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Darwinism and Surrealism: The Case of Juliusz Słowacki's *Samuel Zborowski*

Abstract: Juliusz Słowacki has been acknowledged as a precursor of the Young Poland poets and recognized as one of the “Three Bards” of Polish Romanticism. A visionary of mystical experience, his later works took a focus on Polish history, including the drama *Samuel Zborowski*, which has been referred to as one of the boldest visionary dramas in world literature. This paper explores the relation of Juliusz Słowacki’s drama *Samuel Zborowski* to Darwinism and Surrealism. As a contemporary of Darwin, this paper presents several overlapping points in time between the lives of Słowacki and Darwin, as well as Słowacki’s relations to both Darwin and his predecessors. It has been argued that *Samuel Zborowski* is the first surrealist work in Polish literature. It employs varied scenic tricks that can be termed surrealist. The textual images of the work include several cinematographic special effects, and the subjects explored in *Samuel Zborowski* reflect a condensed, symbolic

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shorthand sign of cosmic experience and historiosophic meditation. At times impressionistic, the concepts therein are formulated by analogy, allusion and synthesis, with signs and images point to infinity. Taken together, we have a dramatic exposition of fundamental Genesis philosophy, interwoven and ultimately subordinate to the perennial Polish Question in the context of Romantic Messianism. The rich philosophical sources of *Samuel Zborowski* reveal a wealth of influences. The end result is a strange symbiosis of Poland's national history, Słowacki's messianistic historiosophy, and the scientific heritage of Darwin's predecessors..

Key words: evolutionism, Andrzej Towiański, mystical vision, theatre.

The year following the publication of Charles Darwin's *Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs* (1842) saw the premiere of Richard Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* (1843), and found Juliusz Słowacki spending the month of September in Pornic in Brittany. Since 12th July 1842, he had been a follower of the mystical Circle of Andrzej Towiański; and only a few days before going on holiday, he had composed his first mystical drama, *Father Marek* (1843, publ. later that year). In Pornic, as he wrote to his mother,¹ he sensed an ineffable, secret bond between himself and the Ocean, and a feeling of total oneness with nature. One month after returning to Paris, on 1st November, 1843, he left the Circle, without however changing his basic attitude towards Towiański and his teaching, appreciating its heterodoxy in relation to church doctrine. Before the year was out, in a febrile spurt of dramatic writing, he had created two more mystical dramas, *Sen srebrny Salomei* and a free translation of Calderon's *Il Principe Constante* (both publ. in the early weeks of 1844).

In the following year, as Darwin published his *Geological Observations on Volcanic Islands* (1844) and Wagner looked ahead to *Tannhauser* (1845), (which would provide Baudelaire with a pretext for elucidating his concept of

¹ Letter dated September, 1843.

correspondences and symbols), Słowacki spent the whole of July and August in Pornic, and wrote *Genezis z ducha*,² a hymn of praise for the Creator who had ordered the murmuring sea and windswept, flower-decked fields to awaken the knowledge buried in his soul and teach him to read the Book of Nature.

Subtitled a prayer, *Genesis of the Spirit* is the account of a revelation, or mystical vision in which Słowacki, sensing that he is Immortal, Son of God, and creator of the visible world, recalls his own spiritual prehistory. At the same time, he gives a visionary exposé of cosmic history, and the story of the earth's creation and progress through the slow motion of past aeons, in which he reflects upon the countless frequency of divine thunderbolts thrashing against the basaltic rocks of the first world, the never-ending succession of subterranean fires and earth shakes needed to transform the mineral world before organic life could emerge from the ocean. Like an imaginative lecturer with a magic lantern or slides projector, he unfurls a vast scenario in which charred wood-pith develops into a nervous system, and gigantic sponges and vegetal-reptiles surge from the silvery waves. In a form akin to cinematographic reel, the fossils of the natural history museum trundle past in animated sequence, and the first bird-beaked lizard sets off in search of dry land for the plodding, omnivorous monsters waiting beneath the ocean surface.

