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Forgotten Books: On the Making of Jane Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw*

Abstract: This article attempts to identify and examine some of the factors and sources that led to the creation of a largely forgotten prose work of English fiction titled *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803) which became an immediate and extraordinary success. Jane Porter's novel deals with a fictitious Polish patriot Thaddeus Sobieski, who is modelled on the Polish national hero Tadeusz Kosciuszko. The novel presents an excellent illustration of the cultural links between Great Britain and Poland towards the end of the 18th century and constitutes a cautionary tale for Porter's English readers, one that creates a basis for moral reform and political engagement.

Key words: national heroes, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, Napoleon, domestic life, 1790s

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The present undertaking is an attempt to identify and examine some of the factors and sources that led to the creation of a largely forgotten prose work of English fiction, *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, the first edition of which appeared in British bookshops in 1803. The work is unique among English novels of the time in taking up a Polish theme, hero and setting, namely, the heroic and tragic years of the early 1790s that marked the demise of the Polish state and the creation of a modern hero in the person of Thaddeus Sobieski. The study places the novel in its historical settings of Warsaw and London of the 1790s, looks into the sojourn of Kosciuszko in the English capital in 1797, one made momentous and captured for posterity by British writers and artists moved and inspired by the figure of the Polish General. Examination is also made of the richly detailed presentation of individuals and events depicting life in Poland at the time that remains a largely unappreciated testament of the courage and self-sacrifice of the Polish people in their struggle for independence against the overwhelming military forces of the Russian and Prussian partitioning powers.

Jane Porter (1776–1850), a now largely forgotten writer, was a British novelist known as *la penserosa*—the thoughtful one. Writing during the years when Britain's military forces were doing battle with Napoleon, Porter was an early pioneer of the historical novel, her most substantial effort being *Scottish Chiefs* (1810). The novel features the heroic Scottish figure of William Wallace (d. 1305), a leader of the ill-fated Scottish Wars of Independence. *The Scottish Chiefs* is exemplary of Jane Porter's sympathy for freedom fighters and the struggle for freedom of subject peoples, be they Poles, Scots, or South Americans. Mme. de Stael (1766–1817) categorized the novel as “une épopée en prose” though Porter herself referred to her novelistic form as “a biographical romance.” The divergent views reflect the two-fold nature of the structure of her first novel, *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803), in which battle-field scenes in the borderlands between Poland and Russia give way to scenes of domestic life in the London of the 1790s¹.

Porter, a native Scot, was fascinated by national heroes, including Peter the Great (1672–1725), Simon Bolivar (1783–1830), the Polish–American free-

¹ D. Looser. (2015). *Cambridge Women Writers in the Romantic Age*. Cambridge, England: University of Cambridge Press. 8

dom fighter, Thaddeus Kosciuszko (1746–1817)², as well as the above-mentioned Wallace. Kosciuszko serves as a model of virtue for the main protagonist *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803), Thaddeus Constantine Sobieski, his namesake. Another is the Polish hetman and king, Jan III Sobieski (1629–1696), and the hero of the Battle of Vienna in 1683. The two are revered as outstanding military leaders in the Polish and larger European tradition. The novel became an immediate best seller, and remained popular throughout the first half of the 19th century, going through numerous printings and several new editions. The fact that Porter chose a prominent Pole as the main protagonist for her biographical romance was a remarkable choice³. She evidently came to know of Kosciuszko and his aide-de-camp, Julian Niemcewicz⁴ (1758–1841) in the course of their brief stay in London and Bristol in May-June, 1797, both of whom are mentioned in her preface to the novel. Kosciuszko himself plays a minor but important role in the novel.

Porter, as can also be seen in her selection of William Wallace as a protagonist of her later novel, was particularly sympathetic to the victims of calamities, political exiles, and fighters for a lost cause. In Kosciuszko, she was drawn to a peculiar type of hero who can be viewed as a counterpart of the larger than life figures of Alexander of Macedon, Julius Caesar and Napoleon whose exploits were driven by overweening power and personal aggrandizement. For Porter, Kosciuszko embodied a selfless magnanimity in his heroic struggles for the independence of America and Poland, and a disdain for personal glory.

² Tadeusz (Thaddeus) Kosciuszko, a Polish nobleman born in the eastern borderlands in what is now Belarus, fought on the side of the Thirteen Colonies throughout the American Revolutionary War (1776–1783), the longest serving foreign officer. Kosciuszko held the rank of colonel in Horatio Gates's army at Saratoga and later directed the fortification of West Point. After that war he returned to Poland to organize the Polish people in their struggle for independence against the King of Prussia and the Czar of Russia. Their last great battle was fought in Warsaw, Poland, where Kosciuszko successfully combined regular military forces with irregular militia, an idea derived from George Washington. Kosciuszko later was offered a command in Napoleon's army but rejected it without guarantees of Poland's independence after the conquest of Europe.

³ George Eliot likewise selected a Polish musician Will Ladislaw as a protagonist in her novel *Middlemarch* (1872).

