

# Preface

The fourth and last volume in the *Góry – Literatura – Kultura* series published so far (Wrocław 2001) – created and edited by Jacek Kolbuszewski, distinguished expert on mountains-related themes in literature and culture, author of a valuable monograph, *Tatry w literaturze polskiej 1809–1939* (Cracow 1982) and many other works devoted to mountains – contained an article by Peter Brang, Slavonic scholar associated with the University of Zurich – an article concerning Zenon Przesmycki's sonnet cycle *Z sonetów szwajcarskich* [*Swiss sonnets*]<sup>1</sup>. Together with the translator Christof Ferber, in 1998 Brang edited and published in Basel an excellent anthology entitled *Landschaft und Lyrik. Die Schweiz in Gedichten der Slaven. Eine kommentierte Anthologie*, containing a comprehensive selection of poems on Alps-related themes by Slavonic poets (Russian, Polish, Czech, Slovak and Serbian). Each of the works in this selection was presented in its original language version and in a German translation, together with a critical commentary. The collection was preceded by a comprehensive study analysing the transformations in the presentation of mountains, the Alps in this case, in the works of authors writing in Slavonic languages and coming from Central and Eastern Europe. Slavonic poetry about the Alps was presented chronologically, which made it possible to follow its evolution in the light of the turn-of-the-period changing aesthetic models, social preferences and historical determinants. Brang and Ferber's anthology contained a large selection of Polish Alpine poems. In addition to poems by pre-Romantics and Romantics, such as Dyzma Bończa Tomaszewski, Kazimierz Brodziński, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Stefan Garczyński, or Konstanty Gaszyński – representatives of a generation the programme of which included discovering and describing the Alps – the anthology also contained works by Maria Konopnicka, Kazimierz Tetmajer, Jan Kasprowicz, Zenon Przesmycki and others. It is, therefore, a pity that Polish poetry, as well as a broadly defined Alpine literature, has not yet seen a separate monograph devoted to it in Poland. We have not seen either – despite the development of research into literary themes – an anthology presenting a large selection of our Alpine literature. So far, scholars dealing with Polish Romanticism, have mostly been interested in Juliusz Słowacki's Swiss Alpine works<sup>2</sup>.

An attempt to discuss Alpine themes in Polish literature perceived in a broader perspective was made by Jacek Kolbuszewski in a pioneering work entitled *Alpy polskich romantyków. Prolegomena*. He devoted a part of this study to the term

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<sup>1</sup> P. Brang, „Warkocz ciał tak się miękko wydłuża” [“The body plait grows long so softly”]. *Miriam (Zenon Przesmycki) i jego cykl „Z sonetów szwajcarskich” (1897)*, [in:] *Góry – Literatura – Kultura*, v. 4, edited by J. Kolbuszewski, Wrocław 2001, pp. 183–189.

<sup>2</sup> See eg. S. Makowski, *W szwajcarskich górach. Alpejskie krajobrazy Słowackiego*, Warsaw 1976; L. Libera, *W Szwajcarii. Studium o Juliuszu Słowackim*, Cracow 2001.

“Alpine literature”, which is of key importance in the context of the methodology of researching Alpine themes in European literature, including Polish literature. He wrote:

When 20th century scholars coined a separate term of “Alpine literature”, understood as a supranational and supralinguistic thematic category, it turned out that its representatives include writers of such stature as Jean Jacques Rousseau, André Chénier, Jacques Delille, Ann Radcliffe, Percy B. Shelley, George Byron, Victor Hugo, François René de Chateaubriand, Alexandre Dumas, Jules Michelet, Charles Nodier, Mark Twain and August von Platten, not to mention the great Goethe. Some of their Alpine works became famous as great works of the world literature, others played once a very important part, an example of which is August von Platten’s famous poem *Einladung zu einer Schweizerreise* (1816) containing the words that became an invitation to the Alps for the entire Romantic generation:

“Willst du durch der Freiheit Eden,  
Wo die Berge zeugend reden,  
Nicht ein froher Pilger gehen?  
Dort, wo freie Männer hausen,  
Selbst die Ströme freier brausen  
Und die Lüfte milder wehen!”