Above all, *Genezis z ducha* is a declaration of faith in evolutionism, a doctrine according to which each form constitutes the memory of a past form and the revelation of a future form, and all forms taken together constitute "the dreaming as it were of forms about man" (niby śnienie form o człowieku). The Spirit lies dormant in the rocks, ready to assume human form, and the birth of Athens is contained in a cliffside flower. For it is evolution by the spirit, through the spirit, and for the spirit. "Everything is created for the Spirit and through the spirit, and nothing exists for a carnal design alone³." It inaugurates the

² Słowacki dedicated *Genezis z ducha* to Andrzej Towiański. Not long afterwards, Aleksander Chodźko's letter to Tsar Nicholas I, written together with Towiański and Adam Mickiewicz, led to further conflict between Słowacki and the Circle, and in April 1845 Słowacki rededicated it to Colonel Mikołaj Kamiński, who on 16th February that year had broken with Towiański as a protest against the appeal to the Tsar. See A. Kowalczykova, *O 'Genezis z Ducha'*, "Pamiętnik Literacki", 1970, vol. 1; and *Słowacki w Pornic*, "Przegląd Humanistyczny", 1979, no. 9.

³ J. Słowacki, *Genezis z Ducha. Modlitwa. Dzieła X, Pisma prozq*; opr. W. Floryan, s. 173. All translations: N.T.T.

body of Słowacki's so-called philosophical works (*Rozmowy genezyjskie*, *List apostołski*, *List do J. N. Rembowskiiego*) that are closely linked with the circle of Towiański's ideas, but develop in a manner incompatible with Towiański orthodoxy. Its style assigns it to the category of religious poetry in prose.

Ever since childhood, as he gazed at the ruined castle on the hill in his native Krzemieniec in Volhynia, Słowacki had dreamed of drama as the highest manifestation of the poetic word. If only from the grapevine of the Polish émigré community in Paris, he had been freshly reminded of this Romantic tenet in Adam Mickiewicz's recent lecture on Romantic drama at the Collège de France (April 4th, 1843). There, quite oblivious of Słowacki's by now considerable dramatic output, and modestly neglectful of his own, Mickiewicz had based his blueprint for the Slavonic drama of the future on a close analysis of Zygmunt Krasiński's *The Undivine Comedy* (1835), though his analysis and commentary are no less relevant to his own *Forefathers' Eve* (1823, 1833). To comply with Mickiewicz's theoretical prerequisites, Slavonic drama as yet unborn would encompass all of past time and all of future time. In his Breton epiphany, Słowacki had perceived eternity. His need to dramatize Genesis philosophy may be seen as a further flowering of boyhood dreams, provoked by a bitter sense of personal affront, and kindled by the bardic precepts from the Collège de France.

The upshot was *Samuel Zborowski*, written in 1844, or possibly in 1845. Its beginning was lost, its ending probably never completed; and it remained in manuscript for the next forty years; in all, 2,500 lines survive. Harking back to an incident of sixteenth century history, Słowacki's title might lead one to expect a historic drama in the romantic spirit about the clash between Chancellor Jan Zamoyski and the notoriously anarchic magnate Samuel Zborowski, that culminated in the trial and execution of Zborowski in 1584. Instead, we have a dramatic exposition of fundamental Genesis philosophy, interwoven and ultimately subordinate to the perennial Polish Question in the context of Romantic Messianism.

Samuel Zborowski functions on a number of levels. A study of the play's rich philosophical sources⁴ reveals a wealth of influences, including ancient gnosis, Jewish Cabbala, neoplatonicism, occultic mysticism. Słowacki's plu-

⁴ On philosophical sources, see in particular Juliusz Kleiner, *Słowacki*.

ralistic spiritualism is related to the monadism of Leibniz, while his reincarnational evolutionism betrays numerous coincidences with the philosophical concepts of natural scientists such as Charles Bonnet and Boucher de Perthes. His mystical system is here integrated with his concept of Polish national messianism, underpinned by the vision of old Republican Poland outlined in his political works, in two letters to Prince Adam Czartoryski *Do emigracji o potrzebie idei*, and his mystical dramas⁵.

According to the doctrine of spiritual evolutionism, the ultimate goal is the highest degree of perfection, attainable only through the exercise of total freedom. In messianistic terms, Poland's duty was to rise from the dead, because the old Republican ideal would be productive for the future, and a *sine qua non* for the world to fulfil its eschatological destiny. Within this general scheme, Polish spirits are the most perfect, and stand above all earthly and social laws. The road to ultimate goals therefore leads through Poland and, by granting spirits absolute freedom, Poland will speed up the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. In the dream of a mystic Poland's sanctity has become a glorification of anarchy: the notion harks back to the anarchical old Polish Republic and its deeply entrenched dislike for any form of state authority as much as to the Romantic hatred of rules, laws and norms of any kind (viz. Shelley regarded law as a synonym of evil), exacerbated by the galling reality of Russian domination.

