
Aleksander Świętochowski's *Damian Capenko*.
The Struggle with the Legend*

O Damianie Capence Aleksandra Świętochowskiego. Zmagania z legendą

BEATA K. OBSULEWICZ

John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2103-9484>

e-mail: beataobs@kul.lublin.pl

Abstract. The objective of this paper is to analyse Aleksander Świętochowski's debut novella series *O życie* [*Oh Life*], with particular emphasis on the opening novella. The reflections focus on *Damian Capenko*, a novella showcasing its relationship with the worldview of the second half of the 19th century and tendentious literature. The author proposes an interpretation of the work in the light of *Dumania pesymisty* [*Musings of a Pessimist*], an earlier series of texts by Świętochowski, one of the most outstanding creators of Positivist literature in Poland. As a result of the analyses, the relationship between the texts and the initial ideas of the Polish Positivism programme is explained, along with the apparent artistic inconsistency of the series.

Keywords: Aleksander Świętochowski, *O życie*, *Damian Capenko*, *Dumania pesymisty*, Positivist literature, 19th century

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Contact details of the author: Department of Literature of Positivism and Young Poland, Institute of Literary Studies, Faculty of Humanities, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 14 Raclawickie Av., 20-950 Lublin, Poland, phone: +48 81 445 39 86.

Abstrakt. Celem artykułu jest analiza debiutanckiego cyklu nowelistycznego *O życie* Aleksandra Świętochowskiego, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem utworu otwierającego tom. Rozważania koncentrują się na opowiadaniu *Damian Capenko*, ukazując jego związek ze światopoglądem drugiej połowy XIX wieku, literaturą tendencyjną. Autor proponuje interpretację utworu w świetle *Dumań pesymisty*, wcześniejszego cyklu wypowiedzi publicystycznych Świętochowskiego, jednego z najwybitniejszych twórców literatury pozytywizmu w Polsce. W wyniku przeprowadzonych analiz wyjaśniony zostaje związek tekstów z początkowymi ideami programu polskiego pozytywizmu, a także wyjaśniona pozorna niespójność artystyczna cyklu.

Słowa kluczowe: Aleksander Świętochowski, *O życie*, *Damian Capenko*, *Dumania pesymisty*, literatura pozytywizmu, XIX wiek

Aleksander Świętochowski does not enjoy popularity comparable to Henryk Sienkiewicz, Bolesław Prus, Maria Konopnicka or even Eliza Orzeszkowa these days. His texts enthral experts dealing with the literature of the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, he is also known to students of Polish Studies, who delve deeper into the literature of Positivism. Outside these groups, few know him and even fewer still study his texts. It is a pity, because the work of the Apostle of Truth and the “Pope” of Polish Positivism, to list only two of his most frequently-used titles, has certainly not been thoroughly studied, thought through and interpreted to date (Mazan, 2001, pp. 29–39; Borkowska, 2001, pp. 101–113; Stępnik and Gabryś, 2011; Płachecki, 1872, pp. 27–47; Osiński, 2011) – to mention some papers from recent years. A philosopher, publicist, journalist, playwright, novelist, social activist, organiser of Polish education, who lived to a ripe old age (1849–1938), deserves a full critical edition of his rich legacy. Until there is one, the shadow of Świętochowski will (as the author believes) fade from year to year, despite the invaluable efforts of Polona and the Polish Digital Libraries Federation. That is why, while waiting for that happy time to come, working on preventing Świętochowski from falling into oblivion is a worthwhile effort.

O życie. Świętochowski took up short prose forms when he was already a renowned playwright and famous journalist (with 10 years of experience). One of the key works in this part of the writer’s oeuvre is his novella-writing debut – the *O życie* series, which consists of three texts: *Damian Capenko*, *Chawa Rubin* and *Karl Krug*. As we know, the author wrote under the pen name of Władysław Okoński. The story *Karl Krug* was published in *Nowiny* in 1878 (Świętochowski, 1878, pp. 117–118, 121), while *Damian Capenko* (Świętochowski, 1879b, pp. 60–66) and *Chawa Rubin* (Świętochowski, 1879, pp. 11–17) appeared in the same magazine, of which Świętochowski was editor, a year later. In 1879, all three pieces were collated into a book edition (Świętochowski, 1879c). The publication opened with a short preface, followed by the works in the following order: first *Damian Capenko*, followed by

Chawa Rubin and, finally, *Karl Krug*. All the texts would later also be included in the *Obrazki powieściowe* [*Fictional Pictures*] (Świętochowski, 1896) volume. They are usually connected with the story *Klemens Boruta* (Świętochowski, 1880, p. 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, 38, 45, 52, 59), mainly on the basis of the similarity of the issues it deals with.

