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## ORIENTALISM IN ADAM MICKIEWICZ'S *CRIMEAN SONNETS*

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In his “A New Age in Polish Poetry,” an ill-considered 1835 critique of “cosmopolitan” trends in Polish romanticism, Seweryn Goszczyński does not fail to single out orientalism. Noting that it is “but a pale copy and most often an earnest reworking into Polish of that which de Sacy or Fauriel had rendered into French from an Eastern language,” Goszczyński goes on to observe that Polish orientalism

some hundred years ago [. . .] may still have had some justification in the direct contacts that Poland had with the East and as a consequence in the resulting brush of imaginations [. . .] — but today? Today, insofar as it is not historically implicated in the essence of an event taken from a common history (*nie jest historycznie wplątana w osnowę wypadku, wyjątego ze wspólnej przeszłości*), it is an empty bauble, worth as little to us as the late lamented French classicism [. . .]. (Goszczyński 321)

There is a rich irony to Goszczyński’s reference in this context to classicism. After all, it was the neoclassicist antagonists of his generation of Polish romantics who chose to most forcefully assert their *raison d’être* precisely when confronted by the orientalist poetics of Adam Mickiewicz’s *Crimean Sonnets*<sup>1</sup> — in terms analogous to those Goszczyński will himself use some eight years later. In a letter of 22 December [1827] to Franciszek Morawski, for instance, Kajetan Koźmian asks his fellow neoclassicist:

Answer me, if you can, what do Turkish “Czatyrdahs” and “Renegades” have in common with national (*narodowa*) poetry. The Germans at least sing about their barons in their ballads, but we, we sing about Turks, Tatars, and Cossacks, and in their own language to boot.<sup>2</sup> (Billip 342)

All differences of what constitutes a “national” literature aside, both Koźmian’s and Goszczyński’s resistance to Mickiewicz’s orientalism was not altogether misguided. From the perspective of the unreconstructed neoclassicist, no less than that of the (for a time) Slavophile romantic, the specifically Polish romantic fascination with the Orient could be understood, *mutatis mutandis*, not only as a kind of aberration in light of its

hardly disguised nod toward Western European fashion, but also, and perhaps above all, in light of Poland's own status as an object of imperial design. Indeed, Koźmian's reaction appears all the more salient when one takes into account that it was triggered by news that the *Crimean Sonnets* had become quite a hit in the capitals of the two future imperial players of "the Great Game."<sup>3</sup> In this connection, then, it may be instructive to revisit the question that in their own way Koźmian and Goszczyński both pose: for whom was Adam Mickiewicz writing when he chose the Crimean Orient as his subject?

If, as Edward Said contends, orientalism can be defined as a Western "system of representations" that at once constitutes, contains, and appropriates the Orient by speaking on its behalf and is thus by its very nature an imperial, "mainly [. . .] British and French cultural enterprise" intent on "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 202–3, 20, 3, 4),<sup>4</sup> the bemusement of a Koźmian or a Goszczyński concerning an oriental fashion in post-partition Polish poetry may at first glance appear to be justified. However, it is precisely as a *cultural* enterprise, a shared system of *occidental* values—and in this, German representational practices were certainly no less influential than those of the British or French (Fuchs-Sumiyoshi 12–17)—that orientalism was such a powerful construct. Goszczyński's claim for a historical disjuncture in Poland's relationship with the Orient is in this sense belied if only by his reference to Polish poets "reworking" de Sacy. If one is to believe Said, it was, after all, the latter's work that ostensibly "canonize[d] the Orient" in the West by means of "textual objects passed on from one generation of students to the next" (Said 129–30), including, of course, Mickiewicz himself.<sup>5</sup> One need only look at Mickiewicz's sources and inspirations—de Sacy, Hammer, Fr. Schlegel, d'Herbelot, but also Goethe, Byron, and Moore (Zajączkowski 68, Kubacki 72–111)—to grasp how diligent, but at the same time quite conventional, the Polish romantic was in rifling and replicating what had become the authoritative canon of nineteenth-century Western orientalism. In fact, in exemplary neoclassicist fashion, Mickiewicz openly acknowledges as much: not only does he use as the epigraph to the cycle two lines from Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* or single out Hammer in the notes to the sonnets (*DzW*, 29),<sup>6</sup> but in his own contribution to the polemic concerning the cycle, "About Warsaw Critics and Reviewers" (1829), he sarcastically remarks, "*Allah, dragoman, minaret, namaz, izan* [are] Arabic or Persian expressions used and glossed so many times in the works of Goethe, Byron, and Moore that any European reader should feel ashamed not knowing them [. . .]" (*Dz* 5:259).

In his turn toward the Orient, Mickiewicz was, of course, no different from many of his contemporaries, for whom the Muslim world, whether experienced vicariously or directly, came to serve as yet another romantic

“counter-narrative,” a way of challenging “the social, political, or imaginative constrictions of their own societies” (Greenleaf 114, see Said 166–97, Piwińska). That Mickiewicz was quite aware of what he was doing in this respect is evident from his letter of 7[19] January 1827 to Joachim Lelewel. “If the *Sonnets* are received well,” he writes to his mentor, “I intend to compose something more extensive in the oriental style; if, on the other hand, those minarets, namazes, izans and other such barbarian sounds (*owe minarety, namazy, izany i tym podobne barbarzyńskie dźwięki*) do not find favor in the classicists’ delicate ear, if . . . then I’ll say [. . .] I’m chagrined, but I’ll keep on writing” (*Dz.* 14:324).

The neoclassicist Koźmian understood the nature of this challenge only too well—just as he probably would have understood the tenor of what Mickiewicz refers to as “barbarian sounds.” For however programmatically provocative the appearance of “minarets, namazes, izans” may have been in Polish verse of the time, qualifying them, all irony aside, as “owe,” “*tym podobne*” “*dźwięki*” would certainly have drawn no objections from Mickiewicz’s nemesis. When it came to representing the Orient *against* the neoclassicists, the Polish romantic effectively perpetuated and indeed traded in notions of the Orient that were comfortably familiar to the former, notions that, as Said would have it, had inscribed the East in Western thought from the time of Aeschylus: a *terra* that was inarticulate, unintelligible, undifferentiated (Said 56–57, see Greenleaf 113–14).