As a hero, Samuel Zborowski asserts the right of a great spirit to total freedom, and he is conceived as the most perfect incarnation of the national spirit and the idea of the fatherland. By breaking the laws that restricted Poland's liberty, he is seen to be contributing towards a process that would ensure Poland's uninterrupted spiritual advancement. His execution was a crime in that it halted the Genesis process of self-perfectioning by limiting the freedom of the individual that is ever directed towards the future. In the finale Christ's verdict sanctifies Samuel's mission, and in the process apotheosizes the Poland of the future, land of the highest spirits untrammelled by legalistic bonds.

Zborowski makes his first appearance in the drama in Act IV. In Act I, Eolion falls asleep at the edge of the stage and undergoes a sequence of anamnestic dreams, recalling the previous evolutionary stages and earlier incarnations of

⁵ See A. Kowalczykova, *Juliusz Słowacki*, [in] ed. A. Walicki, *Polska myśl filozoficzna i społeczna*, Warsaw 1973, pp. 273-305.

his wandering soul, including a mystical suicide with his sister and wife Atessa as a means to reincarnation. Reborn in Act II as the son of Prince Polonius, he meets Atessa, now a fisherman's daughter, but their idyll is disrupted by Lucifer, who turns himself into a bridge that promptly collapses into the chasm below. Act III takes place in the ocean depths where Atessa, now a water nymph named Heliana-Diana, is buried in a coral coffin. Act IV takes place back on earth. Believing his son Eolion, now named Helion, to have perished, Prince Polonius has gone mad and is possessed by the tormented soul of Chancellor Zamoyski, who is trying to escape from the furious decapitated Zborowski, but is abducted by him. The trial takes place in Act V in preternatural, unearthly spheres – before a lower and a higher court, first in hell, then in heaven, and is judged by the Devil and Christ. Lucifer is advocate for the defence, and now appears in a different guise under the name of Bukary, only to be replaced by the person of the poet.

Ideologically, romantic individualism and the creative freedom of the artist reach their ultimate limits in *Samuel Zborowski*, breaking all the known norms and boundaries, and surpassing all the excesses and formal deconstruction of Polish romantic drama. The list of its dramatic personages is telling enough: Apart from the eponymous hero and his historical executioner and judge (Chancellor Zamoyski), the cast comprises characters human (Prince Polonius, Eolion, a Theologus and Logicus from the magnate court, a Lawyer, and Chorus of Wise Men) and divine (Christ, Lucifer, Iskariot, and a chorus of angels great and small). It includes ancient mythological figures (Pluto, the Head of Medusa, a Nereid, and Amfitryta), cosmic and meteorological bodies (Sun, Moon, Stars, Mists with lightning), cubistic abstractions (a Human Shape, a Face, Voices enclosed in material shapes or disembodied spirits), and two Valkyries with lightning on their head. With her retinue of frozen Genesis forms, the queen of the oceanic kingdom is amorphous.

Since 1833, the *nec plus ultra* of compositional open-planning had been Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve. Parts II, IV and III*. Lacking both beginning and end, *Samuel Zborowski* is unconstrained by logic, time or space. Full of lights and glinting mists, the stage is open to infinity on all sides; Kleiner has referred to the work as a dramatized experiencing of infinity. Temporal and spatial categories are ignored. The laws of cause and effect are in abeyance. Structural elements are arbitrarily joined, in particular in Acts IV and V. In a less than consistent plot, the love story is subordinate to the demands of metempsychosis.

The characters move in oneiric space. Scenic space encompasses the interior of a Gothic castle, an ill-defined beauty spot in the Carpathians, and the bottom of the ocean bed, the place where evolution is arrested and which in mystical and metaphysical terms denotes hell. In Act V, the antagonists meet in interstellar space, in real hell and real heaven, and the trial takes place *sub specie aeternitatis*. As Słowacki wrote in his diary, "Goethe knew nothing". Time is neither sequential nor cohesive. There is no clearly defined present, the focus being simultaneously on the most distant past and the most distant future.

