

DARIUSZ CHEMEPEREK

## THE BAROQUE FANTASTIC AND ITS MORAL FUNCTION IN *EMBLEMATA NIEKTÓRE* (1623) BY JÓZEF DOMANIEWSKI

Józef Domaniewski who lived at the turn of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, does not belong to the circle of the outstanding and famous poets of Polish Baroque literature. His literary heritage is not large in quantity. As an active member of the Arian community (also called Socinians or Polish Brothers) in Lithuania he published several religious works.

With his poem *Byt ziemianski i miejski* [*The Existence of Gentry and Townspeople*] (1620), Domaniewski came to be recognized as an author of the Old Polish poetry of the gentry (Gruchala, Grzeszczuk 1988, 203–212). In this poem he celebrates the peaceful life of the landlord who cherishes stoic virtues and contrasts them with the care-worn existence of townsfolk. Unfortunately, this 1500-verse poem has no significant poetic value and provides merely a background to the works by other poets who used the Horacean motif of *Beatus ille* (Ep. II) more creatively and related it to Jan Kochanowski's masterly paraphrase (*Panna XII* from *Pieśni świętojańska o Sobótcie*). A work of greater interest, not only for reasons of its genre, is Domaniewski's poem *Pociecha tym, co im wadzą mężowie, gdy się prowadzą* (1620) [*Consolation to those wives with husbands in their way*]. The theme of this poem is a comparison of two women: a gentlewoman and a stallkeeper. The author presents the hard life of a wandering stallkeeper with much sympathy (but a bit of irony as well) in order to contrast it with the image of a grumbling noblewoman dissatisfied with her lot. Rigid Arian moralism is combined here with realism, and the genre of the descriptive poem with the travel poem (*hodeoporicon*). The poem, although poor as a poetic work, could be a quite an interesting object for literary research from the perspective of feminism.

A brief analysis of Domaniewski's poetical output leads to the conclusion that we are dealing with the *minorum gentium* author, lacking the poetic vein, but interesting with respect to the issues that he brings to the fore. After all, the history of literature consists not only of masterpieces. The Lithuanian Arian deserves some attention as one who provides the background to the most famous masterpieces and who focusses on atypical themes. This statement is confirmation by the analysis of the collection of poems entitled *Emblemata niektóre* (1623) [*Some Emblems*].

This work has its literary roots in Vilna and in the magnificent development of emblematics in Europe at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The studies by J. Pelc (Pelc 1973, 119–135) and P. Buchwald — Pelcowa (Buchwald 1981, 24–34) have shown that the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was the leading centre of

'emblematic production' in the Commonwealth. Since 1589 occasional emblematic prints (for example the entrance of King Zygmunt III Waza to Vilna, the lordly wedding, stemmata) were published; in 1606 the paraemblematic *Zwierciadlo* [*Speculum*] by Mikołaj Rej, containing copies of the copperplates by the Hungarian artist Georg Bencz to the *Triumphs* by Petrarch was also reissued. There was also a significant development of religious emblematics. In addition to the school prints of the Jesuit Academy, the collections of Hieronim Bildziukiewicz (1610), the *Allegoriae* of Krzysztof Chalecki and the *Sacra Lithotesis* by Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski are also worth mentioning. Protestants were also interested in the fashionable genre of the emblem. Daniel Naborowski, a Calvinist, and eminent author of courtly, sophisticated Baroque poetry also wrote emblematic poems (see Chemperek 1996). His friend Salomon Rysiński possessed such significant works as the collections of emblems by Alciati, Reusner, Beza, Cats, and Vaenius in his library.<sup>1</sup> Naborowski's and Rysiński's interest in emblematics is crucial because they were both courtiers of Krzysztof II Radziwiłł. The Calvinist prince was the protector of Lithuanian Protestants and Domaniewski — an Arian himself — belonged to the circle of his patronage.

Domaniewski's collection was published in Lubcz by the printing office of Piotr Blastus Kmita, a typographer closely related to the Calvinist line of the Radziwiłł family. The *Emblemata niektóre* consists of 8 longer subscriptions without engravings ('naked emblems,' or *emblemata nuda*). The dedicatory work is the expression of his awareness of the peculiar character of the genre, his individual *credo* (Pelc 1973, 135). Domaniewski, in accordance with the original meaning of the word, which is close to Alciatus' usage thereof, understands an emblem as the 'planted art', the genre intended to 'implant' moral principles, to instruct people how to "live fortunately in one's soul" (Miedma 1968).

The central topic of the collection is nautical symbolism. The stoic commonplaces of life — seafaring — as well as the poetical devices gain new significance in Domaniewski's formulation; although the author is also interested in typical, everyday moralism. The revival of the stoic, moralizing convention was inspired by the selection of such masterpieces as: *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, the *Distichs* of Pseudo-Cato, the *Natural History* of Pliny, works by Ovid, and also — as J. Pelc has noted — the *Emblematum liber* by Alciatus. The references to the Bible support the moralising thoughts of the author, while the material of the poetic images are primarily images from the ancient epic poems and the curiosities described by Pliny.