⁴ Porter refers to "Niemcewicz" in the novel as a "bard and hero" who had "fought at the side of the then imprisoned Kosciuszko in the last battle in which the general fell". In a footnote she calls him "the Tyrtæus of his country" and "a fellow collegian with Kosciuszko... but of a more literary disposition, his pen rather than his sword took part in the early struggles between Poland and her enemies" (93).

Joel J. Janicki, *Forgotten Books: On the Making of Jane Porter's "Thaddeus of Warsaw"*

While he appears as a national hero who redeemed the Polish nation from the ignominy of the partitions by uniting the Polish people in standing up to their enemies, he is also viewed as a fallen hero who failed in his mission to liberate his people from foreign aggressors.

In the Napoleonic era, the destructive spirit of war between nation and nation, with its blatant aggression, private aggrandizement and short-sighted self-interest, was seen by Porter as having a negative model for the younger generation while promoting vices all too characteristic of Regency England. Hence Porter's concern about the crisis of "manly British youth" who were completely lacking in wholesome principles. This dread for the future well-being of Britain served as a major impetus in the penning of the novel. Her stated aim was "to draw a distinguishing line between the spirit of true patriotism and that of ambitious public discontent; between real glory, which arises from benefits bestowed, and the false fame of acquired conquests." In such a context "the character of General Kosciuszko...presented itself to the writer as the completest exemplar for such a picture"⁵.

No less an authority than Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) credits Jane Porter with the invention of the historical novel. Scott himself is often considered to be the founder of the genre with its great impact on a generation of Romantic writers. Scott's most important works were published in 1814 (*Waverley*) and 1820 (*Ivanhoe*), significantly later than Porter's early novels. Both writers created memorable characters whose actions, decisions and manner brought history to life⁶.

Jane and her sister, Anna, had been household names in the first decades of the 19th century, "the toast of Regency-era England," when other female writers of fiction such as Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849) and Jane Austen (1775–1817) were making names for themselves. Her "biographical romances" appear as densely plotted fictional accounts of heroic men and virtuous women, and were eagerly embraced by a reading public fascinated by uplifting historical tales. "The Porters were bright, pretty and in demand; their literary success allowed them to transcend their lower-middle-class roots to move easily among Eng-

⁵ J. Porter. (1884). *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. Porter, Appendix to the novel, 445.

⁶ D. Brown. (1979). *Walter Scott and the Historical Imagination*. London: Routledge, 10ff.

land's smart set, fussed over and feted by the soldiers, statesmen and artists who were busily transforming Britain into the most powerful nation on earth"⁷.

In his unpublished essay, Anessi asserts that Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw* presents a "usable history," that puts some recent and not so recent historical events in Eastern Europe into the service of her readers living in the era of the Wars of the First (1792–1797) and Second Coalitions (1798–1802) against Napoleon. For Anessi, "Porter wants to illustrate a foundation in history for evolutionary political change" by constructing in the novel a hierarchy of forces responsible for social order, with national identity, built upon common historical experience, at the top"⁸. This is accomplished by her depiction of the main character, Thaddeus Sobieski, both as a Polish nobleman fighting for his country, later as political exile in England and ultimately as a true scion of a British lord upholding a traditional and virtuous way of life, one that is in some respects at odds with Kosciuszko's values and political ideals. Porter, surprisingly for contemporary readers, describes in significant detail Thaddeus's participation in the political and military events that shaped the tragic destiny of his native Poland, culminating in the total loss of national independence. Porter vividly describes both the battlefield on which Kosciuszko fell in October 1794 and the subsequent crushing of resistance in Warsaw by overwhelming Russian forces under the command of General Alexander Suvorov (1730–1800) later in that year.

Porter, however, goes beyond historical accounts in her creation of Thaddeus Sobieski, a composite figure based on the two most prominent military heroes in Polish history, Jan III Sobieski and Thaddeus Kosciuszko. While drawing upon the personal virtues and military prowess of Kosciuszko, she endows Thaddeus with royal blood, assigning him a much higher social status than the Polish general. This suits her novelistic purposes in making him a suitable mate for Mary, the novel's upper-class heroine and female counterpart and transforming him into an English Lord. The upper-class-consciousness of the British writer is alien to the democratic spirit of Kosciuszko who

⁷ D. Looser. (2016). *Sister Novelists*. Devoney Looser and the Porter Sisters. Jefferson City, MO: Office of Research, 6.

⁸ T. Anessi. (1999). *England's Future/Poland's Past: History and National Identity in 'Thaddeus of Warsaw'*. M. A. Thesis, University of South Carolina, Department of English, 5.

Joel J. Janicki, *Forgotten Books: On the Making of Jane Porter's "Thaddeus of Warsaw"*

espoused republican values and championed the common man. His support of the human rights of Blacks, Native Americans and Jews—all outcasts in British (and American) high society in the early 19th century—was remarkably ahead of his times.

