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Adam Mickiewicz: The Life of a Romantic by Roman Koropeckyj

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known (in the west at least) forms of artistic activity as well as a number of fresh methodological approaches that warrant further exploration.

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***Adam Mickiewicz: The Life of a Romantic.*** By Roman Koropeckyj. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008. xvii, 560 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. \$45.00, hard bound.

This 500-page biography of the most important Polish nineteenth-century poet and, still today, a towering figure in Polish culture, is an extension of Roman Koropeckyj's earlier critical study *The Poetics of Revitalization: Adam Mickiewicz between "Forefathers' Eve, Part 3" and "Pan Tadeusz"* (2001). Like the earlier book, which won two distinguished awards, this new work is an outstanding contribution to Mickiewicz scholarship, despite its very different nature. Although this work provides biographical and philosophical background and information about Mickiewicz's writings, its focus is the poet's rich, tumultuous, often rewarding, but even more often difficult and tragic life. Divided into thirteen chapters, it adheres for obvious reasons to strict chronology, but it also provides psychological insights and discreet evaluations. Page by page and year by year, Koropeckyj builds up a portrait of a poet that comes to life under our very eyes. The meticulous account of important facts and events is fleshed out with colorful anecdotes, including Mickiewicz's abundant erotic conquests and adventures. The Mickiewicz that emerges in Koropeckyj's narrative is neither a monumental, marble-like, figure, as in some biographies of the poet penned by his compatriots, nor a picturesque and weightless literary creation, but a man of flesh and blood, eminently human, combining greatness of vision and an exceptional poetic gift with foibles and failures of judgment, a man torn between sensuality and spirituality, pride and humility, reason and affect, ideology and faith, word and deed.

Throughout the book, Mickiewicz's life and personality are presented in terms of the opposition of "reason and affect," an opposition verbalized by the poet himself in his early poem-manifesto "Romanticism." It is in light of this opposition, which doubles later on in the poet's life as the opposition of "ideology and faith," that Koropeckyj discusses Mickiewicz's "intuitive politics" and "paranoid" messianism, as well as his lectures in the Collège de France, in which scholarship "fused with the voice of prophecy" (275). Deeply engaged, but free of a tendency to mythologize, Koropeckyj maintains a salutary distance toward his subject. He does not hesitate to qualify some of the poet's pronouncements as "fictionalizations," and when appropriate, he speaks of his subject with irony, wit, and humor: "Puttkamer's horse to excite his imagination, Kowalska's body to comfort him, his friends' solicitude to baby him and gossip: Mickiewicz was ultimately happiest when worlds were spinning around his sun, and that sun was producing flames" (43).

One of the most valuable and original aspects of the book is its presentation of a vast and multifarious historical, political, social, and cultural panorama of nineteenth-century Europe, from the provincial town of Vilnius in Lithuania where Mickiewicz spent the best part of his youth to such great metropolises as St. Petersburg, Rome, and Paris where the poet spent most of his adult life as an exile. The vivid descriptions of urban streets and architecture as well as the evocative topography of natural landscapes are accompanied by concise but precise information about political regimes as well as philosophical and literary trends, cultural ambiance, and the social scene. Just like the principal actor, the stage on which he moves acquires a palpable reality and teems with real people. As Mickiewicz's life moved from one place to another across most of Europe, Koropeckyj's self-imposed task of bringing these places to life required prodigious research, and no less prodigious imagination.

"It is difficult to separate the facts from spin" (391). Although this admission comes late in the book, it reflects well the daunting task that the author set for himself when embarking on writing what is arguably the best, most meticulously researched, and scru-

pulously honest biography of the Polish poet. As Koropecykj notes, every ideological formation over the last 150 years has appropriated the poet for its own ends and purposes. Koropecykj's guiding principle was to get at truth, to separate facts from "legends, embellishments and prejudice" (391). This motivation explains his methodology, the almost exclusive reliance on an impressive array of primary sources: diaries, memoirs, journals, official documents, and, above all, voluminous correspondence. Yet the huge scholarly apparatus, evident in copious footnotes, never burdens or interferes with the swift and seemingly effortless flow of the narrative. Written with a flare for drama in a lively, almost breezy, style, this painstakingly researched, serious, and detailed journey through the life of the great Polish Romantic poet does not flaunt its own scholarship. A readable and entertaining literary biography is a privilege of creative writers and journalists more often than academicians; by gracefully combining the requirements of scholarship with a gift for telling a story, Koropecykj is an admirable exception to the rule.

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***Which Socialism, Whose Détente? West European Communism and the Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968.*** By Maude Bracke. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008. 414 pp. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Tables. \$47.95, paper.

The immense scholarly literature on west European communism—especially on the two largest and most influential parties, the Italian Communist Party (Partito comunista italiano, or PCI) and the French Communist Party (Parti communiste français, or PCF)—has stressed that the Prague Spring (an eight-month period of wide-ranging liberalization in Czechoslovakia in 1968) and the August 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had far-reaching effects on the PCI and PCF, but no previous study has systematically documented this phenomenon. Maude Bracke has drawn extensively on formerly inaccessible materials from the PCI, PCF, and former East German archives for her book. The result is an interesting, valuable study that makes an important contribution to the scholarship on these two parties.

Bracke structures her book in three main parts, each consisting of two to three chapters. In her introductory chapter she offers a brief review of the literature on the PCI and PCF and an overview of the book's themes. She then provides, in part 1, a lucid survey of the evolution of the PCI and PCF and their relations with the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries from 1956 to 1967. Bracke enriches this capsule history with intriguing material from PCI and PCF archival documents as well as declassified items from the former East Germany. She makes a convincing case that the parties' changing complexion during this period goes a long way toward explaining why they reacted as they did to the Prague Spring, the Soviet-led invasion, and its aftermath.

Part 2, focusing on the two parties' reactions to the Prague Spring, the invasion, and the Soviet Union's initial efforts to restore greater control over the world communist movement is the heart of the book. Bracke adroitly shows how the two parties' concerns about their domestic standing interacted with their conceptions of détente and European security as the Prague Spring unfolded. A complex mix of domestic pressures in 1968, including the rise of extreme leftists and Maoists, often pushed the PCF and PCI to take stances toward both Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union that they might otherwise have avoided. PCI leaders viewed the Prague Spring favorably for several months, seeing it as an example of the potential for "democratic socialism." Only when they came to fear that the Czechoslovak Communist Party might lose control of the reform process and that a continuation of the Prague Spring would provoke Soviet military action did they believe that the changes were moving in a negative direction. In the PCF a few officials looked positively upon the Prague Spring, but the party as a whole (including most of the leaders) was distinctly unenthusiastic about the sweeping reforms in Czechoslovakia. But PCF leaders did not share Moscow's view that "counterrevolution" was under way in Czechoslovakia, and they repeatedly emphasized the need to deal with the situation peacefully.