deceiving the Man by attempting to transfer her own characteristics onto the Wife and accusing the Wife of holding him back, the Wife is unable to convince her husband of the truth, for he must realize it himself.

Not until the Man stands at the precipice, preparing to leap toward heaven, does the Maiden reveal her evil identity to him, and the Poet sees the same vision that his wife sees. He observes: “What is happening to you? The flowers are leaving your temples and falling to the earth, and as soon as they are touched, they slip away like lizards, they slither like serpents” (188). [“Cóż się dzieje z tobą — kwiaty odrywają się od skroni twoich i padają na ziemię, a jak tylko się jej dotkną, ślizgają jak jaszczurki, czołgają jak żmije” (23).] The flowers are noticeably the first to fall – signaling the departure of any remnant of natural beauty that the Maiden possesses in her constructed physical form. When her beauty vanishes, the Maiden is no longer able to play the role of temptress, but the Man has already decided to abandon her, and the subsequent disappearance of the Maiden, one might argue, is symbolically the Man’s failure as a

Poet. By choosing to walk away from Poetry, he has given up his ability to serve as a link between the supernatural and the natural world.

As we might recall, Krasieński foretells the consequences of giving into the temptations of “Woman,” both ethereal and earthly, in the prologue:

Blessed is he in whom you have resided, as God has resided in the world, unseen, unheard, in His every part magnificent, great, the Lord, before whom all created things bow and say: “He is here.” Such a one will wear you like a star on his forehead and will not separate himself from your love by the abyss of the word. He will love all men and will walk as a man among his brethren. But he who does not hold to you, who deceives you too soon and betrays you to the vain delights of men, on such a one’s head will you strew a few flowers and will turn away, and he will play with the wilted flowers and will weave his funeral wreath all his life. Such a one and woman have the same beginning.

(179-180)

Błogosławiony ten, w którym zamieszkałaś, jako Bóg zamieszkał w świecie, nie widziany, nie słyszany, w każdej części jego okazały, wielki, Pan, przed którym się unizają stworzenia i mówią: “On jest tutaj.” – Taki cię będzie nosił gdyby gwiazdę na czole swoim, a nie oddzieli się od twej miłości przepaścią słowa. – On będzie kochał ludzi i wystąpi mężem pośród braci swoich. – A kto cię nie dochowa, kto zdradzi za wczesnie i wyda na marną rozkosz ludziom, temu sypniesz kilka kwiatów na głowę i odwrócisz się, a on zwiędłymi się bawi i grobowy wieniec splata sobie przez całe życie. – Temu i niewieście jeden jest początek. (5)

If he so chooses, the conned Poet will embrace Poetry in the same manner in which a devout person embraces God, loyally and completely. The Poet is loyal to Poetry while still a man in the material world, fully accepting his role, and allowing the will of Poetry to guide him. However, the Poet who abandons the true notion of Poetry for the temptations of earthly women will be abandoned by Poetry herself. The Poet is caught in a triangle, with Poetry in one corner and Woman in the other. Should he choose Woman, he is left only with the remnants of his former Poetic life, and destined for a life of suffering.

II.

The Maiden's subsequent banishment and disappearance, and, accordingly, the disappearance of Poetry from the drama, symbolizes the Man's abandonment of Poetry and failure as a Poet, but his realization of his earthly duties as a husband and father. The Man returns home to find his wife on her deathbed, realizing his betrayal toward her. When he reaches her side, she reveals that, having prayed to God to instill in her the spirit of poetry, she has become a poet in order to bring him back to her. She composes poetry aloud before telling the Man about their son's fate as a poet, and then dies, foreshadowing their son's eventual death: "He who is a poet does not live long." ["Kto jest poetą, ten nie żyje długo" (33).] The Wife misunderstands the nature of poetry as a façade and seeks to become a poet herself as a solution to keeping her husband.

From the time I lost you, a change came over me. 'Lord God,' I said, and beat my breast, and held a taper to my chest, and did penance – 'Send down the spirit of poetry unto me' – and on the morning of the third day I became a poet. (190)

Od kiedym cię straciła, zaszła odmiana we mnie – ‘Panie Boże’ mówiłam i biłam się w piersi, i gromnicę przystawiałam do piersi, i pokutowałam, ‘spuść na mnie ducha poezji’ i trzeciego dnia z rana stałam się poetą. (30) ¹⁷

She has acted as the ideal wife and woman, willing to sacrifice everything, even her life, for her husband and son. She is truth and devotion, and subsequently acts as a guide for the Man in order for him to see the truth, as well. Krasieński’s discursive treatment of women is embodied in the contrast between the Maiden and the Wife, and draws from the Genesis story to accentuate the detrimental effect that both women have on the Poet. A negative discourse on women as the cause of original sin by man disparages the Wife as unable to satisfy the spiritual needs of the Man, but also further emphasizes the divergence between the beautiful seductress form and the evil nature of Poetry’s content. In this way, Krasieński’s theme of form versus content is reiterated through women, and taken beyond the matter of poetry and Romanticism.

In the prologue, Krasieński asks of the Maiden/Poetry: “Who created you in anger or in irony?”, posing the question of who could produce something so twofaced and cold as Poetry. He continues: “Who gave you your vile life, so delusive that you can seem an Angel a moment before you sink into the mud, before, like a reptile, you creep into the slime and are stifled by it” (179). [“Kto cię stworzył w gniewie lub w ironii? – Kto ci dał życie nikczemne, tak zwodnicze, że potrafisz udać Anioła, chwilą nim zagrążniesz w błoto, nim jak płaz pójdziesz czolgać i zadusić się mułem?” (4)] The reptilian characteristics accentuate the disgust of Poetry’s nature, directly tying back to the imagery of Genesis and relating Woman to temptation:

¹⁷ Note the intersection between Romanticism and religious imagery in this passage. *Gromnica* is a large, special candle that is lit only during the sacrament of baptism, communion, and in keeping vigil over a deceased person. The candle is also placed in the hands of the deceased before burial. According to some folk beliefs, the candle lit in a window also serves as protection during a large storm. In addition, there is the imagery of resurrection in terms of “rising” as a poet on the third day.

Woman of clay and mud, be not jealous, hold your insults, do not blaspheme. See, that was God's first thought of you, but you followed the counsel of the serpent instead and thus became what you are now. (185)

Kobieto z gliny i z błota, nie zazdrość, nie powtarzaj- nie bluźnij – patrz – to myśl pierwsza Boga o tobie, ale tyś poszła za radą węża i stałaś się, czym jesteś. (18)

When the Man defends Poetry to his wife, his defense recapitulates the story of Eve falling victim to temptation by the seductive serpent in the Garden of Eden. Accordingly, Woman is also subject to temptation. However, the Man neglects to acknowledge that God also expelled Man for his sin, interpreting Man as “hero” and Woman as “weak,” a paradigm that resurfaces more than once in the play.¹⁸

The image of a reptile in mud also distances the nature of Poetry away from the ethereal, metaphysical and brings it closer to the primitive, natural world. Thus, if Poetry is not actually a divine creature, she and Woman are born as a result of this earth. “You and woman have the same beginning” (179). [“Tobie i niewieście jeden jest początek” (4).] A clear association forms among pain, creativity, woman, and childbirth, foreshadowing the nature of the relationship between the Wife and her son throughout the first and second acts of the play. If Poetry comes from the same beginning as a mortal woman, she must then also suffer the same pains as Woman. Krasieński addresses Poetry:

But you, too, suffer, though your pains are creative of nothing and come to naught. The groan of the lowest wretch is numbered among the tones of the celestial harps. Your despair and sighs fall to the depths and Satan gathers them in, adding them joyfully to his

¹⁸ See page 36 for another instance of this in the discussion about the effeminate son, Orcio.

falsehoods and delusions. And the Lord one day will deny them as they have denied the Lord. (179)

Ale i ty cierpisz, choć twoja boleść nic nie utworzy, na nic się nie zda. – Ostatniego nędzarza jęk policzon między tony harf niebieskich. – Twoje rozpacz i westchnienia opadają na dół i Szatan je zbiera, dodaje w radości do swoich kłamstw i złudzeń – a Pan je kiedyś zaprzeczy, jako one zaprzeczyły Pana. (4)

Poetry does not contribute or look to progress beyond suffering, but instead contributes to the body of evils, artifices, and lies. Rather than producing something good from the pains she inflicts, Poetry suffers for nothing, and causes suffering as a result. Poetry's evil qualities, collected and nurtured by the Devil himself, would be denied in the face of God and the ethereal goodness. Should Man embrace any of those qualities, he would also find himself forbidden entrance into the space of eternal peace in the divine world.