For Porter, the “historical” section of the novel offers an opportunity to depict a true hero in action and a virtuous male figure who forms a stark contrast, once he arrives in London, to the feckless, dandified and unattractive British aristocrats, his contemporary counterparts. The fact that Thaddeus arrives in the British capital without financial resources allows him to get to know the world of the poor and neglected; later, through his characteristic modest dignity and the inherent nobility of his demeanor, together with his native appeal to women, he gains access to the salons of the upper crust of British society. This gives Porter a perspective for examining and satirizing characters from contemporary Regency England, primarily in London, eventually shifting the action to the English countryside where Thaddeus comes to terms with his British patrimony. Thaddeus is depicted as an ideal gentleman, possessed of a set of personal, social and political values that his English counterparts are at pains to measure up to. National identity together with social class determine both the structure of a society’s social relations and domestic tendencies that shape an individual’s character. Thus, it is unavoidable for the purposes of biographical romance that Porter ultimately transforms Thaddeus into a true scion of the British nobility, making him a suitable match in every respect for a British lady and at the same time satisfying her primarily female readers’ expectations of a happy ending. The novel provides a wealth of British characters with whom Thaddeus, the Polish exile, interacts so as to put his democratic instincts and the full range of his virtue on display. These characters come from various social stations—from impoverished city folk and pawnbrokers to wealthy upper-class denizens of London and baronets from the English countryside of Leicestershire⁹.

From a Polish reader’s perspective, the appearance of an English novel featuring a Polish hero as protagonist seems quite unlikely and unexpected. The Polish writer and philosopher, Krystyn Lach-Szyrma, (1790–1866), who

⁹ T. Anessi. (1999). *England's Future/Poland's Past: History and National Identity in 'Thaddeus of Warsaw'*. M. A. Thesis, University of South Carolina, Department of English, 6.

lived and traveled in Britain in the early 1820s, was appalled by the lack of knowledge of Poland and the almost complete unfamiliarity with Polish culture of the British educated class. In order to enlighten the British reading public about Polish life and letters, he wrote a volume entitled *Letters Literary and Political on Poland* (published in Edinburgh in 1823) and *Letters and Tribes* also of 1823. He later wrote *Reminiscences of a Journey through England and Scotland, 1820–1824*. In his own words, Lach-Szyrma admits to his dismay at “the ignorance of people in Britain about the Slav nations—a ‘terra incognita’ even to the most intelligent and educated.” Western historians, he asserted, “were unable to read Slavonic languages” and were dependent almost completely on secondary sources; consequently, they tended to make judgments of the Slavic peoples that appeared unfair and condescending, attacking them for their “barbarity and slavery.” Meanwhile, “the moral features of the (Polish) nation, and still more the literary, as they have appeared in the succession of ages, remained a sealed book”¹⁰.

This makes the appearance of Porter’s novel, *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, in British bookstores in the first decades of the 19th century all the more remarkable. In the first third of her novel, she offers the reader a Polish setting, describing Poland on the eve of its demise in the 1790s. In addition to the royal Sobieski family, she presents to the British reader with a compelling, if not always completely accurate, depiction of the panoply of life at the time and a surprisingly abundant cast of characters, including the last Polish King, Stanisław Poniatowski (1732–1798), his nephew, the military commander Prince Józef (1760–1813), Kazimierz Pułaski (1745–1790), General Tomasz Wawrzecki (1753–1816) and the Polish magnate Franciszek Ksawery Branicki (1730–1819), one of the leaders of the Targowica Confederation and great traitor of the Polish nation, among others. The latter is depicted in the novel not as a Pole but as the Russian military leader Count Brinicki.

Writing over a century ago, Dr. Roman Dyboski, in his essay „Powstanie Kościuszkowskie w powieści angielskiej z r. 1803” (1908), shares this sense of incredulity at discovering the existence of an English novel with a Polish set-

¹⁰ K. Lach-Szyrma. (2009). *London Observed: A Polish Philosopher at Large, 1829-1824*. M. K. McLeod (Ed.). Translated from Polish by M. Magnice & A. Kierszstejn. Oxford: Signal Books, xxii.

Joel J. Janicki, *Forgotten Books: On the Making of Jane Porter's "Thaddeus of Warsaw"*

ting. As a Polish reader and a Pole with a professional interest in English letters, Dyboski was amazed to come across an article with a list of "Half-Forgotten Novels," among which was the English-language novel *Thaddeus of Warsaw* set in the Polish capital of Warsaw and describing the events of 1794, an *annus mirabilis* in Polish history. The article had been published by Routledge and Sons in London under the telling title of "Half-Forgotten Books" and was devoted to the peculiarities of novel writing from the previous two centuries. Other works included those by more prominent writers such as *The Mysteries of Udolfo* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823), *Things as They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) by William Godwin (1756–1836), and *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744) by Sara Fielding (1710–1768) (sister of the eminent author of *Tom Jones*, Henry Fielding (1707–1754)). Dyboski wonders how an English novel about the Poland of those fateful years came to be written. Jane Porter's name was hardly known in Poland, nor has any Polish translation of the novel ever been undertaken, though it was translated into German. Dyboski acknowledges that, as an account of recent historical events, the novel served as a prelude and a model of sorts for Walter Scott, whose historical novels inspired Russian and Polish historical fiction, including a work by Niemcewicz¹¹.