However, Mickiewicz’s capacity to operate with these notions was not, as Goszczyński insisted, simply “a pale copy [. . .] of [. . .] de Sacy or Fauriel.” Mickiewicz’s by all accounts genuine interest in the Orient<sup>7</sup> intersects not only with the efflorescence of orientalist studies at his alma mater in Vilnius, but, more importantly, also with the careers of those of its graduates who for whatever reasons and under whatever circumstances were themselves subsequently instrumental in disseminating knowledge about the Orient in—and for the political benefit of—the Russian Empire. Such friends and contemporaries of Mickiewicz as Józef Sękowski, Aleksander Chodźko, Józef Kowalewski, Jan Nepomucen Wiernikowski, Michał Bobrowski, and Ludwik Spitznagel were in this respect willy-nilly implicated in and, indeed, as teachers, scholars, or government officials (Zajączkowski, Reychman, *Istoriia* 101–7, 125–30, 150–67, 202–9, 227–82), themselves helped institutionalize a Russian imperialist discourse that was no less a “style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” than its Western progenitors.

What Mickiewicz intended, then, as a romantic challenge to Polish neoclassicist poetics acquires an entirely different set of connotations when viewed in the context of Russian imperial ambitions in Central Asia and the representational practices, be they scholarly, artistic, or journalistic, that served to naturalize and legitimate them (Layton 8–14). But it is in this

respect too that the *Crimean Sonnets* can provide something of a corrective to Said's tendency to totalize orientalism into "a monolithic, developmental discourse that uniformly constructs the Orient as the Other of the Occident" (Lowe 4). Like Lisa Lowe (5), I would rather view Mickiewicz's representation of the Orient as a "juncture" of competing and at times contradictory narratives, wherein the discourse of Western orientalism and, in turn, of its Russian (*vel* Russo-Polish) reflex is itself "complicated and interrupted" by national but also personal concerns.

That Mickiewicz's representation of the Orient derives as much from imperial Russian orientalist discourse, from Sękowski, Ivan Muraviev-Apostol, and Pushkin, as it does from de Sacy or Hammer or Goethe, certainly bears repeating.<sup>8</sup> However, of far greater interest is the reception of the Crimean cycle, or, if you will, its horizon of expectations. By this I mean not so much even the fact that Russian readers, for whom Pushkin had effectively "discovered" the Crimea two years earlier (Hokanson 125), were in some ways quicker to recognize the significance of the *Crimean Sonnets* than were many of Mickiewicz's own countrymen,<sup>9</sup> but rather the terms in which they did so. The opening paragraphs of Prince Petr Viazemsky's 1827 foreword to his Russian translation of the work, which was enormously influential in setting the tone for the subsequent reception of the sonnets in Russia, frame these terms quite unequivocally:

We have here an extraordinary and satisfying (*удовлетворительное*) phenomenon. An elegant work of foreign poetry, the work of one of Poland's premier poets, has been published in Moscow, where perhaps no more than ten readers are capable of properly evaluating it; [. . .] it passed into the domain of booksellers *incognito*, without honors from journals, without critical alarms [. . .]. (Viazemskii 326)

Comparing Mickiewicz to Kantemir, who wrote his "immortal satires" on the "desert island" that was Paris, Viazemsky writes that "for the Polish poet, Moscow is almost the same desert island," although as a poet he ultimately "speaks with himself" (326). In this, Viazemsky's stress is — or at least strives to be — more on "poet" than on "Polish"; for him, the desert isle is ostensibly a (romantic) metaphor of sociocultural rather than national significance. But then he continues:

It is impossible not to wonder and regret that [the literature of] this fellow tribe (*соплеменница*) is so poorly known among us. At once the political ties now binding us with Poland and the ties of natural kinship (*природное сродство*) as well as the mutual benefits to literature should draw us closer together. Knowledge of the Polish language could be helpful in supplementing knowledge of our native language. Numerous family traits, preserved among our neighbors and common heirs, have disappeared among us; by examining the inheritance divided between us, through a peaceful exchange on both sides, we could discover mutual benefits. Brothers [. . .] should [. . .] commit to oblivion the middle ages of our existence, marked as they were by family (*семейные*) quarrels, and unite (*слиться*) on the basis of the fundamental characteristics of our origins (*в чертах коренных своего происхождения*) and our present union (*соединение*). To Polish and Russian journals is given

the responsibility of preparing the preliminary measures for bringing this family together (*изготовить* [. . .] *меры семейного соединения*). At least we, for our part, are happy that we have the good fortune of marking one of the first steps toward this desired goal, of acquainting our Russian readers with the *Sonnets* of Mickiewicz [. . .]. And if Mickiewicz was prompted by an equal desire to promote this union, then one must admit that he chose the best means to do so: by publishing his sonnets in Moscow [. . .]. (327–28)<sup>10</sup>

