

EUZEBIUSZ SŁOWACKI: AN INTELLECTUAL PORTRAIT AT THE CROSSROADS OF EPOCHS

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The figure of Euzebiusz Słowacki – father of the Polish literary classic Juliusz Słowacki, a teacher, writer, translator, and theorist of literature – remains ambiguous and not yet fully established in scholarly discourse. Nevertheless, his creative legacy, although not extensive in volume, is profound and multifaceted. In each of his roles, Euzebiusz Słowacki demonstrates both a close alignment with his own era and a forward-looking cultural perspective. As a translator, he focused primarily on classical antiquity, whose examples set the aesthetic benchmark to which both the artist and the reader should aspire. In his original works written in Polish, Euzebiusz Słowacki, without intending to surpass the existing aesthetic level of Polish literature, sought to construct a genuinely historical Polish cultural context – one that could introduce national literature into the ranks of European literary traditions.

The central idea of his aesthetic theory lies in the need to develop clear criteria for the not yet widely accepted notion of taste, shaped through the assimilation of the finest models of art. It should be remembered that, lacking formal philological and pedagogical training, Słowacki devoted a significant portion of his intellectual efforts to independently mastering the core principles of the scholarly and pedagogical disciplines he taught in Kremenets and Vilnius: poetics and rhetoric.

In his pedagogical reflections, he proceeded from strictly pragmatic considerations, encouraging his students to engage consciously with the process of reading literary texts. Taking into account that Euzebiusz Słowacki historically belongs to the phenomenon of «Polish Literature of Ukraine», an essential prerequisite for the effective reception of his intellectual legacy is the qualified translation of his theoretical writings and didactic essays into Ukrainian, enabling their integration into the broader context of European culture.

ЕВЗЕБІУШ СЛОВАЦЬКИЙ: ІНТЕЛЕКТУАЛЬНИЙ ПОРТРЕТ НА ПЕРЕТИНІ ЕПОХ

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Ключові слова: література народів України, історія польської літератури, Евзебіуш Словацький, естетична теорія.

Постать Евзебіуша Словацького, батька класика польської літератури Юліуша Словацького, викладача, письменника, перекладача та теоретика літератури, є двозначною та до кінця не усталеною. Однак його творча спадщина хоча й не відзначається великим обсягом, є глибокою та багатогранною. У кожній зі своїх іпостасей Евзебіуш Словацький демонструє водночас і відповідність своїй епосі, і перспективу на майбутнє.

Як перекладач він орієнтувався перш за все на античну класику, на прикладі якої можна встановлювати естетичну планку, до якої повинен прагнути як митець, так і читач. У своїх оригінальних творах польською мовою Евзебіуш Словацький, не маючи на меті вийти за рамки існуючого естетичного рівня польської літератури, намагався створити саме історичний польський культурний контекст, який адаптував би вітчизняну літературу до рангу європейської.

Натомість головна ідея його естетичної теорії полягає у необхідності вироблення чітких критеріїв не дуже популярної досі ідеї смаку, який формується у процесі засвоєння найкращих зразків мистецтва. Слід пам'ятати, що, не маючи ґрунтовної філологічної та педагогічної освіти, наш автор значну частину своїх творчих зусиль покладав на самостійне засвоєння провідних постулатів тих науково-педагогічних дисциплін, які він вів у Кременці та Вільні: поетика та риторика.

У своїх педагогічних міркуваннях він виходив із суто прагматичних критеріїв, привчаючи вихованців до свідомого процесу читання художньої літератури. Ураховуючи ту обставину, що Евзебіуш Словацький історично належить до феномену «польська література України», українець необхідним елементом ефективного засвоєння його творчої спадщини є кваліфікований переклад його теоретичних праць та дидактичної публіцистики на українську мову для подальшого засвоєння у контексті європейської культури.

Introduction. In William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, there is a character who sets the entire action in motion, yet about whom we know almost nothing – the father of the title character, also named Hamlet. The peculiarity of this figure lies in his transparency and immateriality, for he appears solely as a ghost.