Temptation plays a large part in the destructive nature of the relationships between the Maiden, Man, and Wife. On the one hand, the Maiden tempts the Man, and consequently the Poet, with her false beauty. On the other hand, Poetry tempts the Wife in an indirect fashion: the Wife *becomes* a poet in an attempt to embody what it is that attracts the Man. As a result, the Wife stands on the opposite side of the Man, trying to pull him away from the Maiden. Temptation in this instance is based on the sinful nature of jealousy, a negative characteristic that Krasieński is associating directly with woman. The Wife's plan relies on the Poet to give into the temptation of Poetry, but this time embodied in her own self and in her son. These scenes again reference Genesis, the susceptibility to sin, and Woman as the cause of that sin.

The relationship between the Poet and Poetry is founded on the Poet giving in to the temptations of the ethereal nature of Poetry. The theme of Genesis reenters in a reference to the faults of Man, as the Poet does not recognize his own position but must decide on his own whether to embrace Poetry. In Genesis, Adam places blame upon Eve, and Eve upon the serpent, for the sin committed; but both Adam and Eve are punished and banished from Eden. Similarly, Krasieński does not place blame solely on Poetry; the Poet too must bear some responsibility:

Not for this do I reproach you, Poetry, mother of Beauty and Salvation. Only he is unhappy who, of a world destined to perish, must remember you or foresee you, for only those do you destroy who have consecrated themselves to you, who have become the living voices of your glory. (179)

Nie przeto wyrzekam na ciebie, Poezjo, matko Piękności i Zbawienia. – Ten tylko nieszczęśliwy, kto na światach poczętych, na światach mających zginąć, musi wspominać lub przeczuwać ciebie – bo jedno tych gubisz, którzy się poświęcili tobie, którzy się stali żywymi głosami twej chwały. (4-5)

The reader is alerted that aside from the grand qualities of Poetry, those who devote themselves to it are the ones who suffer most. Poetry leads Poets to the depths of hell, notably the *un-divine*, because she has instilled in them her gift. She is not reliable, and the Poet should not allow himself to be taken over completely by Poetry.¹⁹ Krasieński suggests that the Poet's commitment to Poetry is a choice that puts him in the position to suffer and be denied entrance into heaven.

At the same time, Man, giving in to the temptations of Woman and earthly sin, is prevented from

¹⁹ This concept is most evidenced in Act I when the Maiden drives the Man to the edge of a cliff nearly to his death. The Man is so swept up in emotion and romantic ideas of poetry that he has lost sight of reality.

attaining a divine state. Neither the Poet nor Man, then, has the true ability to enter the divine world. Krasiński thus demonstrates that Poetry is great and a part of the celestial world, but also the downfall and a problem in the material world for the men who choose to embrace it.

For the remainder of his life the Man will be a failed Poet, unable to reenter the ethereal space to which the Romantic Poet is said to have access. Such an interpretation is supported by the prologue, where the persistent and faithful Poet “will wear [Poetry] like a star on his forehead and will not separate himself from your love by the abyss of the word” (179). However, as the Man does not follow Poetry beyond the cliff, he “does not hold to [Poetry].... deceives [it] too soon and betrays [it] to the vain delights of men ... and he will play with the wilted flowers and will weave his funeral wreath all his life” (180).²⁰ In this sense, the Man’s inability to commit solely to Poetry decides his fate as one that is full of pain and that contributes to his death. By committing to Poetry, he would at least have fulfilled his expected role as a prophet-poet. Krasiński’s prophecy is played out, and the principal values of Romanticism in transcending the material world are here unmasked as ideals unattainable for humans. The Man will hold only the remnants of Poetry in his hands. Poetry can only remain within a man that chooses to embrace its qualities and reject all else (including family life). Poetry, however, cannot exist without the Poet, who creates her with his own inherent ability. Thus, the relationship between the Poet and Poetry becomes complex and lines become blurred if the Poet loses his control over the nature of Poetry, or if he becomes so enticed by its ethereal nature that he loses touch with the natural realm.

²⁰ See Polish text and citation of this and the above quote on page 23.

CHAPTER 3: The Poet: Neither Word Nor Deed

Significant attention has been given so far in this study to Poetry characterized in the female form. As mentioned above, Poetry does not exist without its creator, the Poet. However, the Man abandons Poetry very early in the drama, spending the remainder of his life without “word,” trying to raise his son in hopes of redemption for being tempted by Poetry. His journey after his failure in “word” is important to Krasiński’s representation of a prophet-poet that also does not succeed in “deed,” but rather suffers because of his gift and position. In the Romantic struggle between “word” and “deed,” the Man of the drama actually fails in both. He abandons Poetry, failing as a Poet, and he attempts deed through revolution in the second half of the play, failing at this as well. Henryk is not a revolutionary in the traditional sense, though, as he is fighting to protect the aristocracy from the “true” revolutionaries led by a committed man named Pankracy (a failed revolutionary filled with hubris, in Krasiński’s portrayal). In Krasiński’s development of the Man as a failure in both word and deed, he suggests that the Polish Romantic Poet that is supposed to lead the people of Poland toward independence might in fact be ineffective in both respects. Any attempts made by the Poet to advance in deed, whose strength ought to be word, will likely end in disaster.

I. Understanding the Romantic Prophet-Poet

Polish literary scholars often discuss the Poet and his poetry as a weapon against the dissolution of a Polish national identity. The use of “Poet” with a capital letter “P” differs from “poet” with a lower case letter “p,” in that the “Poet” is the Romantic hero. He holds the responsibilities of bridging the material and ethereal worlds through his position. A “poet” does

not necessarily possess these divine characteristics, but is rather called such simply for the act of creating poetry as a basic literary item, not Romantic Poetry. In Polish Romanticism, the “Poet” is a bard, a prophet, and takes on the role of representative of the nation. In his book

Romantyzm : Słownik Literatury Polskiej, Mieczysław Inglot defines the Romantic Poet as...

...being simultaneously a representative of the people and a guard of the nation's mementoes as well as values. His works are supposed to nurture patriotism and the memory of his ancestors. At the same time, the poet's songs are a tool to educate the simple people. These works should reach “the thatched roofs” of the peasants, so as to enlighten the folk.... The poet, whose genius allows him to create visionary images, was named bard.... Poets not only assisted the national struggle with their poetry, but also actively participated in it.