I forgive. All the texts end with the easily remembered word spoken by the narrator in the first person singular: *przebaczam* [I forgive]. It seems it would not be a great risk to identify the narrator with the author. The phrase is a fragment of the characteristic phrase, “Poor you... for the fact that you... wanted to work... I forgive you” [“Biedny/biedna... ja ci to, żeś... pracować chciał/chciała... przebaczam”], it is found within its emphasised coda. This overlooks a crucial subject of 19th-century literature, which was fascinated with the human psyche, crime and social or metaphysical harm (Obsulewicz, 2009). The phrase is a reaction to someone’s guilt, presupposing a previous transgression against the divine or state law. Who needs the forgiveness of the Positivist Pope? According to the paradoxical logic of the author of *Liberum veto*, the innocent is the guilty one, and since the reader sympathises with the wronged eponymous character, the irony contained in this absolution is thus emphasised.

The final act of the novellas provokes thought. It is clear that forgiveness is not necessary for the victim of violence, especially when it is difficult to point out even a trace of their ill will or pride (*hybris*). Forgiveness thus becomes an accusation of the selfishness of a dysfunctional society which was unable to defend its victim, and which, through its representatives, sentenced them to death. Who has the power, who is sanctioned to forgive? Can everything be forgiven? There was a popular saying in the 19th century: “To understand everything is to forgive everything.” It encouraged the people to think about the guilty person and the victim in anthropological, ontological, and psychological terms, to consider the circumstances of the act and, finally, to take into account the cognitive capabilities of the individual. Did the narrator really understand everything? The most discerning readers, including Stanisław Tarnowski, questioned the narrator’s judiciary and pastoral competence (Tarnowski, 1881, pp. 31–38). They approved of the novellas as an artistic whole, which they described as neatly told, but they could not find a connection between them and the refrain-like punch line that closes them.

Crime story. It is not known whether Świętochowski was aware that his debut could be qualified as crime novellas. All the title characters’ lives ended as a result of a crime committed against them¹ – shooting (*Damian Capenko*), battery (*Chawa Rubin*), causing a fall that leads to death (*Karl Krug*). All the killings were

¹ This was noted by Samuel Sandler (1965, p. 21). For more on the death in selected works by Świętochowski, see Joanna Jasińska (2002, pp. 11–25).

premeditated murders. All of them were committed by people who previously had conflicts with the law, were known in their immediate circles for their brutality and violence – in other words, they were classic villains. The victims found themselves at the wrong time in the wrong place. All the murders were committed out of greed (the direct motive was money) and jealousy. They were motivated by the struggle for sustenance – a term too well known from 19th-century world-view discussions on natural and social sciences. In the author's preface, the key word of the era appears: "the lowest lusts of blind instincts" ["najniższe żądze ślepych instynktów"] (Świętochowski, 1879c, p. 3).

Tarnowski, as well as other commentators and critics, drew attention to the naturalistic (French) context of these miniatures.² It is difficult to argue with them, as naturalism explored "an era of corruption, stoked low desires and appetites, an era in which the only example of corruption in history was raised to the height of the system and considered as a mainspring of rule" ["epokę zepsucia, rozbudzonych niskich pożądliwości i apetytów, epokę, w której jedynym w dziejach przykładem zepsucia podniesiono do wysokości systematu i uważano jako sprężynę rządzenia"] (Sienkiewicz, 1985, p. 111). The killers had motive and opportunity. They acted under the dictates of fighting for survival and eliminating weaker competitors. The struggle was to be won by the strongest person, better adapted to life in the given conditions. That in moral terms they were the worst is a statement beyond the lexicon of consistent naturalists.

Given this perspective, the aforementioned forgiveness makes sense. The victim must be forgiven for not having understood the elementary laws governing the world in which the weakest and least determined to fight for their own are doomed to unconditional failure. If the narrator had not gotten the last word, if only he had kept a strict naturalistic observation, these texts would have been better in literary terms, because (from this point of view) they would have been devoid of pity for the already suffering victims. However, Świętochowski did maintain moderation; most likely because he could not give up the great temptation of a biased narrative strategy.