In the history of Polish literature, one can likewise identify such a markedly transparent figure: the father of the poet-prophet Juliusz Słowacki, **Euzebiusz Tomasz Słowacki**, son of Jakub Słowacki, a nobleman of the distinguished Leliwa coat of arms. This heraldic emblem, borne by more than 800 Polish noble families, also adorns the coats of arms of several contemporary Ukrainian cities, among them Ternopil. The family name *Słowacki* derives, as a modern scholar (Makarski W.) has demonstrated, from the toponym of the Ukrainian village *Słowatycze*, whose population today amounts to merely 378 inhabitants. The estate, together with the name, was acquired by the family's Polish Sarmatian ancestor, Wacław, most likely by purchase. The inhabitants of this Volhynian village can scarcely suspect that one of the most eminent chapters in Polish literature is linked to their native soil.

Yet, as so often was the case for the residents of the Kresy, fate proved to be arduous. Thus, to his descendants – his son Stefan, grandson Józef, great-grandson Jakub, great-great-grandsons Euzebiusz Tomasz, Erasmus, and Józef, down to his great-great-great-grandson Juliusz and his cousins – the founder bequeathed only a celebrated surname.

The authors of this study regard its **aim** as the restoration of the creative and scholarly legacy of Euzebiusz Słowacki – one of the forerunners of Polish Romanticism, who developed intellectually under the challenging conditions of political occupation and the consequent need to seek both national and broader European sources of inspiration – into active academic and didactic use. Moreover, the very cultural atmosphere of Kremenets, as a scientific and educational centre, created a favourable milieu for the emergence of a distinctive humanistic tradition from which later arose literary groups and movements – unique phenomena that gave rise to significant developments in both Polish and Ukrainian literature and the arts.

From this fact there emerges, with complete clarity, the central **task**: to delineate the range of intellectual and creative domains encompassed by our author's interests – teaching, didactics, translation, original literary production, and theoretical writing. Thus, the **subject** of the present inquiry is the historical and literary context of the existing, primarily Polish, scholarship on literature, while the **object** of analysis is the corpus of texts by Euzebiusz Słowacki together with the problem of the author's status.

1. Background

Thus, returning to the first of the Słowackis to have attained a certain level of public recognition, we may observe that, despite the existence in the district town of Kremenets, Ternopil region, of a Julius Słowacki Museum – visited periodically by both Polish and Ukrainian historians and literary scholars – the status of the father of the Polish literary genius within Ukrainian cultural consciousness has remained confined to his purely biological function: he gave life to Juliusz, and thereby fulfilled his role for the universe. A researcher at this very museum, speaking about Euzebiusz Słowacki, poignantly entitled her presentation «In the Shadow of a Genius Son» (Gaskevich). Polish scholars, for the most part, hold a similar view: «Euzebiusz Słowacki left behind a few poetic works, the most eminent of which was Juliusz himself» (according to Janina Kulczycka-Saloni). Some even admit to a certain talent: «His father, too, was a poet; not a genius, but neither an ordinary one» (Hoesick F.).

As for the Ukrainian context – or, more precisely, its absence – the matter is clear. Of the four-volume collected works of Euzebiusz published in Vilnius in 1824–1826 (Słowacki Ew. *Dzieła z pozostałych rękopismów ogłoszone*), nothing exists to this day in Ukrainian: neither his original writings, nor translations, nor theoretical works. It is not easy to find enthusiasts willing to search the websites of Polish incunabula for ancient texts published outside mainland Poland and to grapple with the peculiar Polish of the last king's era.

Moreover, Euzebiusz lives under the shadow of the «curse» of incomplete education, which, for credentialed scholars – Ukrainian as well as Polish – brands him as a second-rate figure: «The talented young man was unable to fulfil his dream of continuing his studies at the university...not even possessing a diploma of higher education» (Gaskevich); «the Volhynian autodidact...a brilliant self-taught scholar...a Volhynian geometer who became a Vilnius professor...a Vilnius professor without proper (formal) education...a self-taught professor» (Czaplewicz E.).

Indeed, if we look at any Polish literary scholars of that period (late eighteenth to nineteenth century), we find, almost without exception, a solid and extensive education (alphabetically): Władysław Bełza (1847–1913) – Kazan Officer School, Main School in Warsaw; Feliks Jan Bentkowski (1781–1852) – University of Halle (Germany); Leon Borowski (1784–1846) – University of Vilnius, Candidate of Philosophy; Franciszek Wężyk (1785–1862) – Jagiellonian University; Michał Wiszniewski (1794–1865) – University of Edinburgh; Filip Neriusz Golański (1753–1824) – Doctor of Theology and Philosophy; Franciszek Zagórski (1770–1806) – Piarist College; Wacław Maciejowski

(1792–1883) – Kraków Academy, Universities of Breslau, Berlin, Göttingen; Feliks Jan Szczepny Morawski (1818–1898) – Lviv University; Maurycy Mochnacki (1803–1834) – University of Warsaw; Adam Naruszewicz (1733–1796) – Jesuit College in Lyon; Ludwik Osiński (1775–1838) – Piarist College; Roman Pilat (1846–1906) – Lviv University, later professor and rector of the same institution; Alojzy Feliński (1771–1820) – Piarist College; Ignacy Chodźko (1794–1861) – University of Vilnius.