To be sure, Viazemsky is to some extent playing the role of Mickiewicz's agent here, pitching the work of his foreign — but not too foreign — friend to the Russian reading public. Nonetheless, it is curious that Viazemsky by the same token disregards the existence of a Polish reading public (in Moscow or St. Petersburg, much less in the Congress Kingdom or Lithuania), as if the sonnets were directed first and foremost at a Russian reader. More noteworthy, however, in this otherwise perceptive and deeply felt appreciation of Mickiewicz's "Russian" debut is the "digression" on Russo-Polish relations, with its liberal humanist intimation that Mickiewicz's work somehow transcends — or at least may help to overcome — the "fraternal" enmities of the past. In resorting here to the kind of pan-Slavic patter that marked the language of nineteenth-century official imperial ideology,<sup>11</sup> the Russian poet and statesman betrays a palpable anxiety about the state of relations between "family" members. But, then, that Viazemsky should choose to project this anxiety onto a Polish poet's orientalist cycle is not at all coincidental, nor, for that matter, is his note of at once apprehension and somewhat patronizing conciliation. After all, the *Crimean Sonnets*, which deal with a relatively recently acquired Muslim land, happened to appear as Ermolov's armies were engaged in a bloody struggle against Persian and Caucasian forces (who were often referred to indiscriminately as "Tatars" [Dziuba 41]) for control over Chechnya and Daghestan. Moreover, they were written by someone whose own homeland had been annexed by Russia not so long ago and who was himself an unconsenting subject and, indeed, penal ward of the empire. As I shall argue below, Viazemsky's foreword, together with his decision to translate in their entirety only the *Crimean* portion of *Sonnets*,<sup>12</sup> suggests that it is precisely Mickiewicz's re-inscription of orientalism in his Crimean cycle and then the fact of its publication in Moscow that could serve to ease imperial anxieties.<sup>13</sup>

When Mickiewicz took his tour of the Crimea in 1825, the Tatar peninsula had been an integral part of the Russian Empire for little over forty years. As elsewhere under Catherine II (including Mickiewicz's native Lithuania), the annexation and absorption of the Crimea was less brutal than it was bureaucratically efficient. To be sure, the ruins that give Mickiewicz such metaphysical pause in the Bahçesaray sonnets (6–9) or in "Ruiny zamku w Bałakławie" [The Ruins of the castle in Balaklava] were a direct upshot of Russian attitudes toward the Muslim Tatar cultural heritage in towns that had been largely emptied of their native urban elite.<sup>14</sup> In fact,

Pushkin, in a letter appended to his *Bakhchisaraiskii fontan* [The fountain of Bahçesaray], records how in the former capital of the khanate he “walked around the courtyard [of the khan’s palace] greatly vexed at the negligence with which it is [being allowed to] decay and at the semi-European remodeling of some of the rooms” (Pushkin 176).<sup>15</sup> This notwithstanding, Russian policies in the Crimea were aimed at absorbing the former khanate as painlessly as possible. While generally tolerant of Islamic religious and Tatar local customs, Russian rulers at the same time strove to co-opt the Tatar nobility, the *mirza* class, by giving it the same rights as those afforded Russian *dvoriane*. As a consequence,<sup>16</sup> however, and also in the face of Russian administrative controls as well as of the growing colonization of the peninsula by Slavs, the Tatar way of life inevitably, and quite rapidly, began to erode.

It has been noted on more than one occasion that in the *Crimean Sonnets* this historical, sociopolitically conditioned Crimea is effectively non-existent (Weintraub 103, Kamionka-Straszakowa 154). Mickiewicz’s Crimea is constituted almost exclusively by nature or historical ruins or both (Kubacki 141). This is no less true of “Bakczysaraj” and the *Alušta* diptych (11–12), whose, so to speak, contemporary urban concreteness is signaled only by the sonnets’ respective titles; and even the ostensible realities of “Bakczysaraj w nocy” [Bahçesaray at night], with its opening lines,

Rozchodzą się z dżamidów pobożni mieszkańce,  
Odgłos izanu w cichym gubi się wieczorze [ . . . ] (7:1–2)<sup>17</sup>

(Pious inhabitants disperse from the *jāmi*’s,  
The echo of the *izan* fades into the evening [ . . . ])

themselves dissolve into an impressionistic depiction of a generic oriental night (Makowski 73–75). In fact, as a native Crimean human presence these “pious inhabitants” are near exceptions in the cycle.<sup>18</sup> But it is these exceptions—most prominently, of course, the figure of the *Mirza*—that complicate the seemingly obvious.

Although his title and presence in the sonnets are justified by their cultural topography, the *Mirza*’s ontological status is nonetheless difficult to pin down. If, on the one hand, some would treat him as an objectified “epic” entity, a pious Muslim “surpassing the Pilgrim in knowledge of the world that [the two] are exploring, a master and teacher” (Opacki 36)<sup>19</sup>, for others he is a lyrical abstraction, “simply the poet’s double in a turban” “with no personality of his own” (Weintraub 103, Piwińska 35–36). But even Izabela Kalinowska-Blackwood’s somewhat more sophisticated characterization of the *Mirza* as “a Bakhtinian other” (436) sidesteps the issue of his essentially discursive nature.

What I mean by this may perhaps be more easily grasped when one compares Mickiewicz’s *Mirza* with his counterpart in *Cafar Topçi-Başa*’s

rendition of “Widok gór ze stepów Kozłowa” [A view of the mountains from the steppes of Kozlov] into Persian.<sup>20</sup> In the Georgian professor’s *ghazal* version of the sonnet, the narrator actually objectifies the figure of the Mirza, who is “described” as the former’s “traveling companion and guide from among Crimean magnates [. . .], a noble *emirzade* and a gracious youth” (Landa 54).<sup>21</sup> By linking him explicitly to a concrete place, by situating him, however schematically, within a web of local sociopolitical institutions (and elite ones, to boot) and ascribing to him the outlines of a personality, the translator imbues the figure with at least the intimations of both history and individuality.

The merits of Topçi-Başa’s aesthetic decisions notwithstanding, they nonetheless throw into relief the status of Mickiewicz’s putatively Tatar noble. Never objectively described by the narrator of the cycle, never even glossed in the notes, the Mirza reveals himself to the reader in, it is made to appear, his own words. Indeed, it is precisely words, exotic words, exotic figures of speech, allusions to exotic myths, places, and beliefs, their very exoticism — but also their literariness — underscored by ostensibly scholarly notes,<sup>22</sup> that constitute the figure of the Mirza and define him as oriental (Karlinsky 116–17). Yet paradoxically, these very same words also effectively strip him of history, ethnicity, individuality, indeed, of an authentic voice. As a discursive node of orientalist figures and images, the Mirza is neither specifically Tatar nor, for that matter, specifically Turkish or Persian or Arabic. He is, rather, something of an occidental ventriloquist’s oriental dummy, wearing a “turban” and mouthing a stylized, syncretic language inspired by, and on a few occasions directly borrowed from, such classics of the Western orientalist canon as Hammer’s *Geschichte der schönen Redekünste Persiens*, de Sacy’s *Chrestomathie arabe*, and Goethe’s own poetic representation of the Orient, the *West-östlicher Divan* (Bruchnalski 453–70, Kubacki 72–111, 173–263, Kwaśny).<sup>23</sup>

Mickiewicz in fact bares his device not so much even in “Widok gór,” where in their dialogue the Polish Pilgrim in effect mimics the Mirza’s speech —

*Pielgrzym*

[. . .]