As a matter of fact, in spite of the dearth of accurate knowledge of Poland and Polish culture among the British at the time, the figure of Kosciuszko had achieved cult status in the late 1790s. According to Grzegorzcyk¹² (1962), two heroic figures from Poland inspired poetic responses from European writers, their courage and deeds serving as testaments to the Polish character and in the process transforming the two generals into legendary figures, namely, Jan Sobieski and Tadeusz Kosciuszko. The two were different types of heroes: Sobieski was triumphant; his victory over the Ottoman Turks at Vienna in 1683 earned him widespread renown as the embodiment of the "bulwark of Christianity" that was Poland. He was subsequently crowned as the last native

¹¹ Jan Teczynski published in 1825 and known in English as *John of Tenczyn*. See the entry "Walterscottism" in the *Słownik Romantyzmu (Polish Dictionary of Romanticism)* ed. by M. Janion et al. and *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Volume 3 | Issue 2 Article 2 10-1-1965 "Walter Scott in Poland: Part II" by W. Ostrowski published by the University of Lodz.

¹² P. Grzegorzcyk. (1961). Kosciuszko w poezji angielskiej. In C. Zygmunt (Ed.), *Księga pamiątkowa ku czci profesora Stanisława Pigonia*, Kraków: PWN, 241-252.

king of Poland prior to Stanislaw August¹³. Kosciuszko, on the other hand, embodied the tragic fate of Poland as its dauntless defender against impossible odds, the upholder of republican virtue, who by his leadership and self-sacrifice more than any other individual created the modern Polish nation and forged the collective mentality of Poles as freedom fighters. By standing up to the overwhelming forces of the partitioning powers, Kosciuszko continues to inspire admiration and sympathy. As Grzegorzczuk¹⁴ shows, no other historical figure of foreign origins ever elicited such a response among England's poets—Coleridge (1772–1834), Byron (1788–1824), and Keats (1795–1821), among others¹⁵, all wrote sonnets dedicated to the Polish General. Their collective effort created a heroic myth surrounding the figure of Kosciuszko among the English at the time as a symbol of patriotism and as an intrepid fighter in the struggle for independence and social justice, helping to create a legend that lives on over two hundred years after the Poland's death.

Porter's novel was thus part of a collective artistic response to the events that had been unfolding in Poland in the 1790s as reported in the London press, culminating in Kosciuszko's defense of Warsaw, his fateful defeat at Maciejowice and the massacre of Praga in the latter half of 1794. In December of 1794, two months after Kosciuszko's defeat, Coleridge wrote a sonnet entitled "Kosciusko" that was printed in a London newspaper¹⁶. The sonnet was part of a series of "Sonnets on Eminent Characters", eleven in all, mainly devoted to British notables. The series has been compared to those written by John Milton and addressed to his contemporaries in an earlier age of revolution¹⁷.

¹³ Porter wonders at the historical blindness of the Austrians and their complete lack of gratitude to Poles for their role in the partitions of Poland. She writes, somewhat inaccurately, in a footnote "Where was the memory of these things when the Austrian emperor marched his devastating legions into Poland in the year 1793?", p. 28.

¹⁴ P. Grzegorzczuk. (1961). Kosciuszko w poezji angielskiej. In C. Zygmunt (Ed.), *Księga pamiątkowa ku czci profesora Stanisława Pigońa*, Kraków: PWN, 241-252.

¹⁵ See Zapotka's "Kosciuszko among the Romantics" (1985) for an English-language account of Kosciuszko's popularity among English poets at the time.

¹⁶ "Kosciusko" was published in the 16 December 1794 Morning Chronicle, the fifth of his *Sonnets on Eminent Characters*. He revised the poem twice, the first for a 1796 collection after having realized that Kosciuszko had not perished on the battlefield and then for a later, 1828 collection of his poems. (Mays, Vol 2, 155, 159).

¹⁷ J.C.C. Mays. (Ed.). (2001). *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works*. Vols. I and II. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 150.

Joel J. Janicki, *Forgotten Books: On the Making of Jane Porter's "Thaddeus of Warsaw"*

Coleridge's sonnet to Kosciuszko was preceded by one to the Marquis de LaFayette (1757-1834), who, like Kosciuszko, fought valiantly in the American Revolutionary War. The theme of the sonnet, LaFayette's escape from a dungeon during the Terror in France in 1794, highlights the common fate of the two generals—freedom fighters who ended up as political prisoners¹⁸. Coleridge's sonnet to Kosciuszko lays emphasis on his role as a martyr for his nation and for his stalwart support and willingness to lay down his life to uphold and protect the constitutional liberties of all peoples:

O what a loud and fearful shriek was there,
 As tho' a thousand souls one death-groan pour'd!
 Ah me! they view'd beneath an hireling's sword
 Fall'n KOSCIUSKO! Thro' the burthen'd air
 (As pauses the tir'd Cossac's barb'rous yell
 Of Triumph) on the chill and midnight gale
 Rises with frantic burst or sadder swell
 The dirge of murder'd Hope! while Freedom pale
 Bends in *such* anguish o'er her destin'd bier,
 As if from eldest time some Spirit meek
 Had gather'd in a mystic urn each tear
 That ever furrow'd a sad Patriot's cheek;
 And she had drain'd the sorrows of the bowl
 Ev'n till she reel'd, intoxicate of soul! (lines 1-14)¹⁹