Among this distinguished cohort of well-educated masters of literary scholarship, only Kazimierz Brodziński (1791–1835), who had completed only secondary school, became a lecturer at the University of Warsaw. Yet, unlike Euzebiusz, most of his works were published during his lifetime, thereby securing him authority.

Thus, the background against which Euzebiusz Tomasz Słowacki appears in the history of Ukrainian and Polish culture rests upon two fundamental factors: 1. Euzebiusz is merely the father of a genius son; 2. Euzebiusz lacked proper (higher) education, which prevented him from attracting the interest of serious scholars of Polish literature.

2. General approaches

Let us briefly recall the life trajectory of our figure. He was born into the family of a not particularly wealthy nobleman, the eldest of five children. At the beginning of his educational period, from the age of eight, the family resided in Kremenets, where he studied until the age of eighteen. Upon entering adulthood, he became aware of the necessity of supporting his large family and thus sought the patent of a royal surveyor. In this position – still sufficiently profitable today – he could have quickly stabilized his financial standing and considered further intellectual development. If not for circumstances. At that very time, before the eyes of all Europe, the Commonwealth of Poland was perishing and disintegrating. The young man was fatally unfortunate, for not only did the state collapse, but the educational system was also destroyed – and by the time it recovered, he was compelled to carry the burden of a provincial surveyor. I wish to emphasize those eight youthful years, squandered for eternity, which no one can ever reclaim. Only at the age of twenty-seven did fortune grant him a more prestigious role – that of private tutor in the household of a nephew of the King of Poland, where he met the future founder of the Kremenets Lyceum, Tadeusz Czacki. Finally, at the age of thirty-three (sic!), he set foot on the path of a scholar, which in Kremenets and Vilnius lasted eight academic years (five and three, respectively).

During these eight years, in the course of teaching subjects such as poetics and rhetoric – that is, the theory of literature and eloquence – the lecturer and professor Słowacki composed several original

literary works: (1) the tragedy *Wanda*, (2) the tragedy *Mindaugas, King of Lithuania*, and (3) a collection of poems; a number of translations from foreign languages: (1) Voltaire's *La Henriade*, (2) Racine's *Andromaque* and *Iphigénie*, (3) Propertius's *Elegies*, (4) fragments of Virgil's works, (5) Roman prose (Cicero, Tacitus), (6) fragments of Horace's works, (7) Ovid's *Elegies*, (8) modern poets (Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, Delille's *On the Imagination*, fables by Dorat); as well as several works of literary scholarship: (1) *The Theory of Taste in the Fine Arts*, (2) *General Remarks on Languages, the Art of Writing, and Linguistic Personae*, (3) inaugural lectures delivered in Kremenets and Vilnius on various issues of the history and theory of language and literature, and (4) scholarly correspondence.

Strictly speaking, it was not an especially remarkable intellectual legacy. In comparison with the output of Słowacki Junior, it amounts to only a handful of texts – sufficient for a qualified expert to analyze in a single evening. Thus, one scholar observes that “his presence in Polish literary and theoretical consciousness appears rather problematic” (Czaplejewicz E.), although another author notes that “among the leading figures of contemporary criticism, Euzebiusz Słowacki possessed the deepest knowledge of literature” (Kleiner J.).

3. Examples

As a writer, Euzebiusz Słowacki found himself situated at a transitional stage of the European literary context. Historians of literature describe his position as that of *post-Stanisławian classicism* – a reference to King Stanisław August Poniatowski, whose reputation was tarnished both in Poland and in the foreign powers that partitioned the country. Romanticism had not yet emerged, for neither Mickiewicz nor the younger Słowacki had entered the literary stage. Thus, the classicist tragedies of Euzebiusz served merely as testimony to the fact that he commanded the material – that is, he knew the rules and was capable of applying them. For in classicism, after all, everything rests upon rules.