... jest jednocześnie przedstawicielem ludu i strażnikiem narodowych pamiątek oraz wartości. Jego utwory mają pielęgnować patriotyzm i pamięć o przodkach. Jednocześnie pieśni poety są narzędziem służącym edukacji prostych ludzi. Utwory mają zawędrować „pod strzechy,” by oświecać lud....Poeta, którego geniusz pozwala mu tworzyć obrazy wizjonerskie, został nazwany wieszczem....Poeci nie tylko swoją poezją wspierali naród w walce, sami również aktywnie włączali się w działanie. (Inglot 172-3)

Inglot provides this definition, however, in relation to the works of Romantic writers such as Mickiewicz and Słowacki. He considers Krasiński's Poet as a different type, not employed in the same way as the Romantic national hero/Poet. Inglot sees the Poet in Krasiński's drama as an unhappy man, and the poetic gift as a curse that simultaneously enables him to encounter the supernatural world. This curse, Inglot argues, is the reason for the final doom and damnation of

the artist; he plays the hero, stages his own death and that of his beloved, but does so according to literary formulas (173-4).²¹ While the Mickiewiczian characterization of the Romantic Poet is heroic, for example, catering to the sympathies of a nationalistic audience, Krasiński's Poet is not "romanticized," not successful, nor is he honored to hold the title of "prophet-poet," or bard. Rather, Krasiński's Poet is imbued with an unfortunate privilege to access the divine world. Such admittance is a detriment to the artist, and essentially the cause of the Poet's demise. Krasiński creates a hero endowed with such an ill-fated ability to access the divine world but forced to live in an earthly realm. His representation of the Poet and the role of Poetry is one that differs from his contemporaries' positive enthusiasm about the function of the Poet and the boundaries (or boundlessness) of Poetry. While Krasiński maintains the customary Romantic form in this dramatic work, he departs from standard Romantic content by altering and reevaluating the role of the Poet and Poetry within the national struggle. He instead suggests that Poetry is flawed and should not be trusted in its entirety.

II. Henryk

Thus far, I have referred to the hero of *Nie-boska komedia* as "the Man." However, Krasiński assigns several names to this character (Mąż, Pan Młody, Henryk) throughout the text that are emblematic of the various changes occurring to the character preceding and following the abandonment of Poetry. In stage directions throughout the entire play, Krasiński calls him "Mąż," meaning either "Husband" or "Man." In the Polish translation of the Bible, "Mąż" means either "husband" as a man living with a woman, or "Man" (in the philosophical sense). The use of "Man" serves as a connotation for "man" created by God, or Adam in the story of Genesis. The Man is also briefly referred to as "Pan Młody," or "Bridegroom," in stage

²¹ "Poeta w dramacie Krasińskiego to człowiek nieszczęśliwy, a dar poetycki to klątwa, która jednocześnie umożliwia kontakt ze światem nadrealnym (Orcio) i jest przyczyną zguby artysty...gra bohatera inscenizującego śmierć swoją i ukochanej na wzór schematów literackich." (173-4 Inglot)

directions in Act I when he speaks to his wife during the wedding celebration.²² The brief use of the designator “bridegroom” has two connotations: first, to the marriage of his wife-to-be Maria at the start of Act I, and second, the name foreshadows the possibility of a relationship with the Maiden. The union between the Man and the Maiden implies a union between the Poet and Poetry, as well, rather than just between the Man and his wife. Lastly, the Man’s actual name, used by those who know him, is “Hrabia Henryk,” or “Count Henryk.” Henryk is not frequently used in reference to this character until the last two acts of the play, and the use of his title “Count” is used only by the revolutionaries, and serves as a distinguishing mark of the aristocracy in contrast to those rising against them. Among all these names, Henryk is not referred to directly as “the Poet” by other characters. Despite this, I suggest that the designation of “Poet” defines his character more than any other title because it is what drives his decisions above anything else. The question then arises of where the Poet comes from, how he became a Poet, and who he is.

Chapter One of this study included a brief discussion of the Romantic Poet as a prophet-poet representative of the common man, composing poetry in an effort to assist in the national struggle. Krasiński suggests that Henryk was *supposed* to be this type of Poet, identified by the spirits and Guardian Angel at the beginning of Act I as a poet with a “great heart.” When he fails to remain loyal to Poetry, however, Henryk fails in both the divine and natural worlds.

²² See pages (8-9) of the original text: *Komnata pełna osób – bal – muzyka – świece – kwiaty.* – Panna Młoda walcuje i po kilku okrągach staje, przypadkiem napotyka męża w tłumie i głowę, opiera na jego ramieniu.
PAN MŁODY: Jakżeś mi piękna w osłabieniu swoim – w nieładzie kwiaty i perły na włosach twoich – płoniesz ze wstydu i znużenia – o, wiecznie, wiecznie będziesz pieśnią moją.
PANNA MŁODA: Będę wierną żoną tobie, jako matka mówiła, jako serce mówi. – Ale tyle ludzi jest tutaj – tak gorąco i huczno.
PAN MŁODY: Idź z raz jeszcze w taniec, a ja tu stać będę i patrzeć na cię, jakem nieraz w myśli patrzył na sunących aniołów.
PANNA MŁODA: Pójdę, jeśli chcesz, ale już sił prawie nie mam.
PAN MŁODY: Proszę cię, moje kochanie.
Taniec i muzyka.

Henryk's marriage and its consummation are symbolic of his decision to forgo the life of a devout Poet. Henryk states:

I have descended to earthly vows for I have found her of whom I dreamt. May curses rain upon my head if ever I cease to love her... Cursed be the moment in which I took a woman as wife, in which I abandoned the mistress of my youth, the thought of my thoughts, the soul of my soul. (181-182)

Zstąpiłem do ziemskich ślubów, bom znalazł tę, o której marzyłem – przeklęstwo mojej głowie, jeśli ją kiedy kochać przestanę... Przeklęta niech będzie chwila, w której pojąłem kobietę, w której opuściłem kochankę lat młodych, myśl myśli moich, duszę duszy mojej... (8-10)

By choosing to marry a woman, he essentially abandons Poetry. Thus, when the Maiden appears, the temptations of Poetry seem to Henryk like a second chance at becoming the prophet-poet. When standing on the edge of a precipice, about to decide whether to follow Poetry or return to his family, Henryk angrily calls back to God in frustration for where he had been led:

O God, do You damn me because I believed that Your Beauty surpasses the beauty of this earth by a whole heaven? Because I went in pursuit of it and wearied myself for it, only to become an amusement for devils? ... The charm of the abyss tempts me. My soul is giddy. O God, your enemy conquers. (188)

Boże, czy Ty mnie za to potępisz, że uwierzyłem, iż Twoja piękność przenosi o całe niebo piękność tej ziemi – za to, że ścigałem za nią i męczyłem się dla niej, a że stałem się igrzyskiem szatanów? (24)

His responsibility to his family is the very reality he was ready to abandon in order to reach the divine world. When he returns, Henryk must learn to deal with his position in the natural world without his previous connection to the divine. In his study of *Nie-boska komedia*, Gordon Wickstrom suggests that, overall, Henryk is...

...progressively shut off from what Krasieński seems to be calling the true poetry, the poetic life, lived directly and in an almost prelapsarian harmony with all creation. The poet sins against himself and life when he erects systems of words, pale and erring shadows of the life for which men were created. (271)

Thus, Wickstrom suggests, the poetic lifestyle is devoid of action and deed in the service of which Man is supposed to live, and his poetry is not life itself, but an abstract copy of life. This argument directs our attention to the errors of Henryk, as well as Poetry. While Poetry has tempted the Poet with the goal of a “god-like dominion through the mastery of art” (ibid.), he himself has chosen that path and the destruction that accompanies it. Henryk’s attempt to reach a “prelapsarian” state is a failure, and as the play progresses, the problems of Poetry become even clearer.

Despite entrusting himself to God, Henryk realizes that he has been deceived. In this way, Krasieński subverts the power of the Poet, recasting him as demoted from the metaphorical pedestal on which he stands. Krasieński suggests that due to a Poet succumbing entirely to Poetry in pursuit of the divine, he suffers and is no longer in control of himself, nor in any condition to lead others. One must note the implications of this for the final two acts of the play, which represent Henryk’s attempt at protecting the aristocracy from a revolution of the masses. As we can see, the Poet’s discourse with God in Krasieński’s play integrates established notions of the Poet and the Poet’s role in Polish Romantic literature. Unlike in the work of Krasieński’s

contemporaries, Poetry in *Nie-boska komedia* is harmful to the Poet, enticing the Poet in his quest to bear witness to the “unseen world,” and likely leading him to a dangerous precipice and his demise, abandoning his obligations and the natural world for which the prophet-poet is responsible. The Romantic must not attempt to live out poetry, Krasieński argues, and neither must he be taken beyond a point of self-control and inner truth. He must not act or respond irrationally. Moreover, Krasieński’s argument is further developed when he places his Poet in the face of active, real revolution.