Coleridge's poem is characterized by the powerful and unrestrained emotional response to Kosciuszko's destruction at the hands of an unworthy enemy—the "hireling sword" and the "Cossac's barb'rous yell". Coleridge's lyrical voice expresses the collective grief in "the loud and fearful shriek" of a "thousand souls" at the mortal blow dealt to Freedom. Porter, in similar terms,

¹⁸ Porter writes of Kosciuszko's ultimate fate that he was "doomed to survive the liberty of his country and to pass the residue of his life within the dungeon of his enemies" (88). Kosciuszko was released after being in captivity for two years and two months.

¹⁹ J. C. C Mays. (Ed.). (2001). *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works*. Vols. I and II. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 160.

captures the collective response of horror and despair at the news of the fall of the Polish commander: "'Kosciusko, our father, is killed!' was echoed from rank to rank with such piercing shrieks...the consternation became universal; groans of despair seemed to issue from the whole army..."²⁰.

Interest in Kosciuszko reached a peak during his sojourn in London and Bristol in May of 1797 after his release from the Peter-Paul Prison in the Russian capital. The reception he received in London was overwhelming, as described by his comrade and travel companion, Niemcewicz: "W żadnym kraju miłość wolności, szacunek dla obrońców jej, słowem, wszystkie szlachetne uczucia powszechniejszymi i żywszymi nie są, jak w Anglii; dziwić się więc nie trzeba, że przybycie generała Kościuszki, rozgłoszone po Londynie, sprawiło największe wrażenie, ściągnęło do widzenia go najznakomitsze w kraju osoby. Le duc de Bedford, Fox, Sheridan, Grey, który wówczas jeszcze nie był parem, wszyscy znaczniejsi czy to w naukach, czy w sztukach, damy nawet, patriotki, między nimi piękna lady Oxford, cisnęli się do mieszkania Kościuszki. [Kosciuszko was residing in the Talioners Hotel on Leicester Square.] Posel naówczas moskiewski w Londynie, Woroncow, miał rozkaz od Pawła Igo bywać często u niego; bywał więc lub co dzień przysyłał młodego naówczas syna swego..."²¹. (In no country is the love of freedom, respect for its defenders, in a word, all noble feelings widespread and lofty, as they are in England. It is therefore no wonder that the arrival of General Kosciuszko, broadcast throughout London, produced the most powerful impression. The wish to honor him with their presence attracted the nation's most outstanding personages. The Duke of Bedford, Fox, Sheridan, Grey, who at that time was not yet a Lord, all of the most renowned in their various fields of learning and the arts, ladies even, and patriotic women, among them the beautiful Lady Oxford, crammed into Kosciuszko's apartment [in the Talioners Hotel on Leicester Square] – Transl. J.J.J.).

Porter's siblings also played a part in bringing about the realization of the novel. Porter had a very close creative relationship with her younger sister, Anna Maria (1780–1832), her companion and a confidante of her literary am-

²⁰ J. Porter. (1884). *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. Porter, 74.

²¹ J.U. Niemcewicz. (1957). *Pamiętniki czasów moich. Tom II*. Warszawa: PWN, 209.

Joel J. Janicki, *Forgotten Books: On the Making of Jane Porter's "Thaddeus of Warsaw"*

bitions and endeavors. The two collaborated as authors of collections of short stories. "Between them, the Porter sisters published 26 novels, a handful of plays, and numerous works of non-fiction. They founded a literary journal, albeit anonymously. They kept detailed diaries, some of which survive. And they wrote letters, thousands of letters"²².

Furthermore, her brother Robert Ker Porter (1777–1842) had an abiding interest in Slavic culture. A painter of panoramic battle scenes, he was invited to serve Tsar Alexander I (1777–1824) as court painter. Robert played a key role in the writing of the novel by arousing his sister's interest in and sympathy for the fate of Poland and exiled Poles in London after he had been introduced to Kosciuszko during the latter's London sojourn²³. Robert shared the strong impression the Polish general had made on other English painters as the embodiment of a fallen hero tormented by the unhappy fate of Poland and still suffering from the wounds incurred on the battlefield. Kosciuszko's reputation as an irrepressible patriot and a steadfast devotee of the cause of freedom added to his virtue and fame, of irresistible appeal to painters and poets alike.