In illustrating a human, historical instance of evolutionism according to the doctrine enunciated in *Genesis of the Spirit*, Słowacki creates a construct akin to the medieval mystery, with its spirits and saints, earth, heaven and hell. As in the medieval mystery, all of the known and unknown world is unfurled, from creation to salvation, with teleological stress on the latter⁶. Attention has been drawn to the drama's Gothic dimension of verticality⁷. Its sinner, saint and hero appears moreover with his truncated head in hand, like a Christian martyr in mediaeval iconography. Scenic space is cosmic; for the cosmos itself has the character of a great theatrical arena ("Co za widok z tych wschodów!/ Cały teatr narodów!/ Światowych stwórca dzieł/Pełny światła i mgieł... A z ognia każdy próg...")⁸.

The vision encapsulated sounds like a distant echo of *El Gran teatro del Mundo*. Słowacki's most recent dramas prior to *Samuel Zborowski* had been steeped in Calderon's artistry and mysticism. *El Gran teatro del Mundo* contains more than the germ of an idea to be reworked by Słowacki. Calderon's Author-Director narrates the stages of Creation in dialogue with the World, then summons the characters who are still only pure essences, or virtualities, and the Creator assigns them an attribute (King, Rich Man, Peasant, Poor Man, Beauty, Spirit and Child). They then all play out the comedy of their life on the boards of the *teatro mundi*. God is a silent observer, and the official prompter, the Law of Grace, intervenes and counsels. At the end, the World strips the characters

⁶ See J. Kleiner, *Słowacki*, 4th edition, Wrocław 1969, p. 256. .

⁷ T. Terlecki, „*Samuel Zborowski*” na scenie lwowskiej”, „Słowo Polskie”, no 282 and 283, October 14 and 15, 1932.

⁸ "What a view from these stairs!/ An entire theatre of nations!/ Creator of cosmic deeds/ Full of lights and mists... Every threshold made of fire..." (J. Słowacki, *Samuel Zborowski*, Act V, 35-40).

of their terrestrial attributes. They will appear as equals before the Supreme Tribunal, being rewarded according to merits and, sooner or later, they will be admitted to the Holy Table. Rooted in the medieval mystery, Calderon's perfected morality was eminently playable on the real boards.

Even from so scant an outline, a vast distance separates the imaginative worlds of the Spanish and Polish dramatist. By its very amplitude and density, Słowacki's dramatized world of spiritual Genesis steps outside the Christian and mythological framework of Calderon's stage. Unfurling in cosmic time and space, it is arguably one of the boldest uses or abuses of spectator credulity within the Western theatrical tradition. Yet Słowacki may well have considered *Samuel Zborowski* as a viable, stageable work. In the previous century, Baroque opera had sought to deploy the natural elements draped as mythological personages on an all but cosmic scale (Rameau's Castor and Pollux play out their fate in the stratosphere). For anyone familiar with the *grands spectacles* of the Cirque Olympique in Paris, nothing was technically unfeasible in the theatre: volcanic eruptions and earthquakes were staged there as a matter of routine. Słowacki had seen other wonders in the boulevard theatres – *change-ments à vue* at the Funambules, and airborne ballerinas at the Opéra. Although Mickiewicz's own *Forefathers' Eve* had been written in Dresden prior to his arrival in Paris, the Cirque Olympique may well have been instrumental in helping him conceptualize his Slavonic drama of the future. After seeing *Les Polonais* there in 1831, Słowacki's had been singularly dismissive; yet, though it is unlikely that he ever became an habitué, he could hardly have failed to read the reviews of Jules Janin in the *Journal des Débats*, fuelling his imagination by proxy and imagining the spectacle in his mind's eye.