III. Henryk and His Son

Act II begins with an oration similar to the prologue of Act I. This passage describes the childhood of Henryk’s son Orcio, a poet, and the ways in which his life is not like a normal child’s, but rather filled with experiences and thoughts that “flow to [him] from another world.” (193) [“...które chyba z innego świata płyną ku tobie” (37).] Ten years after the death of Henryk’s wife, Orcio stands at his mother’s grave with his father, where he recites poetry. Henryk feels pain and unrest at his son’s fate, yet is preoccupied with his own emptiness and lack of love or desire within him. He is haunted by several premonitions: that his son should go blind, that the society he knows will dissolve, and that he will suffer alone (197). Henryk then encounters an Eagle,²³ which incites in him a will to transform himself and fight with the aristocrats against the revolutionaries. However, Orcio, now fourteen years old, is ill and going blind. As Henryk goes off to fight, he wonders how his blind poet-son will survive.

Following the death of Henryk’s wife in Act I, the events of Act II show how Poetry can drive its victims nearly to death, and – should he still survive – the Poet is likely to suffer

²³ A white eagle is the symbol of Poland. Thus, given the call for the Man to “fight for [his fathers’] honor and power,” (198) [“Szablą ojców twoich bij się o ich cześć i potęgę”] may be interpreted as a call to fight for Poland. However, Wickstrom argues that the eagle symbolizes egoism and the pursuit of fame throughout the play (271). Mickiewicz regards the Eagle as a symbol of “political and warlike ambition” (*Analysis* 46).

anyway. Henryk's life is an example of this, as he continues to live both as a failed Poet, and as a helpless father.²⁴ We see that the goals of Henryk's wife, who christens her son in Act I as a poet, are met when Henryk remains to care for him. After his wife's death, Henryk fully devotes himself to loving and caring for his blind, effeminate son in the hopes of redemption for giving in to the temptation of Poetry in Act I. Orcio is a tragic child-poet, blind and unable to fend for himself. He also suffers from a continued supernatural connection to his mother, who continues to call down to him from heaven, guiding him to continue to pursue poetry. It is essential to take note that Orcio is a different kind of poet than Henryk. Orcio is not regarded as the Romantic Poet like his father, but as a natural poet whose life is devoted entirely to poetry but not fated to bear the same national burdens as his father. As a helpless individual, however, Orcio is fated to die young. Orcio is a frail being, blind and helpless, and his only ability is to produce poetry. His weakness casts Orcio in an effeminate light since as a boy he should instead become strong and independent. Krasiński's feminization of Orcio is another instance where the female gender is spoken of in a negative light.²⁵ Furthermore, the weaknesses of Orcio and his mother as poets imply an inability to survive as poets. The mother loses her sanity and dies almost immediately after she becomes a poet, and Orcio dies young, underscoring that both are unable to handle the spirit of poetry within themselves for very long. As soon as the revolution begins, Orcio is killed in crossfire, unprotected by his father. Henryk fails in deed, unwilling to join the revolutionaries who are fully committed to action, failing to lead the aristocrats to success, and failing as a father along the way.

²⁴ See Erlich, who argues that Count Henryk is "a moral cripple, a tragically warped human being, an empty shell" (*Images* 86). Count Henryk fails both Poetry and his family, and later will fail himself as well as those he intended to lead in the final battle at Holy Trinity castle.

²⁵ See above, pages 25-26. Consequently, gender in the play is again viewed in such a way that man is a strong hero, and woman is weak. This further relates to Genesis, following the interpretation that Eve is subordinate to Adam given that she was created to serve the needs of Adam. Thus, Krasiński is treating woman as subordinate to man.

Krasiński has constructed the drama in such a way that readers will witness the making of Orcio as a poet, whereas the introduction to Henryk begins with his abandonment of Poetry, a simultaneous construction and deconstruction of “Poet.” While Henryk and his son both suffer as poets, they have different beginnings as such. Henryk is a product of divine will, blessed as a Poet, who relinquishes his connection to the divine when marrying a woman. Orcio has also been blessed as a poet, but in a baptism that is heretical in nature as the wife disrupts the ceremony, and curses her own son. In this way, their respective endowers, Maria and God, are creators who bestow upon Orcio and Henryk the responsibilities of poet. The baptism takes place at the exact moment when Henryk stands at the cliff, making the decision whether to cross the abyss into the divine world or to abandon his role and embrace the natural world. The timing signals a transfer of powers from one poet (Henryk) to another (Orcio) at the hands of two different creators: the divine God and the earthly mother. “I bless you, [Orcio]... Be a poet so that your father may love you and not abandon you some time... serve your father and be pleasing to him and then he will forgive your mother... I curse you if you will not be a poet” (186). [“Błogosławię cię, Orciu, ... Bądź poetą, aby cię ojciec kochał, nie odrzucił kiedyś... Ty ojcu zasłużysz się i przypodobasz – a wtedy on twojej matce przebaczy... Przeklinam cię, jeśli nie będziesz poetą” (20-21).] Her decision condemns her son to a life of suffering, and again places the weak and feminized Orcio at the service of his masculine, “heroic” father. She tells her husband: “At the christening, Poet was the first name the priest gave him... I blessed, and then I cursed. He will be a poet” (191). [“Na chrzcie ksiądz mu dał pierwsze imię... błogosławiłam, dodałam przekleństwo – on będzie poetą” (31).] Just as his father had once been, Orcio is now a poet above all else, christened as such, and thus with a connection to the divine through the religious service demanded by his mother. By blessing him as a poet, however,

Maria also realizes that she has placed a curse on her son. She understands the implications of her son's role. "I fastened on his wings," Maria tells Henryk on her deathbed, "and dispatched him among the worlds that he might imbibe everything that is lovely and terrible and lofty."

(191) ["Jam mu skrzydła przypięła, posłała między światy, by się napoił wszystkim, co piękne i straszne, i wyniosłe" (32).]

Henryk finally recognizes the burden of being a Poet at the cliff, abandons Poetry, and heads home. Upon his return, he finds his son cursed with the very thing he has just abandoned. The major conflict is in the position between the natural and the divine world. The wife's attempt to endow her son and herself with poetry is an attempt to endow the natural world with the divine qualities that tempt Henryk:

Maria, do you want to destroy your own child and burden me with two deaths? ... God, have mercy on our child whom, it seems, in Your wrath You have destined for madness and premature death... For ten years I have not had a peaceful day... You have let down upon me a hail of pain, of fleeting images, of forebodings, and of dreams... Let me love my child in peace and let there be peace now between Creator and created. (195-6)

Mario, czyż dziecię własne chcesz zgubić, mnie dwoma zgonami obarczyć? ... Boże, zmiłuj się nad dzieckiem naszym, którego, zda się, że w gniewie Twoim przeznaczyłeś szaleństwu i za wczesnej śmierci ... Od lat dziesięciu dnia spokojnego nie miałem ... spuściłaś na mnie grad bóleści i znikomych obrazów, i przecuciów, i marzeń ...dozwól mi dziecię ukochać w pokoju i niechaj stanie mir już między Stwórcą i stworzonym. (40-42)

Henryk's reference to the "Creator" and the "created" is ambiguous and may refer to either God and his creation, or the mother and her son. Due to the capitalization of "Creator" in the original text, Krasiński is likely referring to God, which implies a relationship between the Poet and him/her who endowed him with the title. However, Maria is Orcio's creator in every sense of the word, and Orcio has been baptized not in waters but in poetry. The distinction between the poets' creators is further intensified if we consider the wife's name, Maria, which conjures images of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Both poets have implications of access to the divine, but receive this quality through different sources. The sources will come into play in how poetry unfolds in their lives, and the responsibilities that each poet carries are utterly different, as exemplified in the contrasting nature of Henryk's and Orcio's poetry.