Na szczycie jaka łuna! pożar Carogrodu  
Czy Allah, gdy noc chylał rozciągnęta bury,  
Dla światów żeglujących po morzu natury  
Tę latarnię zawiesił wśród niebios obwođu?

*Mirza*

Tam? — Byłem; zima siedzi, tam dzioby potoków  
I gardła rzek widziałem pijące z jój gniazda.  
Tchnąłem, z ust mych śnieg leciał [. . .]. (5:5–11)



*(The Pilgrim:*

[. . .]  
 On the peak, what a glow! Constantinople ablaze!  
 Did Allah, when the night drew apart its dun gabardine  
 For the worlds sailing on the ocean of nature,  
 Light that lamp 'midst heaven's circumference?

*The Mirza:*

There? — I was there; there winter sits, there I saw the beaks  
 Of torrents and the throats of rivers drinking from its nest.  
 I took a breath, snow flew from my mouth [. . .])

—but rather in such poems as “Bakczysaraj w nocy” and “Ałusztą w dzień” [Aluşta in daytime]. There the narrator himself, without now the example or direct mediation of his oriental “other,” speaks in the same eclectic “eastern” style as the Mirza:

Już góra z piersi mgliste otrząsa chylaty,  
 Rannym szumi namazem niwa złotokłosa,  
 Kłania się las i sypie z majowego włosa,  
 Jak z różańca kalifów, rubin i granaty. (11:1–4)<sup>24</sup>

(Already the mountain shakes off from its breast the misty gabardines,  
 The golden-eared meadow buzzes with the morning namaz,  
 The forest bows down and pours from its green hair  
 Rubies and carbuncles, as if from the worry-beads of caliphs.)

Or rather, to be more precise, the other way around. For despite the claim of Sękowski, Mickiewicz's “master” in things oriental, that “hyperbole is as inherent and necessary an embellishment of the eastern style as strength and precision of expression, simile, antithesis, etc. is among us” (Makowski 103), it is this very hyperbolism that Topçi-Başa deliberately attenuates in his Persian *ghazal*, to say nothing of eliminating most of the Polish romantic poet's more extravagant exoticisms (Landa 303–4):

e farq nur-e derakhshān cho barq andar ābr /  
 forogh-e partowash hardam be charkh-e bāla bud  
 to guyi nayreyeh harq-e sur-e islambul /  
 ze qolehye falakinash hamy howeydā bud  
 cho bazm-e zulmat-e shab ra ghaẓa muratab sākht /  
 magar cheragh-e mu'alaq ze taq-e myna bud [. . .]

*Mirza:*

[. . .]  
 keh ruzy shodam be ruz ānjā /  
 na ābr bud namayan na ruye ghabrā bud  
 ze har taraf hameh seylāb kuh kuh be muj /  
 ravān cho ruh-e ravān bar ravān-e sahrā bud  
 chonankeh didamash an manzar mahal-e [shekare] /  
 maqam-e barf o yakh o jaygāh-e sarmā bud  
 be vaqt-e dam zadanam barf az dahan myrikht /  
 ze shedat-e asar-e zamharyr kanjā bud (Landa 55)

(On the peak there's a blazing light, like lightning in the clouds,  
 the light of its radiance at every instant high toward the heavenly wheel.  
 You'd think the light from the burning fortress of Istanbul  
 Was ever visible from its heavenly peak.  
 As fate prepared the feast of night's somberness,  
 It was like a hanging lamp from the firmament's ceiling.

*The Mirza:*

[. . .]  
 "I once went there during the day.  
 Neither the clouds nor the visage of the earth were visible.  
 From everywhere there was a flood, mountain upon mountain of waves,  
 Rolling like flowing souls upon the soul of the field.  
 As I saw it, that site was the abode of the bird of prey,  
 A way station of snow, ice, and the locus of cold.  
 When I took a breath, snow fell out of my mouth  
 From the intensity of the cold there.)

It is hence difficult to agree with those who would see in Mickiewicz's traveler a "child-like" searcher, guided in his quest for self-knowledge by his wise Tatar companion (Opacki 36–38); or, all the more so, someone who eschews "a priori erudition" for the sake of experiencing the real world directly (Kamionka-Straszakowa 154). Quite the contrary, the poet, and, no less saliently, his traveling Polish *porte-parole*, comes already armed with a second-hand knowledge of the Orient, with anthologies of oriental poetry, with the works of Goethe, Byron, Moore, and Pushkin, with Sękowski's *Collectanea* and Muraviev-Apostol's travelogue of the Crimea, that allow him, ultimately, to constitute and literally speak for a Tatar noble without really knowing his views on god, nature, marriage or, for that matter, the modes for expressing them.<sup>25</sup> As an ontological entity, the Mirza, like the Bahçesaray night, is thus but a Westerner's poetic sign for the Islamic East (Makowski 73–75, Pogodin 381–83), its meaning determined by Mickiewicz's willingness and ability to bestow it from a ready stock of occidental representations of the Orient. Viazemsky seems to have instinctively grasped this when to those, his "northwestern readers" who might object to the "vivid oriental coloration" of the sonnets he responds reassuringly that "the *most* oriental similes and turns of phrase *were put* into the Mirza's mouth *by the poet*" (332; my italics).