In *Emblem II. Pogoda i Niepogoda* [*Good and Bad Weather*] the image of storm and halcyons which "[...] ahead of time they fly away from the sea, / When they feel

<sup>1</sup> Luksaite, Inge. 1985. *Salomono Rysinskio bibliotekos. Vilniuje sarasas*. In: *Is Lietuvos biblioteku istorijos*. Vilnius. The Author gives here the list of Rysiński's lectures. Items are: [731], [790], [707], [126], [187], [63], [176].

bad weather of the sea" (v.5–6)<sup>2</sup> serve as an example to illustrate the reflection "Don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today" (v. 16). The reference to the halcyon taken from Pliny's *Natural History* (Book X, chapter 31) has purely anecdotal function; it serves as a colouration of the moralistic argument. Domaniewski does not limit himself to the fantastic images and ideas of Plinius. 'His' halcyon, having built its (solid) nest on the sea waves, flies away when the storm is brewing. The poet here somewhat subverts the emblematic tradition. For Alciatus (1531, *Expace ubertas*) or Schoonhovius (1618, *Emblemata[...] partim moralia, partim etiam civilia*, nr 49: *Bona conscientia in malis est secreta*) the halcyon symbolises serenity and a clear conscience. For the Polish author, it is the symbol of circumspection. The poem ends with the description of the weather, that is, *Occasio*, who has her "back bare and forehead hirsute" (v. 19) borrowed from Pseudo-Cato and — perhaps — from the emblematic collection by Alciatus (*Emblema CXXI. In Occasionem*). The apostrophe to the reader to seize it lacks the epicurean connotations and serves as a tribute to house work, done on time:

When you happen to be late with one job,  
You may also happen to be late with all the others (v.17–18).

Domaniewski interprets the nautical symbolism from the point of view of an average nobleman's own needs. The strange, curious and distant turns out to be the familiar. And so the protagonist of *Emblemat III Charybdis* i.e. "a voracious whirl" is a meretricious Scylla (*Emblemat VIII*), to wit, a low company: gamblers, drunkards, and outlaws.

The fantastic sea creatures from Homer's *Odyssey* acquire a totally new symbolic meaning in Domaniewski's work. In Alciatus' collection (1550, p. 76) *Scylla bififormis* means harlotry — hence the inscription *Impudentia* by B. Anneau (*Picta poesis...*) provides his poem about Scylla with the inscription *Invidiosum quam miserum esse praestat*. The source of symbolic imagery for Alciatus is the duality of form depicted in the engraving — Scylla's deceitfulness. Anneau reveals his interpretative key in the following sentence: "Envious is Scylla fighting with canine monsters" (*Invidia obtreptans monstribus est Scylla caninis*). For Domaniewski, on the other hand, the most important element of Homer's vision is the sound of the waves which resembles the barking of dogs (v. 1–3). The Polish poet associates Scylla with her vociferous and idle company.

What seems to be Domaniewski's most original idea when compared with the European emblematic tradition is that he made Charybdis (not Scylla) the symbol of the rake. In fact, this is not something to be particularly proud of, because this conceit is based on rather apparent obscene allusions ("the whirl voracious at the depth of the sea [...] that drags inside and devours everything" v. 1–3). Fortunately

<sup>2</sup> Domaniewski's poems are quoted from the rare book, Biblioteka Narodowa, sign. XVII. 3. 5841.

for the author this caused no scandal, since the collection did not include illustrations.

The “Wielorybowie” [Whales] from *Emblemat V* are “indubitably nobler people than we are.” As the source of *inventio* Domaniewski mentions the Bible, adding the word “Leviathan” as a synonym, despite the fact that in the Bible Leviathan is described as a hybrid creature: a serpent and a sea dragon (Mode 1977, 119), and symbolises the monster, Satan. The meaning given to the Whales by Domaniewski is utterly different. For him the mammal stands for the nobles with their excessive needs. Moral instructions are stoic in nature, their aim is to warn the readers against mingling with the rich and encourage them to make acquaintance with their own class. Thus Domaniewski’s description of the title animals is far from the Apocalyptic terror (Ap.12) and instead is connected with their appetite: “They have got huge bellies and greedy gullets.” In Western emblematics a parallel to Domaniewski’s formulation can be found in *Emblem III* of Joachim Camerarius’ collection, *Symbolum et emblematum aquatilibus et reptilibus* (1604). The image shows the whale spitting fish into the sea and it is provided with the inscription *Nocet assentatio magnis*. Both Domaniewski and Camerarius caution against flattery. The latter, however, gives instruction to the whale (the nobleman), Domaniewski to the small fish (people of the middle class); not yet swallowed by the giant.