Jane, a sensitive young female and a budding artist, took Kosciuszko's fate to heart, which inspired her to write her first novel about Poland, and learn about the personalities involved in the Polish-Russian War of the early 1790s and the destruction of Warsaw. In creating her hero of Thaddeus Sobieski, she invests him with a religious devotion to truth and virtue, endowing him with a modest manner and a noble mind, making him into the epitome of an enlightened gentleman. It is significant that the reader learns to appreciate the sterling qualities of Thaddeus the Pole through his erstwhile enemy on the battlefield. In creating the figure of Pembroke Somerset, Porter creates the unlikely scenario of an Englishman fighting for the Russians against the freedom-loving Poles! The youthful and sincere Pembroke, an Englishman living in happy security of his rights and advantages, gets Thaddeus to express the values closest to his heart, revealing a wisdom at which Pembroke can only marvel. Thaddeus cautions and chides him about his vain-glory: "Do not envy

²² D. Looser. (2016). *Sister Novelists*. Devoney Looser and the Porter Sisters. Jefferson City, MO: Office of Research, 18.

²³ R. Dyboski. (1908). *Powstanie Kosciuszkowskie w powiesci angielskiej z r. 1803*. Krakow: Drukarnia 'Czas', 10.

me: I would rather live in obscurity all my days than have the means which calamity may produce of acquiring celebrity over the ruins of Poland. O! my friend, the wreath that crowns the head of conquest is thick and bright; but that which binds the olive of peace on the bleeding wounds of my country will be the dearest to me"²⁴. Thaddeus opens the eyes of Pembroke for whom victory and glory were synonymous terms: "Sobieski taught me how to discriminate between animal courage and true valor—between the defender of his country and the ravager of other states." Pembroke sees in Sobieski "the sublimity of his sentiments and the tenderness of his soul" and a mind "unacquainted with the throes of ambition or the throbs of self-love", that is, a disinterested amour patriae²⁵.

Porter goes beyond the events of the Polish-Russian wars, the defeat and devastation of Poland, and the deaths of Thaddeus's mother and grandfather by depicting his life in exile, an all too common fate among Poles beginning with the Kosciuszko Uprising. In so doing, she shifts the action of the novel to the infinitely more familiar London. Fashioning an imagined hero, the descendent of the Polish King Jan III Sobieski, ensconced in a palace on the north bank of the Vistula, the 19-year-old Thaddeus (at the outset of the novel) conformed to her artistic intention of a foreign-born aristocratic hero "educated... to the exercise of all the virtues which ennoble and endear the possessor"²⁶ while decrying the anti-heroic stature among the native English lords during a time of national crisis.

Porter also came to know of Kosciuszko by the portraits made of him at the time of his English sojourn. These included one by Henry Singleton (b. 1766), a painter of battle scenes. Singleton depicted Kosciuszko in prison as he appeared before his liberator, Paul I (1754–1801). The Russian Tsar is depicted with the Star of St. Andrew on his left side, taking the left hand of the prisoner he is about to liberate. The painting was entitled *Paul I granting Liberty to the Great Kosciuszko* and was done in accord with the instructions of Kosciuszko himself in May/June of 1797. It was presented to the public on

²⁴ J. Porter. (1884). *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. Porter, 39.

²⁵ J. Porter. (1884). *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. Porter, 62-63.

²⁶ J. Porter. (1884). *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. Porter, 2.

Joel J. Janicki, *Forgotten Books: On the Making of Jane Porter's "Thaddeus of Warsaw"*

March 25, 1798, when Kosciuszko was residing in Philadelphia, the former American capital²⁷.

Another portrait of Kosciuszko was made by Richard Cosway (1742–1821), a leading portraitist of the Regency period and the most renowned miniaturist of the time. His long creative career extended from 1770 to 1810. During a stay in Poland in the pre-partition years Cosway painted Polish portraits commissioned by Isabella Czartoryska (1746–1835), one of Kosciuszko's patrons. He depicted Kosciuszko lying in a room, leaning on his right hand while his left hand touches folios lying on a couch. He appears dressed in military uniform wearing high fitting boots; a table on the left bears a plume and a saber with the inscription "From the Whig Club of England to General Kosciuszko, 1797." An inscription was attached to the frame of the painting dating from January 1798 by Anna Maria Porter, the novelist's sister, which reads: "O Freedom, Valour, Resignation! here/ Pay, to your godlike son, the sacred tear;/ Weave the proud laurel for his suffering brow,/ And in a world's wide pity, steep the bough." The inscription was dedicated to the Whig Club of England²⁸.

Jane Porter thus chose the exotic and romantic setting of war-torn Poland for her novel, gathering an abundance of authentic information at her disposal (together with some inauthentic) to create the figure of her Polish-born hero. The novel was an immediate and extraordinary success and earned the novelist an acknowledgement of Kosciuszko himself. The Polish General wrote a letter to Porter in which praised the author for publicizing the Polish cause, gently chided her at the same time for excessive praise "z dodatkiem tylko skromnych zastrzeżeń przeciwko pochwałom" ("with this added note of modest reservations against excessive praise")²⁹. In subsequent editions of the novel beginning with the tenth (1820), Porter included a dedicatory essay entitled "Notes chiefly relating to General Kosciuszko." It appeared as a eulogy of sorts in the appendix to that edition published three years after the General's death in 1817.

²⁷ R. Dyboski. (1908). *Powstanie Kosciuszkowskie w powiesci angielskiej z r. 1803*. Krakow: Drukarnia 'Czas', 7.

²⁸ Ibid., 8.