Perhaps it is not coincidental, then, that these "most oriental" of images are invariably associated in the cycle with mountains.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, with the exception of "Mogity haremu" [The graves of the harem] (about which below), the Mirza's environment is circumscribed by heights and precipices: Czatyrdah (Çaterdah), Czufut-Kale (Çufut Kale), Kikineis. In speaking for the Tatar noble, in giving him voice, Mickiewicz by this very same token quite literally raises him up, and effectively enlightens him. For there, "between the earth and heaven" (13:12), where "above [. . .] the

turban there was only a star" (5:14) and "God speaks to nature" (13:14), it is given this native of the Crimea to recognize and share in that most exquisite of romantic experiences (and to some, the empirical crux of Mickiewicz's Crimean journey [Kubacki 44–72, Kamionka-Straszakowa 148–51, Kalinowska-Blackwood 430–31]), the delightful terror evoked by . . . *his own* Crimean mountains. And he does so thanks precisely to his occidental alter ego. In "Droga nad przepaścią w Czufut-Kale" ("The road along the precipice of Çufut Kale") the Pilgrim responds to the Mirza's hyperbolized cautions to refrain from looking into the precipice by proclaiming with awe-struck resolve, "Mirzo, a ja spojrzatem!" ("But, Mirza, I looked!" (15:12). However, the suggestion that this experience of the sublime articulates the sensibilities of "a nineteenth-century European intellectual" and as such "goes against the laws of the Mirza's religion, as well as against the dictates of reason" (Kalinowska-Blackwood 434) constitutes only half the story. For in the first line of the very next sonnet, "Góra Kikineis" ("Mount Kikineis"), in what is, in effect, a reversal of roles, the Mirza appears to have in fact already internalized the "lesson" in sensibility proffered by his aesthetically "sophisticated" Western traveling companion. Now he himself is able to direct the latter, "Spójrzyj w przepaść" ("Look into the precipice") (16:1).

But the Tatar noble's enlightenment on the heights of a romantically sublimated Crimea at the hands of the Pilgrim also demands that he leave behind—below—him the other, "thankless" (17:2) Crimea, a land whose autochthonous culture, like that of much of the Orient in Western eyes, is marked by ruin, decay, and death:

Jeszcze wielka, już pusta Girajów dziedzina!  
 Zmiotane czołem baszów ganki i przedsienia,  
 Sofy, trony potęgi, miłości schronienia,  
 Przeskakuje sarańcza, obwija gadzina.  
 Skroś okien różnofarbnych powoju roślin,  
 Wdzierając się na głuche ściany i sklepienia,  
 Zajmuje dzieło ludzi w imię przyrodzenia,  
 I pisze Balsazara głoskami "RUINA." (6:1–8)

(Still great, already empty realm of the Girays!  
 The locust hops over, the reptile encircles  
 The porches and vestibules worn smooth by the foreheads of pashas,  
 The sofas, the thrones of power, the shelters of love.  
 Through the multicolored windows the convolvulus,  
 Climbing the mute walls and vaulted ceilings,  
 Occupies the work of men in the name of nature  
 And with the letters of Belteshazzar writes "RUIN.")

This is, ultimately, a culture that is no longer viable and quite literally incapable of reproducing. As the Mirza observes in "Mogity haremu"

about the erstwhile source of Crimean Tatar fecundity, the women who populated the khan's harem,

Skryta je niepamięci i czasu zastona,  
Nad nimi turban zimny błyszczący wśród orgodu,  
Jak buńczuk wojska cieniów [. . .]. (9:5–7)

(The shroud of forgetfulness and time has covered them,  
Above them, amidst the garden, shines a cold turban,  
Like the horse-mane mace of the army of shadows [. . .])

What remains, and what, together with his Polish companion, the Mirza leaves behind for the enlightened sublimeness of the Crimean heights, is either impersonal, destructive nature or “castles shattered into disordered rubble” (17:26). And amidst “the ruins of the fort in Balaklava,” whose “Greek” and “Italian” inhabitants once heroically protected “thankless Crimea” from “the Mongols,” one encounters now only “reptiles [. . .] or man baser than reptiles” (17:4). Aside from the orientalistically abstract “pious inhabitants” of Alušta and the man “in a turban” fashioned by and for the Polish Pilgrim, that churl amidst the ruins constitutes the only other contemporary native human, or, rather, less than human, presence in Mickiewicz's Orient.

Summing up his discussion of the *Crimean Sonnets*, Stanisław Windakiewicz observes that their “theme [. . .] is not strictly Polish, but rather Russian. And it is for this reason that they were so popular in Moscow and that so many translations appeared there” (99). There is more to this observation than the Polish critic would have liked to admit. For readers in Moscow and St. Petersburg, increasingly concerned by Muslim resistance to the empire's expansion in the Caucasus, Mickiewicz's sonnets furnished a reassuring reminder that Russia had in fact already notched a triumph over Islam—in a land whose khans, as Muraviev-Apostol put it three years earlier in his *Journey through Tauris*, “not so long ago [. . .] demanded tribute from Russians” but which “is at last under the boot of Russia,” the “silent dust” of its once terrible rulers resting “behind a [cemetery] fence” (123). And in a sense, the Polish poet's representation of the Crimea too serves to safely ensconce the world of the Islamic peninsula, but behind a fence, as it were, of form. Tightly contained within the unyielding confines of the sonnet, its Muslim inhabitants aesthetically packaged by someone *from* the Slavic Occident *for* the Slavic Occident, Mickiewicz's Orient, or rather, as he so tellingly calls it in an 1827 letter to Lelewel, his “Orient in miniature” (*Dz.* 14:324)<sup>27</sup>, could be viewed as a place whose Islamic otherness was exotic but not incomprehensible, alien but, unlike the “Tatar” auls of Chechnya and Daghestan, no longer threatening. In-

deed, as his Tatar noble leaves behind him the decaying remains of an effete culture and rises up out of it in the company of a Slav who imbues him and his world with new meanings, Mickiewicz is enacting nothing less than the desiderata of the empire's "civilizational" mission for its Muslim colonials.