Whilst outstripping the theatrical tradition of its time, *Samuel Zborowski* largely antedates the scenic visions of a later age. In Poland he points forward to Stanisław Wyspiański's (1869-1907) dream concept of monumental theatre – a theatre without limits, unrestricted by material boundaries, embracing the vast airy spaces of both the visible and the invisible worlds, and peopled by real characters, shadows of the dead, and ideas embodied in human artistic creations⁹. For Wyspiański, whom one might term "visionary of culture", the

⁹ "Teatr mój widzę ogromny/ wielkie powietrzne przestrzenie/ ludzie je pełnią i cienie,/ ja jestem grze ich przytomny". St. Wyspiański, *Dziela zebrane*, Vol. XI, pp. 160-161.

entire world was theatre; and he staged all that he saw in the "theatre of his soul". A portrayal of the metaphysics underlying the Greek, Judaic and Christian heritage, in which architecture and sculpture are considered as the main residue of civilization, his *Akropolis* of 1904 is a visionary dream dramatization of the historical, mythical, and cultural palimpsest of Western culture, in which the *dramatis personae* are all works of art brought to life on the night of the Resurrection¹⁰. Its evocation of consecutive cultures and centuries embraces a timescale of some three thousand years.

As a visionary of mystical experience, Słowacki condenses into the space and time of a performance whole aeons of past epochs: embracing Calderon's human and divine set within the entire evolution of the cosmos mystically experienced, complete with stars and planets, and the disembodied, incorporeal beings that have not yet been assigned their shape in the genesis process. The end result is a strange symbiosis of Poland's national history, Słowacki's messianistic historiosophy, and the scientific heritage of Darwin's predecessors. Zbigniew Folejewski has referred to *Samuel Zborowski* as one of the boldest visionary dramas in world literature

Słowacki's two Valkyries anticipate Wagner's *Rhinegold* by eight years; the Ring cycle was completed a quarter of a century after Słowacki's death. By its deflationary device of theatre within the theatre *Balladyna* (published in 1839), his Shakespearean fairy-tale of crime and punishment rooted in peasant lore and folk balladry, had shown him as a precursor of the grotesque and the absurd as early as 1834¹¹. Five years later, *Lilla Weneda* (written in December 1839, published before May, 1840), pointed no further ahead than Richard Wagner (four years his junior, b. 1813). Teutonic in mood, laced with reminiscences of Ossian and the *Edda*, and often referred to as operatic, or Wagnerian drama, this "pyramid of misfortunes" consciously modelled on *King Lear* fabricates a fictitious yet true myth around Poland's legendary past, enhanced with lyrical choruses of Harpers and Chieftains, and an allegorical, symbolic prop,

¹⁰ See N. Taylor, *Stanisław Wyspiański and symbolist drama: The work of art as dramatis persona*, [in] *British Contributions to the X International Congress of Slavists*, Sofia 1988. In "Slavonic and East European Review", 66 (2), April 1988, pp. 198-209.

¹¹ See W. Weintraub, *Balladyna czyli zabawa w Szekspira*, "Pamiętnik Literacki", 1970, vol. 4 pp. 46-76.

the Harp of Derwid; its catastrophizing finale amounts to a provisional twilight of the nation. Though the historiosophical discourse of *Samuel Zborowski* is to be found in embryo in *Lilla Weneda*, it surpasses it by far in terms of the demands it makes of the reader-spectator, director, or scenographer; while its use of sounds and light effects hints perhaps in the direction of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Both *Lilla Weneda* and *Samuel Zborowski* are symbolist *avant la lettre*. Słowacki is the acknowledged precursor of the Young Poland poets, who project worlds outside of normal temporality and space, explore semi-conscious states, and are prone to transfer their yearnings, fears and dreams onto the plane of historical indeterminacy. Often heavy with historiosophical argument, the subject-matter of *Samuel Zborowski* is no reflection of life, but a condensed, symbolic shorthand sign of cosmic experience and historiosophic meditation. Impressionistic in parts, it remains overtly anti-naturalistic, formulating its concepts by analogy, allusion and synthesis; its signs and images point to infinity.

Inconsistent, often incongruous, the phantasmagoric play of events in *Samuel Zborowski* is held together by the figure of the Poet undergoing the dream. Dream drama is nothing new in Polish Romanticism; in fact, the dream formula as an external frame of dramatic structure was exploited at least as early as the Polish Baroque in Piotr Baryka's *Z chłopą król* (1629, staged 1633), and recurs in the comedy of the Enlightenment. *Samuel Zborowski* is however more than a dramatized dream: it is an example of dream poetics informing dramatic structure. The Dreamer, moreover, identifies now with one, not with another character.