The tendency. The novellas from the *O życie* series are still read today as an illustration of one of the points on the positivist agenda: the assimilation manifesto. They are treated as justification for its need, or even necessity. This applies especially to the assimilation of the Jews, although the series speaks of a wider target: Germans (Silesians) and Ukrainians (Little Russians). They are also read as a harsh reckoning of Poles with national egoism, callousness, blindness, and ill will – as the Polish

² Tarnowski wrote that Okoński "is infected with naturalism in artistic terms" ["jest zarażony naturalizmem pod względem artystycznym"] (after Sandler, 1965, p. 25).

equivalent of *J'accuse...!*³ However, such an interpretation seems to be a misreading. In *Chawa Rubin*, this approach still seems to be based on some evidence (see Rybka, 2014, pp. 231–243), although the roughly-drawn portrait of the protagonist's husband, Symcha (see Szargot, 2001, pp. 71–78) and the portrait of Srulowa, the innkeeper, draw particular attention. When Franek confides in her: "I'm going to strangle her. If I don't strangle her, she'll starve to death" ["Ja ją uduszę. Nie uduszę, to z głodu zdechnie"], she reacts: "»She'll be fine«", – she said harshly [...] – »Now she can eat geese. She was just here, today she has a letter for Polanówka«" ["»Nic jej nie będzie« – odrzekła surowo [...] – »teraz może gęsi jadać. Dopiero co tu była, dziś ma list do Polanówki«"] (Świętochowski, 1879a, p. 53). These words, which reveal the protagonist's destination, lead directly to a vicious beating of the woman. In *Karl Krug*, it is the Jewish developer Glückwurm, who brings workers from Silesia to Warsaw, ruthlessly houses fifteen of them in a damp basement (Świętochowski, 1878, pp. 71–78) and deducts the cost of their travel from their pay.⁴ He pays them drastically less than his Polish workers and Germans, which eventually leads to mutual animosities. Edward Tabor, a completely degenerate figure, is a converted Jew from Przesmyk, a smuggler and a crook, who pulls first Pustułka and then Capenko into a trap. A careful reading is a reversal of the tendentious perception of Jews presented by Eliza Orzeszkowa (*Silny Samson*, *Meir Ezofowicz*, *Eli Makower*) or (in some works) Maria Konopnicka (*Mendel Gdański*). An impartial reading may give rise to the question: can this nation be liked? Is it necessary to strengthen the relationship with it? These questions have a *raison d'être* because the author, in his collection *O życie*, took care to depict a very positive image of a Germanised Pole from Silesia (Karl Krug) and a Little Russian from Podolia (Damian Capenko), but did not rework the image of the Jew. In Świętochowski's statements, one can point out the manifestations of his (increasingly growing over the years) reluctance towards the Jewish question (see Osiński, 2011, p. 207; Borkowska, 2005, p. 225). The same attitude, although much more subtly evoked, is inscribed in the cycle of short prose pieces analysed in this paper. Since we said earlier that *O życie* was dictated by naturalism, it is worth recalling the opinion expressed in *Dumania pesymisty* [*Musings of a Pessimist*], a series of articles from 1876: a Christian cannot and must not dislike the Jews, brothers in faith in the one God, but a Darwinist has the right not to like

³ Of course, they came almost 20 years before Emil Zola's famous speech in defence of Alfred Dreyfus, published in the Parisian magazine *L'Aurore* on 13 January 1898.

⁴ As the narrator comments: "[...] that Glückwurm deducted the price of this transport from his travel costs considerably, who knows the Warsaw [...] Gluckwürms" ["[...] że zaś Glückwurm w kosztach podróży cenę tego przejazdu znacznie zredukował, kto zna warszawskich [...] Gluckwürmów"] (Świętochowski, 1965, p. 65).

them,⁵ since they are a nation victorious in the fight for existence. They do best of all nationalities and will not retreat from their positions. It is also not possible to bring Slavs and Semitic people together.

It is funny to meditate on how they [Jews – B.K.O.] can be reconciled with Poles of Slavic origin. This means asking how to dissolve lead in water or how to make noodles for the broth from iron. A Pole – a Slav – and a Semite are bodies of two different categories, with no affinity between them. Like chemistry, ethnology has its laws for the forming of relationships and does not allow for connecting everything. The combination of a Semitic element with a Slavic one only results in a mechanical mixture. Thus, the Jewish question, if it does not want to be a nonsense puzzle, has to put itself in this form: how to destroy the Jews and turn them into Slav-Poles, or the other way round. There can be no agreement in which the two parties would retain their separate character; there can be no talk of it. Experience has proven this more than needed. (Świętochowski, 2002, pp. 94–95)⁶