With much of their aesthetic appeal lost in translation, it can be argued that it was, rather, this capacity on Mickiewicz's part to replicate in the *Crimean Sonnets* the imperial discourse about Russia's relationship with its Muslim world that created an implicit bond between the young Polish poet and his Russian readers. Put differently, and somewhat bluntly, Mickiewicz's representation of the colonized Oriental in a way assured the Polish exile of his own identity — *vis-à-vis* the empire, but also, consequently, *vis-à-vis* his fellow Poles.

It cannot be stressed often enough that Mickiewicz's confidence in himself as a great poet was the work of Russians, who, as Alina Witkowska puts it, "discovered Mickiewicz for himself" (59). The extent to which this did occur was, as Viazemsky predicted, in part a consequence of the poet's decision to publish the *Crimean Sonnets* in Moscow. Despite some not overly convincing equivocating,<sup>28</sup> Mickiewicz understood only too well that it was in the Russian imperial centers, whose cultural vitality and sophistication he repeatedly compared favorably to the "calcification" and "backwardness" of Poland's cultural capital,<sup>29</sup> that his artistically innovative work could be most fully appreciated. Remarking that in contrast to the erotic sonnets "the Crimean ones will appeal more to foreigners," he goes on to note with some pride in his 14[/26] April 1827 letter to Antoni Edward Odyniec that "here in Moscow the well-known prince Viazemsky has translated them into Russian [. . .] together with a very flattering review," while "old Dmitriev did me the honor of translating one of the sonnets himself" (*Dz.* 14:338). As Koźmian tacitly admitted in his condescending dismissal of this type of news (Billip 341), it was the recognition extended to Mickiewicz's oriental cycle precisely by the imperial cultural elite that effectively guaranteed his identity as not so much even a Polish poet, but, as Viazemsky suggests in his review of *Sonnets*, a Slavic, or rather, imperial, poet *tout court*. And Viazemsky also hints at the premise for this recognition when he expresses the hope that Mickiewicz's poetic evocation of the Crimea will constitute the first step in mitigating the "family misunderstanding" between "brother" Slavs. For by projecting himself and his porte-parole as instruments of colonial enlightenment, indeed, by simply choosing to describe in Polish verse this new jewel in the Russian crown, Mickiewicz, like his Polish Orientalist contemporaries at Russian universities and in the service of the government, in effect implicates himself too, a Polish poet, in the Russian imperial enterprise.

Viewed in this light, Jan Czczot's censure of his fellow exile for ostensi-

bly betraying his fatherland by, as Mickiewicz ironically puts it in his response to Czeczot, “eating the tref steak of the Moabites” (*Dz.* 14:315), acquires additional meaning, particularly since it is in this same response that the poet equivocates about his reasons for printing *Sonnets* in Moscow. Although Czeczot’s accusations are not extant, one must assume that the publication of the *Crimean Sonnets* was among the “sins” he imputed to his Vilnius friend. To make things appear even more egregious, Mickiewicz had gone so far as to dedicate the cycle to his “Crimean traveling companions,” who included General Jan de Witt, the man in charge of ferreting out conspiracies in Russia’s south on the eve of the Decembrist uprising, and his right-hand man, the agent Aleksandr Boshniak. And while the young political exile had good reasons of his own for dedicating his work to such unsavory characters,<sup>30</sup> it was nonetheless thanks to de Witt (as well as their lover Karolina Sobańska) that Mickiewicz was both protected and spoiled during his sojourn in the south (*Czapska* 77–78).

But then in his own defense, Mickiewicz writes to Czeczot that “when hungry, [he] is ready even [to eat] meat from the altar of Dagon and Baal — and will nonetheless be as [he’s] been, a good Christian.” In order to underscore his point, in the next breath he discloses to his censorious friend that he is “reading Schiller’s *Fiesco* and Machiavelli’s *History*” (*Dz.* 14:315–16), two of the most important ideological sources for *Konrad Wallenrod*, the poem about patriotic treason and self-sacrifice that Mickiewicz was writing at this time. In other words, the anxiety informing Viazemsky’s review of the *Crimean Sonnets* was to a large extent justified. It may even have been elicited by the ominously cryptic closing tercet of “Bakczysaraj,” whose palace once hosted the victorious Aleksandr Suvorov and the triumphalist Catherine II (*Bakhchisarai* 7) but whose fountain now “calls out through” the ruins:

“Gdzież jesteś o miłości, potęgi i chwały!  
Wy macie trwać na wieki, źródło szybko płynie,  
O hańbo! wyście przeszły, a źródło zostało.” (6:11–14)

(“Where are you, o love, power, and glory!  
Your are meant to last for ages, the fountain-head flows,  
O shame! You have run your course, but the fountain-head has remained.”)

Indeed, Viazemsky’s reading of the *Crimean Sonnets* was, as Mickiewicz’s career was to prove, ultimately based on a misunderstanding. While the Polish poet’s representation of the Crimea may have resonated with the expectations of Russian readers for its Muslim South, the conflict between Poles and Russians remained, on a representational level, qualitatively distinct. It is precisely to this asymmetric configuration that Mickiewicz will in fact return some fourteen years later when in his lecture of 29 December

1840 at the Collège de France he describes the struggle of medieval Slavs against the onslaught of Eastern peoples:

The Slavic peoples divided among themselves the great mission of defending Christendom. Rus struggled with the Mongols, Poland with the Turks; and yet, amidst this simultaneous resistance no contact was made between the Russians and Poles. (*Dz.* 8:31)

For all of its imperial intimations, Mickiewicz's literary appropriation of the Orient remains in this sense but a romantic's conventional excursion into the exotic, a step—perhaps a necessary one—on a poetic journey with a radically unconventional trajectory.