This is further complicated by the fact that each major character is revealed in the light of his previous spiritual incarnations: the dramatic web of *Samuel Zborowski* is an unending balletic *chassé-croisé* of transmigration and reincarnation. As a protohuman Lucifer, Eolion has been Egyptian Pharaoh, only to become Helion, Sun Spirit, or Sun Angel; Atessa, his sister lover, is reborn as a Fishergirl, then as Heliana and Diana, female moon and water spirit. Most impressive of all are the successive incarnations of Lucifer, a global, Herculean hero of Genesis labours: as Serpent, Judas, fiery "globe spirit" of the earth, later as Lawyer-Poet. Christ and Lucifer are not antithetical, but rather complementary; Zamoyski and Polonius are the same person. In Act V a fur-

ther confusion of identities ensues as Lucifer, Bukary, the Lawyer, and the Poet succeed one another as the defenders of Samuel Zborowski, each apparently representing a higher level of consciousness and spiritual evolution than his predecessor. In Act I, scene 1, Eolion was the dreamer; but the onus of oneiric activity ultimately falls upon the Poet: his vantage-point of cosmic and spiritual vision lacks anchorage.

More than half a century after Słowacki's death, in 1902, a European dramatist was attempting to interpret life not through the senses and reason, but through memory, imagination, the subconscious, and the experience of dreams in different forms. He was interested in the Bible and medieval moralities, in Swedenborg, Hinduism and Buddhism, influenced too by Maeterlinck, whose *Le Trésor des Humbles* he was translating at the time. He was wrapping his characters, statements, and scenes in ambiguity and uncertainty, dissolving the personality of a character, introducing dream-inspired sequences into open-composition drama using a montage procedure that anticipated film technique. In his dramas he was striving to imitate the uncoordinated, but seemingly logical form of dream, where "everything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and place do not exist. On the trivial basis of reality, fantasy spins and weaves new patterns; a mixture of memories, experiences, free ideas, nonsense and improvisations. [...] Characters divide, double, dissolve, condense and fuse"¹².

Strindberg was attacked for the incoherent composition of his dramas, yet this surface chaos reveals its own coherent logic, not of dialogue and discourse, but of dreams and visions; the logic of his composition proved to be the logic of dream. In referring to Strindberg reception, we could be reading an entry in some posthumous notebook of Słowacki's. It has been claimed that the last bastion of tradition – the unity of the hero – had been overthrown in *Samuel Zborowski*¹³. Over half a century later, by dividing his own personality into several characters: Stranger, Beggar and the Confessor, Strindberg was

¹² L. Sokół, *Introduction*, [in] A. Strindberg, *Wybór dramatów*, ed. Z. Łanowski, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk: Biblioteka Narodowa, 1977, p. 733.

¹³ M. Żmigrodzka, *Związki między kosmosem a historią i Polską* (wypowiedź nadesłana), [in] M. Janion and M. Żmigrodzka (eds.), *Słowacki mistyczny. Propozycje i dyskusje symposiumu Warszawa 10-11 grudnia 1979*, Warszawa 1981, p. 379.

creating in *To Damascus* a new type of drama, the ego drama, or Ich-Dramatik. In *The Dreamplay* the authorial ego is split into three characters: Officer, Lawyer and Poet, who acts rather as a medium of the author, dreaming and articulating in his dream the problems that beset him. The Strindberg scholars are, unbeknown to themselves, touching on issues of Słowacki's theatre.

Part of the complexity for both dramatists is how to represent the transmigration of souls. Only two days before finishing *The Dreamplay* Strindberg entered in his diary: "Presently the 'Hindu religion' has given me the explanation of my dream play and the meaning of the daughter of Indra, the mysteries of the Doors = Nothingness"¹⁴. In the words of a Strindberg scholar, "Earlier dramatists had certainly used their powers of imagination and their memories and had touched on the unconscious, but none of them had written a play designed to tell the truth about God, man, and the universe in a form deliberately imitative of a dream"¹⁵. As is so often the case, the eminent academic had not looked to the chrestomathy of Polish Romantic texts, and the unfinished manuscript of a text that aspired to weld dream, cosmic evolution, and transmigration of souls into a single dramatic text. Over the span of half a century, the two dramatists share an undeniable affinity of the imagination, and a common forebear in the person of Emmanuel Swedenborg, who had been more than a figure-head for the adolescent Słowacki, and whose influence had been instrumental in effectuating Strindberg's conversion.