The prologue to Act II describes the childhood of Orcio, and the ways in which his life is not like a normal child's. Instead, his life as a poet is filled with experiences and thoughts from another world, a divine one. Orcio's actions focus on contact with nature, calling attention to his Romantic tendency toward the idyllic. The characterization of the boy even begins to represent an angel, and Krasiński fashions an image that again recalls Genesis and the fall of Man/Adam:

If a flower that fades had a soul of fire and inspiration from heaven, if on every little leaf that bends toward the ground an angel thought lay instead of a drop of dew, the flower would resemble you, O my child. Perhaps children were that way before the fall of Adam. (193)

Gdyby kwiat, co wieden, miał duszę z ognia i natchnienie z nieba, gdyby na każdym listku, chylącym się ku ziemi, anielska myśl leżała miasto kropli rosy, ten kwiat byłby do ciebie podobnym, o dziecię moje – może takie bywały przed upadkiem Adama. (37)

The notion that Orcio is so close to the image of an angel reinforces the idea of the boy being a natural poet, pure and living only for creating poetry. However, being born from an earthly woman, he is still a child born *after* the fall of man, and his weakness and eventual demise demonstrate a non-angelic mortality. His near-perfection works in opposition to Henryk, and Henryk is then further cast as the postlapsarian man, whose sin was falling for the temptations of the Maiden and of Woman.

Following the prologue of Act II, Henryk and Orcio stand beside Maria's tomb. Orcio begins to pray for his mother, altering the words of the traditional Hail Mary: "Hail, Mary, full of the grace of God, Queen of Heaven, Lady of everything that blooms on earth, in the fields, by the streams" (194).²⁶ ["Zdrowaś Panno Maryjo, łaskiś Bożej pełna, Królowa niebios, Pani wszystkiego, co kwitnie na ziemi, po polach, nad strumieniami" (38).] Orcio changes the words of the original Hail Mary, adding idyllic images of nature and speaking aloud the words that are so strong in his head that he cannot help but pronounce them: "When those words reel about my head and make it hurt so, I just have to say them, Papa" (194). ["Kiedy mi te słowa się nawijają i bolą w głowie tak, że, proszę Papy, muszę je powiedzieć" (39).] His nature as a poet is so overwhelming that he cannot control it and cannot help but carry out his role. In response, Henryk calls out to God, "Let me love my child in peace and let there be peace now between Creator and created" (196). ["Dozwól mi dziecię ukochać w pokoju, i niechaj stanie mir już między Stwórcą i stworzonym" (42).] After ten years, Orcio displays these signs of the prophet-poet, but is still only a child, and Henryk fears Orcio's inability to persist, feeling hopeless for his inability to release his child from the curse from which he himself chose to break away.

²⁶ Compare with the traditional "Hail Mary": "Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." The Polish prayer is as follows: „Zdrowaś Maryjo, łaski pełna, Pan z Tobą, błogosławionaś Ty między niewiastami i błogosławiony owoc żywota Twojego, Jezus. Święta Maryjo, Matko Boża, módl się za nami grzesznymi teraz i w godzinę śmierci naszej. Amen.”

Henryk feels his incapacity to be a good father, despite having abandoned Poetry in order to serve his family, and his failures to fulfill his responsibilities to his son become apparent.

IV. Blindness

In Act II, Henryk's metaphorical blindness and Orcio's literal blindness serve as a further distinction between the two poets. Orcio's weakness is magnified immensely when he goes blind, but he feels that he can actually see *more* in his blindness: "When I close my eyes, I see more than when they are open... [I see] with the eyes of my soul; but the other eyes have gone dark" (199). ["Kiedy spuszcze powieki, wiecej widze niz z otwartymi oczyma... [widze] oczyma duszy, lecz tamte pogasly" (50).] Orcio's blindness (arguably part of his poetic nature) is not represented as a positive trait or advantage, though.²⁷ He can see faces and recall places he has seen, but he cannot see what surrounds him and is unable to function on his own in the natural world. While Orcio is blind to the world around him, Henryk was blinded by the mystique of the ethereal. Though Henryk's blindness was not literal, it prevented him from seeing the true nature of Poetry in Act I. He had been deceived by the allure of the Maiden and the possibility of reaching the divine world, blind to the actual, evil identity of Poetry, and unable to recognize the beautiful life that he possessed in the material realm. While Henryk now can see clearly in the natural world, he is unable to access the divine. Orcio experiences the opposite: he is blind in the natural world, but able to see the metaphysical. The argument against the notion that blindness helps one see truth is evident in Orcio's death, his inability to take physical action or defend himself, and Henryk's failure to protect his son. Blindness as represented by Krasiński does not make the blind man more apt to understand and detect truth, but rather makes him unable to help himself and others.

²⁷This type of blindness is consistent with Adam Mickiewicz's argument that blindness makes one more able to see truth. This will be discussed in the conclusion of this study. See page 54-55.

The death of the blind Orcio is further evidence of the contradiction that word could be more effective than deed. The boy's attempt to take part in the final battle of the play is futile as his blindness (that might serve him in seeing "truth") leads to his death. He makes a fatal decision by insisting on staying with Henryk in battle, and is consequently shot dead, leading to Henryk's suicide soon after. Literal blindness, like poetry, does not lead directly to tangible or perceptible change in a physical revolution. Arguably, the ability to take action is more constructive when one is fighting against the deeds of others, and not their words. Henryk's death, however, shows that when the former Poet takes up arms, he too is useless.

Krasiński suggests that while blindness may lead to heightened senses and access to the metaphysical realm, it is a detriment to man in the material world. We see this in Act IV as Orcio is killed in the line of fire, unable to physically defend himself or move aside. Both poets end up dead in the revolution, and their poetry proves useless. Their deaths recall Act I after the baptism, when the Godfather, in reference to Orcio, states: "George Stanislas,²⁸ you have only now become a Christian and entered the society of man. ... Remember that you must love your country and that it is even beautiful to die for your country" (186). ["Jerzy Stanisławie, dopiero coś został chrześcijaninem i wszedł do towarzystwa ludzkiego ... – pamiętaj, że Ojczyznę kochać trzeba i że nawet za Ojczyznę zginąć jest pięknie" (21).] His remarks resound with the Polish Romantic notion of the Poet, and the rhetoric of messianic ideals of the Romantic Poet. It also combines Polish identity with Christianity, merging civic and religious responsibility.²⁹ The comment also foreshadows Orcio's death as imminent, while both beautiful and sacrificial.

However, the idea of this "beautiful" sacrifice fails to show that death for one's country would

²⁸ George Stanislas is the full name of the child in English translation. English translation frequently translates the diminutive "Orcio" as "Georgie."

²⁹ The Godfather's comment recalls Krasiński's own belief that Polish patriotism and Christianity are indistinguishable.

actually effect change, as Orcio's death fails to do. Without necessarily diminishing the value of love for one's nation, Krasinski suggests that the Poet is not good for his words alone, nor is the man of deed good for merely his death.