## NOTES

- 1 The texts of the polemic triggered by the publication of the *Crimean Sonnets* are collected in Billip 69ff.
- 2 The references are to Mickiewicz's sonnet "Czatyrdah" from the Crimean cycle and the earlier, 1824 poem "Renegat" (first published in 1826). I leave aside for another occasion the question of, as Metternich might have put it, Koźmian's own status as an "Asian".
- 3 "Yesterday Odyniec predicted [ . . . ] that Mickiewicz's fame is spreading from the Atlantic Ocean all the way beyond the Araxes, since they're translating his *Sonnets*: Viazemsky in Moscow; some famous littérateur and senator in Moscow; and in London two journalists learned Polish in order to impart to their countrymen the fruits of this great poet, whom an English periodical is already calling the premier Polish genius and writer" (Billip 341).
- 4 See Kalinowska-Blackwood 428, 439. Although the present article was originally delivered as a talk before the publication of Kalinowska-Blackwood's article, it offers a (polemically) different reading of the *Sonnets* through the same prism of Said's notion of orientalism.
- 5 In fact, the founders of Orientalist studies at the universities of Moscow, Dorpat, and St. Petersburg were all students of de Sacy (*Istoria* 98, 100, 144–45).
- 6 All references to the text of *Sonety krymskie* are from Mickiewicz, *Dzieła wszystkie* (= *DzW*), 29. All remaining references to Mickiewicz are to Mickiewicz, *Dzieła* (= *Dz.*)
- 7 See, for instance, Mickiewicz's letter to his erstwhile schoolmate and student of the Orient Józef Kowalewski from the end of December 1826, in which he writes: "Write to me, Chodża Effendi, how you feel about my Eastern *Sonnets*. You should know that I'm setting out in an orientalist direction, I'm reading a history of Persian literature [i.e., Hammer's] and have even translated from the Persian six lines from Mirchond's [i.e., Mir Khvand's] history. NB from the original" (*Dz.* 14:309). See also his letters to Lelewel, 7/19 January 1927, and again to Kowalewski, 9/21 June 1827 (*ibid.* 324–25, 341). It should be noted here too that during his exile in Russia Mickiewicz reworked two qasidahs ("Szanfary," based on de Sacy's *Chrestomathie* as well as on a literal translation by the Russo-Polish orientalist Józef Sękowski; and "Almotenabby," based on Lagrange's *Anthologie arabe*) and then produced his own original "qasidah," "Farys." See Kleiner 134–41, Segel.

Later in life, however, Mickiewicz's enthusiasm for oriental poetics cooled considerably. Indeed, the observations he makes on the "literatures of Asia" in his Lausanne lectures on classical literature (1839–1840) cast his youthful fascination in a very different light that is not altogether flattering to the poet-professor. In response to what from

today's perspective may be described as calls for cultural relativism — that oriental literatures deserve just as much attention as those of Europe — Mickiewicz assumes a decidedly conservative (Hegelian) stance, arguing that in contrast to Latin literature, “Asian literatures are only branches of that great tree that have reverted to a state of savagery [. . .] they are not necessarily indispensable for a man with general interests, for a man who practices *studium humanitatis*. [. . .] Indian epics and dramas [. . .] do not even come close to bringing together all the virtues that shine through in Homer and Vergil. It is difficult to read Ferdowski's *Shah-Nama* from beginning to end [. . .]. From the assertions of orientalists we know also that in Asian literatures one can discern various modes and genres, but it is impossible to detect there consecutive periods of development, the vital proliferation of which is an attribute of European literatures. [. . .] Once [Asian] writing reached a certain degree of maturity, it stagnated and languished in sterility and has every mark of an abnormal creature: a mongrel incapable of replicating itself” (*Dz.* 7:184–87).

- 8 On the *Crimean Sonnets* and Sękowski, see Zajączkowski, Kwaśny. On Mickiewicz and Muraviev-Apostol, see Pogodin 364–98, Kubacki 223–28. On the image of the Crimea in Mickiewicz and Pushkin, a topic that was examined as early as 1855 by the Polish critic Julian Klaczko, see, among others, Lednicki 243–52, Karlinsky 108–20, Cadot, Wesling.
- 9 On the reception of the *Crimean Sonnets* in Russia, see Struve 107–8, 124–26, Landa 283–300.
- 10 A relatively accurate translation of these opening paragraphs as well as a summary of the remainder of Viazemsky's foreword appeared in *Gazeta Polska* in 1827 (Billip 126–27).
- 11 This motivates even Viazemsky's method of translation, through which, he claims, “we wanted to demonstrate the similarity between the Polish and Russian languages and often not only translated word for word, but would use a Polish word itself when we found it in the Russian language, with some mutations, to be sure, but still with its native properties” (Viazemskii 334).
- 12 Viazemsky translated only two sonnets from the “erotic” cycle and practically ignores it in his foreword.
- 13 In his commentary to his 1976 Russian edition of *Sonnets*, Landa insists, to some extent rightly, that Viazemsky's enthusiastic discussion of the *Crimean Sonnets* as an articulation of Byronism constitutes a subversive challenge to the stifling atmosphere of Nicholas I's post-Decembrist Russia (283–95). See also Wyrzens, 68–69. At the same time, it should also be noted that Viazemsky was the author of a foreword to *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, in which, as Katya Hokanson argues, he “indirectly asserts” that Pushkin's Crimean poem is an example of the notion of romantic “*narodnost*” (124). Moreover, it was largely thanks to Pushkin's Crimean poem that the conceptual link between Poland and the Orient, be it Crimean or Caucasian, became something of a commonplace in Russian literature (Lotman 18–19, see Dziuba 19).
- 14 For the present purposes I draw my historical information on the first fifty years of Russian administration in the Crimea primarily from Fisher (68–96).
- 15 Mickiewicz acknowledges his Russian predecessor in a note to Sonnet VIII, “Grób Potockiej” [Potocka's grave] (*DzW*, 28).
- 16 “The results of this incorporation of the *mirza* stratum into the Russian *dvoriane* [. . .] brought about a Russification of those *mirzas* themselves. To work on an equal footing with their Russian counterparts, the *mirzas* found it necessary to adopt the Russians' habits, language, and ways of conducting business” (Fisher 76).
- 17 All citations from *Sonety krymskie* refer to sonnet number followed by line number(s) in *DzW*, 17–29.
- 18 I do not include here the sailors and (occidental) passengers from the sea triptych (2–4), who, in any case, may themselves be characterized as “abstract figures” (Kamionka-Straszakowa 154).