[...] The “Alpine literature” perceived in this manner is thus, in a way, a community created by Swiss, German, French and English writers as well as those representing other nationalities (the case of Twain). The evolution of this literature is always seen in relation to the development of tourism and mountain-climbing; its originality is found in its distinctiveness and independence in experiencing and describing the mountains<sup>3</sup>.

However, he stressed that

It is no exaggeration to say that Alpine themes in Polish Romantic literature make up an almost separate, interesting chapter; the most important works containing these themes can successfully compete with those by well-known writers from Western Europe. [...] This Polish “Alpine literature” acquired artistic maturity and greatness in the period of Romanticism, but it did have earlier, interesting though modest beginnings, and a mature continuation in the second half of the 19th century and in the 20th century<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> J. Kolbuszewski, *Alpy polskich romantyków. Prolegomena*, [in:] *idem, Przestrzenie i krajo-brazy*, Wrocław 1994, pp. 257–258.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 259.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that the fifth volume in the *Góry – Literatura – Kultura* series is devoted entirely to Alpine themes in Polish and foreign literature. The majority of the papers and articles published in the volume deal with Polish works, mainly those from the 19th century. The authors included in the volume were interested both in Polish translations of European Alpine works and in original Polish works representing various literary genres and circulations. The volume also contains two studies devoted to foreign literature. The publication does not aspire to be regarded as a monograph but is to signal systematic research into Polish Alpine literature, interpreted in a broad European context, the result of which will be a comprehensive anthology. The first steps in this direction have already been taken. We have prepared, in collaboration with the students from the “Koedycja” student editors association at the Institute of Polish Philology of the Wrocław University, a collection of Polish poems dealing with the Alps. It will be expanded and supplemented, and then soon published as a special volume in the present series.

*Ewa Grzęda, 22 December 2009*

Konstanty Gaszyński

#### THE JUNGFRAU<sup>5</sup> AT SUNSET

As the summer sun ends its daily course,  
When my thought from a lone hill like an arrow high  
Through Oberland's<sup>6</sup> peaks went up in the sky,  
My eye met the Jungfrau's radiant summit!

Oh! nature's splendour, greater than the marvels of dreams!  
The mountain white with the brilliant whiteness of virgin snow  
Suddenly saw a blush suffuse her face  
And seems to be burning with fire in a bottomless space!

But suddenly it slowly turns pale, fades – the crimson scarlet  
Turns into sapphire – sapphire into opals –  
Until finally in the darkness of the night the mountain melts!

– And so all that is earthly in us, though shines magnificently,  
Youth, charm and beauty – they stay but for an instant  
And then fade – pass – and disappear in the mist of oblivion!<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Jungfrau – a summit in the Bernese Alps (part of the Western Alps) in Switzerland.

<sup>6</sup> Oberland – geographical and historical region in the Swiss canton of Bern.

<sup>7</sup> First printing: *Poezje Konstantego Gaszyńskiego. Wydanie 2 pomnożone*, Paris 1856, pp. 48–49. The basis of this edition is the first printing, because it is the only available authentic version. In some places the necessary updating of spelling and punctuation was introduced.

The poem is dated 1850. From 1848, having resigned as a secretary of a deputy from Paris, Leon de Sièyes, Gaszyński travelled throughout Europe. He would spend time mainly at health resorts, trying to stop the spread of a disease which made movement increasingly difficult for him. The sonnet quoted here is related to his stay in Switzerland in connection with a course of treatment, dated 1850 (probably the summer of that year, because as late as 29 April Gaszyński wrote to August Cieszkowski from Aix, while in November he set off for Heidelberg in the company of Zygmunt Krasiński)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> This edition of the text together with its commentary was prepared by Dorota Stępień.