V. Revolution and Deed

The tone and action of the play take a drastic turn in Act III when the realism of the second half radically departs from the unrealistic, supernaturalism of the first. Krasinski has displayed in the first two acts his skepticism of Poetry's positive nature, and offered a scenario where the Poet loses his grip on reality, and his ability to reason weakens. As the second half of the play begins, the tone shifts, and the Poet has the opportunity to become a voice of reason on a field of unprepared, irrational revolutionaries and an angry, deceptive mob. Act III begins with a declaration, stating how people will now choose to follow a man who leads with a great mind, not heart. The proclamation addresses the masses that wait and struggle as the world becomes engulfed in bloodshed. Once the masses begin to "stir" and "awaken," there is a leader that steps forward to speak, an action reminiscent of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and the crowd kneels before him. The similarities to this event from the Bible is important in that this is a revolutionary leader gathering followers, rather than the Poet whose words should instead be attracting the people. The revolutionary leader that stands before them is called Pankracy,³⁰ and he makes them promises of a better life through "words of comfort and of murder" (203), prompting cries for an uprising. The passion and mysticism, heavily present in the first act of the play, are replaced with "words of comfort and murder" (203), because aggressive and dynamic

³⁰ The name Pankracy comes from the Greek male name, meaning "omnipotent." *Pan* designates *everything, all*, and *kratos*, meaning *power, or strength*. In Orthodox Christianity, *Pankracy* is used as a nickname for Christ. The name also references the Christian-convert Patron Saint Pankracy of Rome, patron of children and against false witness and perjury. Like the Patron Saint, the character Pankracy is also a convert, which is important in the context of the play, especially in reference to the character taking on the guise of conversion and Christianity as a mask, and taking on a "form" that is inconsistent with his "content." (See page 45 below for further discussion of form versus content in my analysis of the revolution.) The invocation of Pankracy against perjury is particularly relevant to this character, as he deeply values the truth in Count Henryk's word.

revolution is what appeals to the “simple people” of the nation. Already we see that the Romantic Poet is no longer as persuasive as the man who participates in and responds directly to calls of action. However, Krasieński shows again a departure from a messianic Romanticism by offering Orcio as an example of the futility of a poet’s efforts, particularly those of a blind poet, in battle against an army outfitted with swords. In these final acts, Krasieński demonstrates the ineffective nature of the poet in the Polish Romantic battle between poetry and action, between word and deed. He also shows a contrast between Count Henryk, the failed Poet and father, and the radical revolutionaries, who lose sight of what they are fighting for in their overzealous attacks. Neither the poet nor the men of action ultimately succeed.

The action of Act III begins as baptized Jews revolt against their masters,³¹ the old gentry, including Count Henryk, and his devoted peasants. The converts are led by Pankracy, whose hesitation and distrust of himself, according to Adam Mickiewicz, prohibits him from acting out the principles he uses to inspire others (*Analysis* 47). The plot thickens as Count Henryk enters the revolutionary space, donning a Phrygian cap and disguised as a revolutionary. Pankracy desires to meet his adversary, Count Henryk, seeing him as his equal. When the two finally meet, it becomes evident that Pankracy has become isolated from those he leads, carried away by his own lofty speech while they instead seek tangible satisfaction and revenge.³² Count Henryk refuses to desert the aristocratic cause, despite the fact that their loss is imminent and inevitable.

³¹ Krasieński’s ideas of messianism become evident in the use of Jewish converts as revolutionaries. While they claim to be converts, they are actually doing so under false pretenses. They are thus “fake” converts, meaning they are in fact still Jews.

³² See Miłosz (*History of* 245), who denotes the meeting between Count Henryk and Pankracy as the “most powerful exchange in the drama.” He points out that Pankracy’s “philosophy is nothing other than dialectical materialism.”

Henryk's interaction with the crowd signals the struggle between word and deed, which must come to realization. While the Phrygian cap is a recognizable revolutionary symbol of freedom and liberty,³³ Henryk is wearing a disguise in order to spy on the revolutionaries on behalf of the aristocracy. Krasiński is again raising the issue of form versus content in the employment of disguise, showing that Henryk is assuming the form of a revolutionary without the corresponding intentions. The cap is a symbol that is being used to fool others, as he is something other than what he presents himself to be. The issue of form and content is no longer just on the level of poetry, but also on the level of political action. While present among the revolutionaries, Henryk sees the false nature of the converts' uprising, remarking, "I despise them and I hate you. Poetry will some day gild all of this" (217). ["Nim pogardzam, a was nienawidzę – poezja to wszystko ozłoci kiedyś" (85).] He recognizes the tendency to memorialize the problems of the past through Poetry, and to idealize events in one's memory, regardless of the evil and deception that actually occur. At the same time, Poetry idealizes brutality. Through Henryk and this impassioned statement, Krasiński makes a clear and strong condemnation of Poetry, underscoring not only its dangers to the Poet, but the problems it poses to the nation as a whole.

Count Henryk's evolution goes deeper than his name and disguise. The constant use of "Count Henryk" by revolutionaries in the second half of the play marks a change from the character's being identified principally as a Poet, to now as a member of the aristocracy. This modification is driven not by the character, however, but by the context and the plot. When Henryk sees the revolutionary crowd and hears them speaking, he remarks, "I like these men. At least they make no mention of honor or philosophy" (212). ["Tych lubię – przynajmniej nie

³³ The implications of the cap are drawn from the French Revolution, not too far in the past for Krasiński while writing the play. In addition to this, émigrés from Poland are living and travelling in France at the time.

wspominają ani o honorze, ani o filozofii” (77).] However, he then encounters a revolutionary who admits to having cruel and subversive plans for after their victory, telling Henryk, “Although you are my brothers in liberty, you are not my brothers in genius. After the victory, everyone will learn of my plans” (213). [“Chociażeście moi bracia w wolności, nie jesteście moimi braćmi w geniuszu – po zwycięstwie dowie się każdy o moich planach” (80).] Henryk now sees the revolutionaries with new ideas, but recognizes they are still rotten at the core. Furthermore, he reflects upon the role of the Philosopher as part of an elite aristocracy, who has the luxury to only think and not do, echoing his former role as a Poet. He has become attracted to the idea of taking action rather than being confined to “word,” and the immense tension between “doing” and “not doing” in Romanticism resurfaces once again in the drama.³⁴ Through this intellectual transition, Henryk is being filled with “real” content rather than the empty ideas of word and deed. Rather than seeing action without reason, he begins to understand that they have a defined cause.

When the former Poet finally takes action in a situation where radicals begin to lose their rationality, he actually has the opportunity to become the voice of reason. Perhaps this indicates the flaw of assuming a Poet’s greatest strength and weapon lies alone in his words, in Poetry. In the final act of the play, Count Henryk claims to be in the service of God Almighty in trying to apply “word” in action. “God, grant me that power which You did not deny me before and I will encompass this new, immense world in a single word. It does not understand itself. But that one word of mine will be the poetry of the future” (222). [“Boże, daj mi potęgę, której nie

³⁴ The Man’s negative feelings toward philosophers recalls his interaction with the Eagle in Act II, as he decides to finally take action: “O past, come to my aid, and if your spirit has already returned to the bosom of the Lord, let it tear itself away from there once again, enter into me, and become thought, strength, and deed!” (198) [“Przeszłości, bądź mi ku pomocy – a jeśli duch twój wrócił do łona Boga, niechaj się znów oderwie, wstąpi we mnie, stanie się myślą, siłą i czynem” (48).] His words to the Eagle are indicative of an attempt to take the power he used to have as a Poet and transform it into strength for committing deed, precisely the goal Mickiewicz had for his Poet.

odmawiałeś mi niegdyś – a w jedno słowo zamknę świat ten nowy, ogromny – on siebie sam nie pojmuje. – Lecz to słowo moje będzie poezją przyszłości” (97-98).] This “word” he deems as his sword, his weapon of choice. Krasieński seems to suggest by the final two acts of the play that while the Poet may be irrational on his own, absorbed in word, he would be most productive and useful should he take part in action, acting as a counterforce to the irrationality of wild and extreme revolutionaries absorbed only in deed.