For Professor Słowacki, literary practice was indispensable in order to analyze consciously the logic of textual construction and to grasp the inner nature of a play or a narrative. Such an approach was normative within the system of contemporary humanistic education: «At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as modern Polish literary scholarship was beginning to take shape, the roles of writer and scholar were so closely intertwined that it is hard to say whether universities appointed writers to literature chairs, or whether professors almost inevitably took up the pen» (Markowska).

Moreover, without resorting to mystical speculation, one may nonetheless observe that Euzebiusz Tomasz Słowacki in fact initiated a literary dynasty

which, extended by his brilliant son Juliusz, did not end with him. His younger brother, Erasmus Słowacki (1781–1839), likewise attempted poetic creation (Słowacki Er.), while his nephew, Władysław Słowacki (1825–1858), Erasmus's son, distinguished himself in prose (Słowacki Wł.). Both spent their lives in Ukraine.

Słowacki's translations did not differ substantially in function from his original literary texts within his scholarly and pedagogical practice. He engaged with what, by contemporary criteria, were the highest models, striving to render them into Polish with equivalent dignity: «Słowacki approached literary translation initially from a practical perspective, regarding it as the best possible means of perfecting his own literary skills and craftsmanship (as well as cultivating refined literary taste)» (Nowak). Inevitably, he thus encountered what remains a central issue of translation theory: «The fundamental assumption of Słowacki is the seemingly banal claim that a good translation must above all be faithful» (Nowak). Yet the criterion of «faithfulness», «correctness», or «equivalence» has never been defined in unequivocal terms. From his extensive reflections, scholars have extracted several basic principles that he observed and recommended to others. First: linguistic correctness and clarity of expression appropriate to the target language. Second: to resist the illusion that prose translation is easy – only Molière's Monsieur Jourdain believed that he «spoke in prose». Third: to avoid coarse and vulgar expressions. The aesthetic criterion of taste was, in Słowacki's mentality, unquestionably dominant; furthermore, as a nobleman and professor, he did not forget the pedagogical function of literature. He also offered a number of practical recommendations for presenting phenomena to modern readers that they might otherwise know nothing about. The translator's task, he argued, is to domesticate texts written a thousand years ago so that they are perceived as current. Indeed, from Słowacki's reflections on translation one might well compile a manual for students of translation.

For an early nineteenth-century Polish literary scholar who aspired to create a structurally coherent system of literary life, the task must have been daunting. The epoch of classical Polish literature had not yet arrived; the founding figures of Renaissance and Baroque letters, Mikołaj Rej, Jan Kochanowski, and others, had only begun the process of emancipating the Polish word from Latin. Strategic directions of development still had to be anticipated. This is precisely what Euzebiusz Słowacki sought to accomplish: introducing Polish belles-lettres into the context of the ancient and the European traditions.

The key theoretical text by Euzebiusz Słowacki is the relatively brief treatise *The Theory of Taste in the Fine Arts*, reissued in Kraków in 2003 under

the rubric «Lesser-Known Classics» (*Słowacki Ew. Teoria smaku*). The very idea of a «theory of taste», a purely aesthetic concept, was by origin classicist, insofar as it presupposed the existence of a norm to which authors must conform and which readers must recognize. Yet in terms of worldview, it stood in tension with the widely known and thoroughly democratic maxim *De gustibus non est disputandum* – «There is no disputing about tastes». Certainly, this phrase could not have been unknown to Professor Słowacki. More than that, he was undoubtedly aware that the dictum did not derive from the ancients but rather from medieval scholastic philosophy, which subordinated human authorship to divine providence. Even Horace, whom Słowacki studied meticulously, wrote in one of his epistles:

*Denique non omnes eadem mirantur amantque;
carmine tu gaudes, hic delectatur iambis,
ille Bionis sermonibus et sale nigro.*

Врешті у різних людей-і смаки, й уподобання різні:

Ти замилуєшся піснею, той – вихвалятиме ямби,

І інших-Біонів бесіди з чорною сіллю привалять. (Goracij)

As various numbers : thee the softer lyre

Delights : this man approves the tragic strain

That joys in Bion's keen, satiric vein. (Horace)

But it is also possible that Professor Słowacki was already familiar with Immanuel Kant's doctrine of the categorical imperative and its formula of universal law: «Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law». As a theorist, Słowacki acted as an exemplary teacher. At the Chair of Vilnius University, which he assumed after a competitive process, the subject of poetics had not been taught for several years; therefore, imbued with the idea of shaping a proper literary worldview in his students, the author approached his task with exceptional thoroughness.