²⁹ J. Porter. (1884). *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. Porter, 8.

In undertaking to write her novel Porter sought to give her readership the opportunity of experiencing the heroic collectively. In the words of Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), writing on the heroic, “it becomes apparent that the soul of a better quality rises up to capture the attention of the community, allowing the collective to enter into an inviting and magnanimous world where they may obtain, if not happiness, then a lasting source of compensation for the imbalances of the past, a redemption for past sufferings and injustices in the stature of the man who is able to raise the standard of civil virtue among mankind”³⁰. Compensation derives from the act of self-sacrifice with its posthumous glory, and it redounds upon those whom the hero, with his sense of honor intact, represents. Such compensation is made manifest in Porter’s version in having the hero assume a role of stature and influence in his society that is peculiarly British in outlook.

Porter was fortunate in having at her disposal a volume written in English by an Englishman on the history of Poland, including the recent events that had been unfolding in that country. In 1795 an anonymously published *History of Poland* appeared together with a portrait of Kosciuszko³¹. The author turned out to be Stephen Jones (1763–1827), who wrote his history of Poland with non-Polish sources³². A large portion of his 500-page work was devoted to contemporary affairs, including letters and documents dealing with the partitions, and with the battles in which Kosciuszko participated. Porter, as an enthusiast of Kosciuszko, had access to this material for the Polish chapters of her novel *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, the first edition appearing just eight years after the publication of Jones’s history.

The religious denouement with the marriage of Thaddeus and Lady Mary in an Anglican church, together with the revelation of Sobieski’s English father further distances the fictional character from the historical Kosciuszko. Nonetheless, the novel added greatly to the English cult of Kosciuszko. The Polish

³⁰ T. Carlyle. (1841). *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*. London: James Fraser, 146.

³¹ The full title of the volume reads: “The history of Poland, from its origin as a nation to the commencement of the year 1795. To which is prefixed an accurate account of the geography and government of that country, and the customs and manners of its inhabitants...”.

³² S. Jones. (1795). *The History of Poland, from its origin as a nation to the commencement of the year 1795*. London: Venor and Hood.

Joel J. Janicki, *Forgotten Books: On the Making of Jane Porter's "Thaddeus of Warsaw"*

leader appears in several scenes, most prominently in the description of the battle of Maciejowice, which Porter identifies as Brzesc. Overall, the descriptions in the novel are faithful to the dynamic events in Poland in the 1790s and the fate of Polish veterans exiled after the defeat in London. True to the spirit of romance, the hero finds personal happiness together with an unexpected fortune. In 1823 Porter published a sketch about the building of a monument to Kosciuszko in his native land, famously known as Kopiec Kosciuszki³³.

The following observations highlight Porter's rendition of Polish historical figures and point out historical inaccuracies in Porter's Polish sources. Kosciuszko (spelled "Kosciusko" throughout the text) makes several appearances in the novel as one of the Polish commanders fighting against Russian forces in the East. He is depicted as the beloved friend of Thaddeus's grandfather the Palatine Sobieski³⁴. Introduced to the illustrious Polander. Thaddeus finds Kosciuszko a commanding presence, a living model of leadership whose dignified manner and native modesty Thaddeus is destined to emulate.

The patrimony of Thaddeus is presented as an issue early in the novel as the "fatherless" hero is told the mystery of his birth by his mother, the Countess, in a letter dated March, 1792. She recalls the events in which she is seduced by an English nobleman in Florence. The English blood flowing through the boy's veins notwithstanding, the father and his unworthy name are rooted from memory as he is given instead the names of the two greatest Polish heroes, names that gained renown among the nations of Europe and beyond, names that embody the values of truth, honor, courage and steadfastness: Thaddeus, Constantine Sobieski. Yet, on her deathbed, his mother, in the aftermath of war amidst a devastated Warsaw, urges him to seek refuge in England, presenting him with a miniature portrait of his father.

Porter provides a footnote about Kosciuszko the first time he is mentioned in the novel. There she characterizes him as being 'noble of birth, and eminently brave in spirit' and as one who had "learnt the practice of arms in his early youth in America." Whereas Thaddeus Sobieski just comes of age when he is introduced to the reader, Kosciuszko, in fact, had completed his thirtieth year by the time he had made his way to the American capital, Philadelphia,

³³ J. Porter. (1884). *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. Porter, 246.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

in 1776. Porter tells us he attended the “great military college at Warsaw”—the School for Knights founded by Stanislaw August Poniatowski and Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski (1734–1823). In his eagerness to serve in the American fight for independence, Porter states that Kosciuszko was made “an especial aid-de-camp to General Washington”³⁵. In fact, such a position was given to Alexander Hamilton, becoming one of a small circle of staff serving Washington, that became known as the “Washington’s family.” Kosciuszko’s wartime contributions took place in other theaters under Horatio Gates (1727–1806) and Nathaniel Greene (1742–1786).