The true revolutionaries, Leonard and Pankracy,³⁵ voice the meaning of “deed” in the overarching choice between word and deed. They pronounce: “He who does not fall in battle by the sword, shall die on a branch” (205) [“Kto od żelaza nie padnie w boju, ten na gałęzi skona” (65)]. These men are the antithesis of the Romantic Poet. They have clearly chosen deed over word, and furthermore, to the extreme. Yet, while Pankracy is supposedly a fully committed revolutionary, Mickiewicz suggests, for example, that Pankracy in fact cannot commit to the very words that he uses to incite action in others (*Analysis* 47-48). Henryk recognizes this characteristic in Pankracy, saying to him, “Your words lie, but your pale, immovable face cannot feign inspiration” (229). [“Słowa twoje kłamią – ale twarz twoja niewzruszona, blada, udać nie umie natchnienia” (108).] Pankracy’s disinclination to act on his own ideas is like that of Danton, Robespierre, and Cromwell: men called upon alone in grand events, constantly plagued by irresolution and vacillation (*ibid.*). Henryk proves strong in his stubbornness and unwavering loyalty to the aristocracy. While he dies because of remaining on the side bound to lose, his ability to remain true to his word allows him at least to fulfill his duty as a leader and redeem himself. He fails to bring about a resolution in battle by deed, but succeeds in keeping his word,

³⁵ Pankracy’s right hand man and “Prophet of Liberty,” Leonard, calls him “an eagle flying straight to its goal” in the fight for the “Liberty of the People.” This reference is additional evidence against Wickstrom’s interpretation of the eagle as a symbol of egoism and pursuit of fame. (See discussion of this on page 36, footnote 23.)

having at least gained respect for the revolutionaries and an understanding for what they are fighting.

The final act begins – as do the others – with a prologue, which prefaces the uprising’s conclusion. Count Henryk and the Archbishop stand before the aristocratic forces in the Holy Trinity Castle, fortified on a cliff, reminiscent of the precipice from Act I. Count Henryk refuses to surrender despite pleas from his own men, and vows to fight with sword rather than words (235). The fighting ensues, and is clearly hopeless. After a final embrace with his son, Count Henryk watches as his son is killed in the crossfire. Count Henryk then jumps to his death from the precipice, the leap he failed to make at the start of the play. Pankracy remains, victorious, among his men. Yet after seeing a cross in the sky and being instantaneously struck blind, Pankracy dies in Leonard’s arms, an ending that Miłosz argues serves as a synthesis of aristocratic order and atheistic materialism, brought about after reactionary order has been abolished (246). In the end, no original leaders of the revolution remain.

Through Henryk’s allegiance to the aristocracy, Krasiński exposes the class differences in Poland. Krasiński demonstrates how revolution implodes from within through the final battle of the play’s revolution not between Poland and the occupying empires, but between factions within Polish society. The anticipation of internecine fighting is a fear Krasiński held all along, which is ignored by other Polish Romantics who instead tend to deal with the conflict between the nation of Poland and the “satanic trinity” (Prussia, Russia, Austria), as dubbed by Mickiewicz. Krasiński debunks the Romantic notion of the prophet-poet, suggesting that such a poet is blind to the internal struggles in focusing so much on the independence of the nation as a whole. Not only is Henryk not a prophet-poet, but he also is leading the aristocracy, not “the people.” In ignoring the conflict *within* the nation, surely the nation cannot fight as a unified whole.

In the final scenes of the play, Henryk becomes a voice of reason against the revolutionaries, despite the initial characterization of Henryk as blinded to truth and understanding by the temptations of Poetry. Miłosz notes that Krasieński takes up first the politically committed man, in command of the reactionary forces defending themselves on the ramparts of the Holy Trinity castle, against the atheistic, revolutionary forces. In Krasieński's drama, Miłosz continues, Count Henryk tries in vain to become a particular type of man, but his unhappy marriage, his pursuit of Poetry, and his political activity reveal only his internal worthlessness (*The History of Polish Literature* 245). One might argue, with Miłosz's analysis in mind, that Krasieński's play leaves room for further development of a Poet, and a greater distancing from the poetics of Romanticism, as a voice of reason alone also seems worthless. Krasieński brings to light the problems encountered by the Poet as a result of the mandates of Polish Romanticism by presenting the dangers that can emerge when the Poet over-indulges and gives himself over to poetry to a precarious degree. He does not declare poetry as a defunct weapon of choice, but rather suggests that its use should be limited and used within reason. In this respect, Krasieński takes a bold step in looking to question the enthusiasm for Romantic Poetry that is embraced and relished by the Polish Romantics and their readers.

CONCLUSION

As Henryk stands above the abyss in Act I, he must choose to either leap in an attempt to follow Poetry and reach the divine, or to turn around, abandoning Poetry for his family and the natural world: “(*Mountains and cliffs above the sea. Thick clouds. A storm.*) Where did she go? The fragrances of the morning have suddenly evaporated and the sky has become darker. I stand upon this height, the abyss beneath me, and the winds roar fearfully” (187) [“(*Góry i przepaście ponad morzem – gęste chmury – burza.*) Gdzie mi się podziała – nagle rozplynęły się wonie poranku, pogoda się zaćmiła – stoję na tym szczycie, otchłań pode mną i wiatry huczą przeraźliwie” (22).] The image of the Poet standing at the edge of a cliff is reminiscent of Adam Mickiewicz’s short poem “Ajudah” (“On Juda’s Cliff”), the final sonnet in the *Crimean Sonnets* (1826). In this poem, the Poet stands in control and open to all that the world around him offers:

*Lubię poglądać wsparty na Judahu skale,
Jak spienione bałwany, to w czarne szeregi
Ścisnąwszy się buchają,*

...

*Podobnie na twe serce, o poeto młody!
Namiętność często groźne wzburza niepogody;*

*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.*

*On Juda’s Cliff I love to lean and look
On waves that battling beat and break with might,*

...

*Thus, Poet, in your youth when storms are wild
And passions break upon the heart and brain,*

*To leave their ruin there – shipwreck and waste –
Pick up your lute! Upon it undefiled*

*You’ll find song-pearls that your heart-deeps retain,
The crown the years have brought you, white and
chaste.*

Translation: Underwood (1917)

While Mickiewicz’s Poet is washed with passions and inspirations about which to write,

Krasiński’s Poet faces a very different fate on such a cliff. Through his image of the Poet on the

cliff, Krasiński points out that Poets are to their own detriment living out Romanticism, taking it too far. His stance is a giant departure from Mickiewicz's characteristic Romanticism, where the Poet is there to conquer all and lead the way with vigor and full devotion. Henryk is indeed a real man and would die if he fell into the abyss. There is the illusion that he will be supported and fly should he jump, but a Guardian Angel stops him and brings Henryk literally "back to Earth" at the final moment. He is forced to realize that he is a real man and not immune to harm in the material world, despite his ethereal relationship with the divine via poetry.

Literary scholars consider Mickiewicz the fundamental exemplar of Polish Romantic literature. A contemporary of Krasiński, Mickiewicz was himself a Romantic poet, and thus comparison between the two writers is appropriate. In 1832, Mickiewicz completed Part III of the play *Forefather's Eve* [*Dziady*], a drama with four-parts written out of numerical order over nearly twenty years.³⁶ In Part III of *Forefather's Eve*, readers will find Mickiewicz's concepts of the poet-seer, messianism, extreme emotionalism, mysticism, and references to Poland's history, all characteristics used in defining Polish Romanticism. Most important, however, is the intense level of nationalism expressed through the prisoner characters of the play. The hero of Part III is an imprisoned Romantic Poet named Konrad. In Scene II, a monologue of defiance against God entitled "Improvisation," Mickiewicz demonstrates the hubris of his hero-poet, Konrad, who speaks as if from a Godlike position whereby he shows great desire for power over the nation that he claims to love more than God Himself. From this scene, we can also draw direct comparisons to Krasiński's Poet, who does not try to bargain with God, but instead is angry with God for where He has led him.³⁷

³⁶ See Segel (Introduction) where he explains the trajectory taken by Mickiewicz in writing *Forefather's Eve*. Segel aligns the separate parts with Mickiewicz's personal history, and the history of Poland.

³⁷ See page 13 above.

The discourse of the Poet in Krasiński's and Mickiewicz's plays integrates the idea of the Poet and the Poet's role in Polish Romantic literature. While the Poet in both author's works comes to a negative end, Poetry entices Krasiński's Poet in his quest to bear witness to the "unseen world," and leads him to a dangerous precipice and near to his demise. While Konrad also does not come to a positive end, his end as a Poet has meaning and fulfills the messianic paradigm that Henryk's does not. Both Poets, Konrad and Henryk, do attempt to barter with God. Konrad argues that because he is closer to the people he has more right to lead them than does God who sits in a divine position so far from them.