Unwitting follower of a Polish poet whose name he may never even have heard, Strindberg was a precursor of Expressionism and Surrealism. *Samuel Zborowski* resorts to a number of scenic tricks that can best be termed Surrealistic. Stars bark, and a staircase leaps through cosmic space. The decapitated head, tucked under its dead owner's arm, holds a light for its own corpse. A glittering column of spirits is seen, and the shapes of transitional beings half-way between the animal and mineral world. Individual scenes, especially in Acts I, II & IV, are described as being like film close-ups. For Mieczysław Jastruń, *Samuel Zborowski* is the first surrealist work in Polish literature. Cinematographic special effects are pre-coded in the textual imagery of *Samuel*

¹⁴ G. Ollén, *August Strindberg*, New York 1972, p. 90; cited by L. Sokół, op. cit., p. lxxxvi.

¹⁵ W. G. Johnson, *Foreword to: A. Strindberg, A Dream Play, and Four Chamber Plays*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973, p. vi.

Zborowski. In the view of a young critic, the problem with Wacław Radulski's staging in Lwów in 1932 was not Andrzej Pronaszko's highly inventive sets, but the overall direction, casting, and diction¹⁶.

The visionary quality of *Samuel Zborowski* tempts one, or even entitles one, to speculate and imagine a fictitious encounter somewhere in interstellar space between Słowacki and a twentieth-century theoretician of often unrealized aspirations. For Antonin Artaud, the theatre was to be a dream, not a carbon copy of reality. Artaud would have praised Słowacki's pre-emptive rejection of naturalism, psychological character theatre, and of theatre as entertainment, implicit in his immanent theatrical poetics. He would have approved of his use of sound and light, his return to the metaphysical sources of spectacle, and his reaching to the very font of poetry. In visualizing a future theatre of gods, heroes, or monsters of mythical dimension, cosmic themes and cosmic forces, Artaud preconized a return to the ancient texts of Mexican and Iranian cosmogonies. Słowacki had largely devised and embroidered his own body of myths in the spirit of pagan folklore and the old medieval chronicles: he would doubtless be commended on that score.

In further discussion they would have doubtless agreed about the inherent cruelty of the cosmic process, the *cruauté vitale* which is at the basis of reality, the metaphysical appetite for cruelty without which worlds cannot be created, to which the *théâtre de la cruauté* harks back. Słowacki would have delighted at the wealth of terminology used to define Artaud's theatre – and might himself have adopted the notion of *théâtre alchimique*, *théâtre métaphysique*, or perhaps *théâtre de l'absolu*, better still *théâtre de Devenir*, or *théâtre de l'Épreuve*, for his own work. He would certainly have expressed interest in Artaud's scenography of *La vida es sueño* (1922), and enjoyed hearing his thoughts on the staging of Strindberg's *Ghost Sonata*. Finally, on being shown Germaine Dulac's surrealist film entitled "d'après un rêve d'Antonin Artaud", he may well have retrieved the surviving manuscript of *Samuel Zborowski* in the hope that he had at last found a collaborator.

The death of Artaud takes us a whole century from that of Słowacki. Darwin had set out as a naturalist on the "Beagle" to South America in 1831, the same year as Słowacki opted for the life of a political émigré in the aftermath

¹⁶ T. Terlecki, op. cit.

Nina Taylor-Terlecka, *Darwinism and Surrealism: The Case of Juliusz Słowacki's "Samuel Zborowski"*

of the November Insurrection. *On the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection* (1859) came out ten years after Słowacki's death. Written in 1844–45, *Samuel Zborowski* was printed in 1884, two years after the death of Darwin, one year after that of Richard Wagner. Through the imaginative intuitions of a Polish Romantic Bard, the intellectual generation of Swedenborg and Lamarck reaches forward to its disparate progeny of Strindberg and Artaud in a drama of evolutionism to which Darwin himself is relevant, but ultimately redundant¹⁷.

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¹⁷ In a lecture delivered in 1908 at the Philharmonia in Warsaw the philosopher Witold Lutosławski argued that Słowacki in his visionariness had sometimes proved to be more "scientific" on certain points than the materialist scientist Darwin. *Darwin i Słowacki* in "Sfinks", 1909, Vol. 4, pp. 176–198.

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