The mermaids (*Emblemat VI*) in the Polish author’s image are not given the common symbolic meaning, contrary to Alciatus (1550, nr. 94), and, for example, Spanish authors such as Juan Horozco Covarrubias and Sebastian de Covarrubias Orozco. The Polish author pays attention in his brief description to their halfhuman form and, even more importantly, their beautiful voices. The characters of Homer’s epic are here the symbols of sycophants and dissemblers. Such a concept seems to be a new one because it was usually serpents, lizards or chameleons which symbolized flattery (Daly 1979, 43, 135, 141–142).

In the last two subscriptions we can find very interesting examples of using nautical symbolism for the needs of stoic moralism. The characters of *Emblemat VII* are remoras. According to Pliny, the fish is “an immeasurable evidence of the hidden power, so that there is no need to look for the greater one” (Plinius, 1845, 504). The Roman author amplifies the description of the animal’s potency, earlier alluded to in Aristotle’s *Zoology* (Arystoteles 1982, 61–62), by pointing out that this small fish was capable, for instance, of stopping 400-paddle galleys. In Domaniewski’s emblematic imagery, remoras clinging to the ship’s side and stopping navigation are “good friends” who intrude upon the house of the reader to whom the poem is addressed:

They tell you to pour into their glasses, and talk nonsense,  
Amusing you with the words you do not need (v.19–20).

Drunkenness and vanity are incompatible with the ethos of the sober-minded landlord. The anaphora “Lord’s eye” in the final verses aims at emphasising the usefulness of keeping the house to oneself. What should the nobleman who advocates stoic rules of ploughing the land, living in agreement with nature do, in order to avoid breaking the rules of hospitality? Domaniewski finds Solomon’s solution (or rather a “golden mean”):

It’s not wrong to take the guest to the field,  
Everything then is right at home, in the field and in the barn (v.31–32).

*Emblemat VIII. Syrtes*, likewise, includes an original idea, uncommon in European emblematics<sup>3</sup>. Syrtes, according to Vergil’s *Aeneid* (and geographical knowledge), are bays full of shoals on the Northern coast of Africa. According to Domaniewski’s interpretation, Syrtes are feelings that evoke great passions, and shatter the spiritual balance. Thus they constitute both love and discord. The metaphor of running a ship aground on the shoal of love (v.22) sounds strange in the ear of a modern reader. Stoic moralists, however, advised against love, as according to their view this feeling was at odds with the ideal of balance in life. To them, the wise man should strive for apathy.

“The didactic moral that the author conveys to the reader in his extensive subscriptions resolves itself into the approval of such ideals as agreement and ‘keeping balance’; but it lacks the characteristic Renaissance attitude of demonstrativeness to the worldly affairs” (Pelc 1973, 134). Domaniewski suggests ideals of the gentry: deliberation in the use of time, and in mingling with lords and flatterers, and a sense of proportion in hospitality and contacts with women. These conventional stoic instructions, which occasionally include commentaries taking into account moral codes common to both Christianity and stoic philosophy, acquire a poetic glamour because of the perfect use of the *inventio* rules by the author. Domaniewski, by interpreting the monsters of the ancient world in an original way, strove to create a new Baroque symbolic code.

---

<sup>3</sup> Emblems whose theme is either Remora or Syrtes are not mentioned in A. Henkel & A. Schöne’s *Emblemata. Handbuch zur Sinnbilkunst des XVI. Und XVII. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1967). Remora as the protagonist of the emblematic composition is indicated in Jorge Louis Borhes’ *Zoologia fantastyczna* (transl. Chadzynska Z., Warszawa, 1983), 141. According to Borhes, apart from Domaniewski, D. de Saavedra Fajardo in his *Empresas Politicas* (1640) also used this motif.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arystoteles. 1982. *Zoologia (Historia animalum)*, transl. Siwek P. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Buchwald-Pelcowa, Paulina. 1981. *Emblematy w drukach polskich i Polski dotyczące XVI–XVII wieku. Bibliografia*. Wrocław: Ossolineum.
- Chemperek, Dariusz. 1996. "Poezja Daniela Naborowskiego i barokowa emblematyka. Inspiracje i konteksty interpretacyjne." *Barok. Historia — Literatura — Sztuka* 5.3: 119–34.
- Daly, Peter. 1979. *Literature in the Light of the Emblem. Structural Parallels between the Emblem and Literature in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press.
- Gruchala, Janusz S & Grzeszczuk Stanislaw (ed.). 1988. *Staropolska poezja ziemianska. Antologia*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Miedma, Hasel. 1968. "The Term `Emblema` in Alciati." *Journal of The Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 31: 239.
- Mode, H. 1977. *Stwory mityczne i demony. Fantastyczny swiat istot mieszanых*, transl. Linke A. M. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Pelc, Janusz. 1973. *Obraz — słowo — znak. Studium o emblematyce w literaturze staropolskiej*. Wrocław: Ossolineum.
- Plinius Secundi, A. 1845. *Historia naturalna*, transl. Lukaszewicz J. Poznan.