Conclusions. The intended objective – the cultivation of a refined aesthetic taste that would become a universal law for future writers and readers – was pursued through the meticulous and systematic elucidation of all stages in the emergence, development, and prospects of genuine art. The treatise was composed of three parts: I. An account of the liberal arts and fine arts, from antiquity to modernity; II. A theory of taste, understood as comprising specific components: beauty, the sense of novelty, the sense of grandeur, the perception of imitation, harmony, grace, communality, and morality; III. The properties of taste: formation, delicacy, appropriateness, sensibility, its relation to criticism, and its influence on customs and emotions.

The professor thus constructed a project of a universe of artistic, imagined reality, in which he

positioned guiding beacons of the highest aesthetic taste and outlined pathways of movement from one to another. The author of this treatise, of course, did not address his fellow scholars but rather a student audience – though students who, in the original, read Roman and French writers. It is doubtful whether all present-day professors would accept the material without resistance. This very combination of demonstrative didacticism with an inexorable conceptualism creates the atmosphere of an integral philosophical worldview.

Any form of human activity, in the course of its development, undergoes refinement. Today's athletes smile at the Olympic records of earlier times; the great dramas and tragedies of the ancient world find it difficult to reach a contemporary theater audience; and the Pythagorean theorem or the wheel, once revolutionary discoveries that transformed the world, are now so familiar that no one would dare to call them «science». *The Theory of Taste* by Euzebiusz Słowacki is, in large measure, a summation of the development both of European literature and of European literary scholarship – as of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The author did not venture to make predictions: even at that stage, literary studies did not aspire to the status of an exact science. All the extraordinary literary breakthroughs of the coming two centuries never crossed the mind of any contemporary «Thomas More». Słowacki was a rationalist; the laurels of Charles Darwin never haunted his dreams, while he was fully content with the meticulous rigor of Carl Linnaeus.

At this point, the question arises: is the figure of Euzebiusz Słowacki – writer, didactician, and scholar – an innovative and unique phenomenon within those historical circumstances? Contemporary analysts, delving into particular aspects of his activity, arrive at an unequivocal conclusion regarding his achievements and prospects: «*Słowacki's concepts undoubtedly ... played a significant, if not crucial, though still underestimated role in equipping several generations of nineteenth-century Poles with intellectual tools*» (Czaplejewicz, 2005). «*Standing at the intersection of epochs, the Vilnius lecturer created a coherent construct which not only remains within the realm of abstraction but also lends itself to practical application. Moreover, firmly rooted in the legacy bequeathed by the preceding generation – the distinguished representatives of the Enlightenment – he simultaneously projects far into the future, thereby demonstrating his considerable cognitive value*» (Nowak, 2024).

Thus, the figure of Euzebiusz Słowacki – father of the Polish literary classic Juliusz Słowacki, a teacher, writer, translator, and theorist of literature – remains ambiguous and not yet fully established in scholarly discourse. Nevertheless, his creative legacy, although

not extensive in volume, is profound and multifaceted. In each of his roles, Euzebiusz Słowacki demonstrates both a close alignment with his own era and a forward-looking cultural perspective.

As a translator, he focused primarily on classical antiquity, whose examples set the aesthetic benchmark to which both the artist and the reader should aspire. In his original works written in Polish, Euzebiusz Słowacki, without intending to surpass the existing aesthetic level of Polish literature, sought to construct a genuinely historical Polish cultural context – one that could introduce national literature into the ranks of European literary traditions.

The central idea of his aesthetic theory lies in the need to develop clear criteria for the not yet widely accepted notion of *taste*, shaped through the assimilation of the finest models of art. It should be remembered that, lacking formal philological and pedagogical training, Słowacki devoted a significant portion of his intellectual efforts to independently mastering the core principles of the scholarly and pedagogical disciplines he taught in Kremenets and Vilnius: poetics and rhetoric.

In his pedagogical reflections, he proceeded from strictly pragmatic considerations, encouraging his students to engage consciously with the process of reading literary texts. Taking into account that Euzebiusz Słowacki historically belongs to the phenomenon of «Polish Literature of Ukraine», an essential prerequisite for the effective reception of his intellectual legacy is the qualified translation of his theoretical writings and didactic essays into Ukrainian, enabling their integration into the broader context of European culture. Therefore, it is precisely in this direction that one should seek the **prospects** for developing the theme «Euzebiusz Słowacki in the Polish-Ukrainian and European context at the turn of epochs».

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