Porter provides a flattering portrait of the last king of Poland, Stanislaw August Poniatowski, (1732–1799). In one of the few historical flashbacks in the novel, Porter recalls the abduction of the “the good Stanislaus” that took place in 1771 by leaders of the Bar Confederation³⁶. While the leaders of the confederation are depicted as renegades, including Kazimierz Pulaski (1745–1779)³⁷, who is dubbed the ringleader of the abduction, the king is depicted in unalloyed positive terms as magnanimous, thoughtful, and forgiving of his enemies (i.e., his abductors). Moreover, he always keeps his word, and is highly esteemed and beloved by his people. Stanislaus is praised as a “brave King,” a description few Poles at the time or today would agree with. He is praised, justifiably, for giving his people a new and just constitution which did away with the elective monarchy. Porter sees the latter as the primary reason for the demise of Poland, leading to foreign interference and eventual domination by external agents. Porter has Kosciuszko praising Stanislaus and Sobieski as the greatest kings of Poland.

Nevertheless, Stanislaus undergoes an abrupt transformation in the final struggle against Russia, appearing weak and lacking the will to resist the enemy. Bereft of a fighting spirit, demoralized and despairing the fate of the nation, he encourages the capitulation of the Diet to agree to the second

³⁵ J. Porter. (1884). *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. Porter, 39.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁷ Pulaski, as the “ring-leader” of the thwarted abduction, according to a note in the novel, escaped execution and was forced to live the life of an exile, finally dying in America in 1779. No mention is made of his heroism in battle and his martyr’s death in Savannah, Georgia in 1779, fighting, as did Kosciuszko, for American liberty.

Joel J. Janicki, *Forgotten Books: On the Making of Jane Porter's "Thaddeus of Warsaw"*

partition of Poland³⁸. Stanislaus's decline marks the upsurge of Thaddeus as a charismatic figure whose broad appeal unites the nation as a whole, including the peasantry³⁹.

At this point Thaddeus takes on a regal stature and is endowed with a halo of sanctity that preserves and protects him in the vicissitudes that are to follow and with which posterity would behold his name. Significantly, he is paired with Kosciuszko at this point: "the two friends proceed to Cracow" seemingly to take over leadership of the uprising. This passage, however, makes no mention of the oath on the ancient capital's Main Square made on March 24, 1794 when Kosciuszko became the leader of the insurrection. Nor does Porter refer to the Polaniec Manifesto in May of that year proclaiming liberty for the peasants and the promise of freedom for those who take up arms on behalf of the nation. Porter, however, reassures the reader on behalf of the Polish nation: "Whilst a Kosciuszko and a Sobieski live, she need not quit despair"⁴⁰.

Jozef Poniatowski is also present as commander in chief of the Polish forces during the 1792 war against Russia. His affableness and charming manner immediately wins over Thaddeus. In depicting the Polish forces of which Prince Joseph and Kosciuszko are the military leaders engaged in battle with the Russians, the Scottish author is no doubt referring to the Russian-Polish War of 1792, the war in defense of the 3 May Constitution. Porter makes use of place names such as Volunna, (Wolyn) Zielime, (Zieleniec) Mariemont, the hills of Winnica where Thaddeus hears the drumbeats of battle for the first time near the border of Kiovia⁴¹ assigned to the left flank among forces commanded by Kosciuszko himself against Russian attackers. Prince Joseph is also depicted as a commander during the Kosciuszko Uprising, leading an army in Lithuania that is defeated by Suwaroff (Suvorov). In fact, Prince Joseph declined the position of leadership in Lithuania and took part in campaigns near the Polish capital.

Jane Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw* presents a cautionary tale for her English readers, one that creates a basis for moral reform and political engage-

³⁸ J. Porter. (1884). *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. Porter, 74.

³⁹ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁴¹ Ibid., 40, 42.

ment. Porter juxtaposes the historical events in Eastern Europe with the ongoing British war with France, and the selfless leadership of both Kosciuszko and Thaddeus that stands in stark contrast to the megalomania of Napoleon. Yet while depicting the tragedy of the Polish state, Porter demonstrates the effectiveness in the Polish leadership of uniting the Polish people in a common cause, reconfiguring society into a purposeful entity that frees itself of the divisiveness and excessive individualism that led to weakness and discord. Porter sees Europe as under the sway of amoral principles propagated by “the flattering sophistries of Voltaire” encouraging the various nations to “drink deeply of the cup of infidelity.” For Porter, Thaddeus as a Christian hero serves as a model of moral probity and as an antidote to the “terrible regicidal revolution in France”, “a tale of horror, the work of demons,” and “a conflict in which no comparisons as between man and man could exist”⁴² Porter was apparently unaware of Kosciuszko being named an honorary French citizen in the regicidal year of 1793. Regardless, Porter’s characterization of moral leadership and her championing of virtue in both private and public life provide a vision for England’s future and engages the reader in coming to terms with the novelistic form as a forum for moral, social, political and military issues and concerns. In uniting the personages of history with creations of her own moral imagination Porter created a new medium for creative thought that has proven remarkably fertile and inventive.

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⁴² J. Porter. (1884). *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. Porter, xvii.

Joel J. Janicki, *Forgotten Books: On the Making of Jane Porter's "Thaddeus of Warsaw"*

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