*I Mocy tej nie wziąłem z drzewa edeńskiego,
Z owocu wiadomości złego i dobrego;
Nie z ksiąg ani z opowiadań,*

...
*Jam się twórcą urodził:
Stamtąd przyszły siły moje,
Skąd do Ciebie przyszły Twoje,*

...
*Tę władzę, którą mam nad przyrodzeniem,
Chcę wyrzucić na ludzkie dusze...*

*Chcę czuciem rządzić, które jest we mnie;
Rządzić jak Ty wszystkimi zawsze i tajemnie...*

*Niech ludzie będą dla mnie jak myśli i słowa,
Z których, gdy zechcę, pieśni wiąże się budowa...*

Daj mi rząd dusz! (140)

Not from the tree of Eden comes my power; not
From knowledge of good and evil is it got,
Not from books nor tales nor dreams

...
I am creator born! I bore them—
My power spring from that same shrine
Whence Thou, God, drewest Thine

...
That power I have above my nature—God,
I'd wield o'er human souls and labours...

No, I would rule by the feeling that is in me,
Rule all like Thee for ever secretly...

Let men be like as words and thoughts to me,
From which, at will, I build my poetry!...

Give rule of souls! (170-171)

According to Konrad, while he has knowledge that is (at the core) the same as that of God, he has the advantage of being among the people. With words, the Poet proposes to rule the people in a way that even God cannot. In *Forefather's Eve*, God is only wisdom and knowledge, whereas the Poet, in the form of Konrad, possesses the prime values of emotion and feeling that address the needs of the people. Konrad's greatest sin is his pride and hubris, and his frustration with God. What is under scrutiny is not Poetry, but his role as a Poet.

In contrast, in *Nie-boska komedia* we see the Poet, Henryk, call back to God in anger, not for the right to lead, but in frustration for where he has been led,³⁸ and again when calling for God to relieve Orcio of his suffering.

Lord, deprive not Your own creatures of reason; forsake not the temples that You have built unto yourself. Look upon my torment and deliver not this angel unto hell. Me, at least, You have endowed with strength to endure crowds of thoughts, passions, and feelings. But him? You have given him a body like a spider web which any great thought can tear apart. (196)

Panie, nie wydzieraj rozumu własnym stworzeniom, nie opuszczaj świątyń, któreś Sam wybudował Sobie – spojrzysz na męki moje, i aniołka tego nie wydawaj piekłu – mnieś przynajmniej obdarzył siłą na wytrzymanie natłoku myśli, namiętności i uczuć, a jemu? – dałeś ciało do pajęczyny podobne, które lada myśl wielka rozerwie. (41-42)

Unlike Konrad, Henryk entrusts himself to God, rather than arguing for his capability to lead on his own. Krasieński, in this way, subverts the power of the Poet, recasting him so that he is demoted from the pedestal on which the Romantics have placed him. Krasieński suggests, through Henryk's attempts to talk God into relieving his suffering, that when the Poet surrenders to Poetry in pursuit of the divine, he suffers and loses control of himself. He is thus also incapable of leading others. When he faces the revolutionaries, his inability to lead becomes even more evident. One should also take note that while Mickiewicz's Poet calls for the position to lead and *wants* to give himself over to the divine, he in fact is incapable of doing so as he is imprisoned. While confined within his cell, his poetry serves no one.

³⁸ See full quote above on page 34.

The attempts at action by both dramatic Poets can also be viewed in comparison to the revolutionary leader Pankracy, and how the people might react to each type of leader. Pankracy is not a Poet, but rather is the embodiment of a man of action. In the prologue to Act III, Pankracy is deemed “ruler of their souls and of their zeal” (203) for his talk of murder and action. The people choose him as their leader, and he bargains with no one for the position. This raises the question of whether the Poet would indeed acquire the devotion of the people, even if God gave him the power to rule. The Poets do not talk of violent action and call for immediate results like Pankracy, but rather they take a passive approach, wanting to rule through their poetic words. If given the choice between the two, Krasieński suggests that the people may in fact choose the man of action as their leader.

There are moments during the “Improvisation” when Konrad resembles Orcio, the child-poet, more than Henryk. The spirit that inhabits Konrad talks about the Poet’s acceptance of his fate: “I grab him, stow him away in a dark hole – And if it’s hardly pleasant there, alack, is it my fault? I’m only a blind tool – the tyrant writes, and so it has to be” (188). [“Każą duszę brać w areszt, biorę, sadzę w ciemność. / Zdarza się przy tym duszy jaka nieprzyjemność / Ale czyż z mojej winy? – jam ślepe narzędzie; / Tyran szelma da ukaz, pisze: ‘Niech tak będzie’ – / Czyż to mnie miło męczyć, – mnie samemu męka” (151).] Konrad’s poetry flows from him in a moment of inspiration, just as it does from Orcio, without boundaries and as a natural action. The curses placed upon them only amplify their inescapable need to use words as their weapons. Through Orcio’s death in Act IV, however, Krasieński provides an argument against Mickiewicz’s understanding that blindness is “seeing” the truth. As discussed in Chapter Three, when Orcio turns blind he claims he can see more than before. Mickiewicz’s Poet, Konrad, experiences blindness in a different physical circumstance; he is among the prisoners enclosed in dark cells

and cannot see anything. Konrad stands in the dark, seemingly possessed and reciting poetry, but he is trapped in the cell. At the same time, he is attuned to the outside political struggle and then enters into a one-sided dialogue with God. However, imprisoned for political agitation in Part III, Konrad has already bridged “word” and “deed.” Because he is thrown into jail for his poetry and actions of resistance, he becomes a symbolic martyr for the national cause, and while he can *no longer* take part in action, his words continue to resist even in blindness.

The first epigraph to *Nie-boska komedia* holds significance for the conclusion of the play. With the knowledge of both Henryk’s and Orcio’s fates, the epigraph proves to have been a foreshadowing of the Poet’s fate. The “errors” Henryk committed and the indecisiveness of his character in the period of his “affair” with Poetry fall on his son’s shoulders. When they both die, their loss is felt in the quiet that remains.

To the errors accumulated by their forebears they added those which their forebears never know – indecision and timidity. And so it came to pass that they disappeared from the face of the earth and only a great silence remains after them. – Anonymous

Do błędów, nagromadzonych przez przodków, dodali to, czego nie znali ich przodkowie – wahanie się i bojaźń; – i stało się zatem, – że zniknęli z powierzchni ziemi i wielkie milczenie jest po nich. --Bezimienny

Krasiński’s Poet questions himself, and his failure in both the natural world and the divine world bring about neither change nor poetry. His family is gone, and no more poetry is written.

While Krasiński looks to represent Poetry in a negative light, calling attention to the problems of Poetry, and thus departing from a strictly Romantic content, the portrayal is very much in line with customary Romantic form. He utilized Romantic poetics and symbolism (i.e.

thematic over stylistic concerns, use of the metaphysical and the emotional), while the true nature and value behind that exterior is in fact the opposite. He challenges the idea that such ideas are to be fully embraced. While the text may appear to match the Romantic formula, however, the meanings Krasiński places behind these symbols and themes are considerably dissimilar. In other words, the “syntax” of the literature remains consistent with Romanticism, often utilizing a poetic and grandiloquent style while the “semantics” stray. Krasiński argues that such a style may instead cause damage when used to appeal to the masses on behalf of the Nation. Krasiński creates scenes and characters that would be consistent with other great Polish Romantic works, such as idylls and maidens. Yet, their function is not to elevate poetry, but to show its detrimental nature. As this study shows, distinction between *Nie-boska komedia* and other Polish Romantic works is evident in the way that Krasiński modifies the content of Polish Romantic literature. These differences pertain particularly to the role of the Poet and Poetry.

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