- 19 Pogodin goes so far as to claim that Mickiewicz may have taken this figure from an actual Tatar "*murza*" who appears in Muraviev-Apostol's travelogue (366n.).
- 20 Mickiewicz at first planned to include Topçi-Başa's paraphrase in his edition of *Sonnets* but because of printing considerations was able to append it only to some copies. In his foreword to the paraphrase Topçi-Başa, an adjunct professor of Persian from Georgia at St. Petersburg University, relates that he first met Mickiewicz in St. Petersburg through Sękowski; after the poet returned from the Crimea, he asked Topçi-Başa to translate the sonnet into Persian, which the latter did, as he says, out of friendship for Mickiewicz and out of a desire on the part of other friends and scholars to see European poetry translated into Persian (Landa 53). On the figure of Topçi-Başa, who translated the sonnet with the help of his Polish student Aleksander Chodźko, a schoolmate of Mickiewicz, see W. Mickiewicz 252–53, Landa 303, *Istoriia* 145–49, Weryho. It was most probably this same Chodźko who, in turn, translated Topçi-Başa's paraphrase into Polish for *Dziennik Warszawski* (Billip 213–15). In a note Chodźko describes Topçi-Başa as "one of the leading poets of his land" (*ibid.* 213).
- 21 I am grateful to my UCLA colleagues Hossein Ziai and particularly Firoozeh Papan-Matin for translations and help with the Persian original. For a somewhat different rendition into English, see Weryho 200.
- 22 On the connection between such annotations and romantic orientalist writing, above all that of Byron, where the former serve "as a kind of guide and interpreter" to an exotic world unfamiliar to the European reader, see Greenleaf 117–20.
- 23 Compare, for instance, the image in line 6 from "Widok gór": "gdy noc chylat rozciągnęła bury" with similar images in Hammer's *Geschichte* ("als die Nacht ihr schwarzes Zelt schon ausgespannt"; "der Himmel trägt eine blaue Kutte wie die Sofis"); or line 14, "Aż tam gdzie mój turban była tylko gwiazda," with "Über meiner Mütze nur die Sterne," from Goethe's *Divan* (Bruchnalski 457).
- 24 As Bruchnalski (464) notes, these lines too have their counterparts in Hammer's *Geschichte*: "Als nun der Morgen Licht verstreut / Und feurigen Rubinenstaub, / Als er aufschloss den Schatz der Welt, / Den Berg mit gold'nen /Stoff bekleidet"; "Als der Tag mit krystallner Hand, [. . .] von dem Saume des grünen Himmelsgewölbes [. . .] Korallen und Perlen austrete [. . .]."
- 25 See Pogodin, who remarks in connection with "Mogity haremu" [The graves of the harem] that the Mirza, the ostensible narrator of the sonnet, articulates "feelings that came naturally to people from a different culture [i.e., Mickiewicz's own] and with different views on marriage [. . .]" (384). According to Mikołaj Malinowski (48), Sękowski himself complained that Mickiewicz "made a bad mistake when he wanted to use eastern metaphors, expressions, etc. in his poems, not knowing at all either Asian languages or the literatures of these peoples." In a 7[[19] January 1827 letter to Lelewel, Mickiewicz in fact confesses, "When I was in Petersburg, I got a thing for eastern languages; but just as I began to learn the basics, I was forced to get back on the sleigh, having gotten as much out of Szpitznagel's lessons as King Wyzimir from Doświadczyński's primer" (*Dz.* 14:323).
- 26 On the connection of Russia's oriental mountains as loci for the sublime with imperial representations of the Orient, see Layton 38–53, Ram 24–38.
- 27 The entire passage from which this characterization is drawn deserves citing here: "But I saw the Crimea! I lasted out a mighty storm at sea and was one of the few unaffected by sea-sickness who maintained enough strength and lucidity to get a good look at this interesting phenomenon. I traversed the clouds on Czatyrdah (supposedly ancient Trebizond). I slept on the sofas of the Girays and played chess in a laurel coppice with the steward of the departed khan. I saw the Orient in miniature" (*Dz.* 14:323–24).
- 28 In his letter to Jan Czeźcot and Tomasz Zan, 5[[17] January 1827, Mickiewicz writes: "I printed [*Sonnets*] in Moscow, because I don't have anyone to send them to in Vilnius.

- [. . .] Communications with Warsaw are difficult and full of complications" (*Dz.* 14: 318–19).
- 29 See, for instance, his letter to Antoni Edward Odyniec, [beginning of November] 1827: "Where but in Warsaw do they translate Legouv  and Delille and, what's worse, Millevoye, etc.? Russians nod their heads in pity and amazement. We're a whole century behind in literature! Here [i.e., Moscow] every new poem by Goethe elicits general enthusiasm, is immediately translated and critiqued. Every novel of Walter Scott is in circulation, every new work of philosophy is already in the bookstore; and among us! The kindly Dmochowski considers Ko zmi n's *Georgics* to be the ideal of Polish poetry" (*Dz.* 14:355). Earlier on, he informs Odyniec of his desire to publish *Konrad Wallenrod* in Moscow as well, adding, "From now on [. . .] in my literary undertakings Warsaw will be a point of secondary importance" (353–54).
- 30 Mickiewicz was well aware of Witt's and Boshniak's activities (see his own comments on this matter in the 7 June 1842 Parisian lecture [*Dz.* 9:362–63]), and like his loyalist declaration in the foreword to *Konrad Wallenrod* his dedication to the *Crimean Sonnets* must be viewed as a prophylactic measure, particularly in the immediate wake of the suppression of the Decembrists (Kleiner 477–78, Czapska 80–81).

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