Our land. *Chawa Rubin* is set in Kazimierz Dolny. The narrator addresses her: “I forgive you for being in my country” [“przebaczam, żeś w moim kraju”] (Świętochowski, 1879a, p. 55). This can be read with Mickiewicz in hand (“the land of childhood”) and treated as a picture from the personal, adolescent memories of the author, brought up there (see Fita, 2001, pp. 111–121). Karl Krug, who comes from Mysłowice, finds a job in Warsaw, and is forgiven as one who wanted to work “here in our place” (Świętochowski, 1878, p. 77). We can understand this, too: Warsaw was by choice the place where Świętochowski worked and lived. Besides, where can one be more “here in our place” than in the capital? What is the setting of *Damian Capenko*? In Przesmyk. There is no such name in *Słownik nazw geograficznych Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich* [*Dictionary of Geographical Names of the Kingdom of Poland and Other Slavic Countries*] (Sulimierski and Walewski, 1880–1914). Neither does it list Łuba, the protagonist’s hometown, near Kamianets-Podilskyi. The only place that can be identified is Szczurowa, a town in Lesser Poland near Brzesko (Sulimierski and Walewski, 1880–1914), where Tabor

⁵ “Whoever adheres to the teachings of Darwinism may despise the Jew, but whoever adheres to the teachings of the Bible – never” [“Kto wyznaje naukę darwinizmu, może sobie gardzić Żydami, ale kto wyznaje naukę Biblii – nigdy”] (Świętochowski, 2002, p. 96).

⁶ “Jest rzeczą śmieszną medytować nad tym: jaką drogą dadzą się [Żydzi – B.K.O.] pogodzić z Polakami słowiańskiego pochodzenia. Znaczy to bowiem pytać się: jakim sposobem ołów rozpuścić w wodzie lub z żelaza zrobić kluski do rosółu. Polak – Słowianin i Semita, to ciała dwóch odmiennych rzędów, nie pozostające względem siebie w stosunku powinowactwa. Jak chemia, tak etnologia ma swoje prawa tworzenia się związków i nie może łączyć wszystkiego ze wszystkim. Element semicki daje ze słowiańskim tylko mechaniczną mieszaninę. Kwestia więc żydowska, jeśli nie chce być u nas zagadką bzdurną, musi się postawić w tej formie: jak zniszczyć Żydów i zrobić z nich Słowiano-Polaków, lub na odwrót. O żadnej zgodzie, w której by obie strony zachowały swój odrębny charakter, nie może być nawet mowy. Doświadczenie dowiodło tego nad potrzebę.”

goes. We know that the plot of the novella takes place on the Russian-Austrian border, because it is guarded by a *Gefreiter* (corporal) Capenko, that Przesmyk lies on the Russian side because people pay in roubles there and words of Russian origin penetrate the language of the characters, just like German words. The narrator speaks of this land in absolute terms, referring to it as “our land” (Świętochowski, 1879b, p. 29). He says so in 1878, more than one hundred years since Poles lost their control over these lands. So, in what sense is it “our land”? Certainly not political. Foreign troops are stationed there (as evidenced by the nomenclature of units), defending not our borders, but the borders of two empires (Russian and Austro-Hungarian), while Jews and Little Russians are doing very well – until a critical moment – in this land. The population speaks Polish, but they also switch to Russian or German without any problems. At the time when Świętochowski wrote these words, this land was not really “ours” or “Polish” in a political and cultural sense. The author – as it seems – treats the partitions as false, he does not want to acknowledge their reality. Whom then does he blame for the death of an innocent victim (who he actually does forgive) when a Jew kills a Ukrainian within the Russian Empire? Who is “us” in this case?

Podolia. Capenko is from Podolia, where his parents work as beekeepers.⁷ His military service is coming to an end. Out of love for Miss Hortensja Motylińska, the daughter of an economist from Przesmyk, he decides not to go back home. He buys a house in Przesmyk, wants to buy a garden, as well as bring his mother (after his father’s death) there. He speaks Polish very well, although with a “domestic accent,” but also knows the “Little Russian dialect” (Świętochowski, 1965, p. 4). He was raised at the court of a Polish nobleman, the heir to Łuba. He is a righteous, energetic, courageous man, perhaps with an unrefined taste (as evidenced by his affection for Miss Motylińska) and too much potential for naïveté. However, he is not the only Podolian there. In Podolia, there was also an estate of another Pole, Bróg, the heir of Przesmyk, who “sold his Podolian lands” (Świętochowski, 1965, p. 12) and came from the steppes to the edge of the Empire. He treats Capenko like a compatriot. He understands Capenko, supports his plans for the future, wisely and consciously advises against marriage to the “healthy, if a little fat” [“zdrową i trochę przytłustą”] (Świętochowski, 1965, p. 16) and primitive economist’s daughter, and finally proposes an honest collaboration in the grain trade. He is like a father to Capenko, or at any rate, like a friend. Capenko competes, *nolens volens*, for Bróg’s favours, as well as for Motylińska’s feelings, with a certain Tabor, “who has grafted as many as three national buds – German, Polish and Russian – on the trunk of his Jewish nationality;

⁷ In the Eastern Borderlands, “activities in the forest apiaries were the domain of small nobility, court servants and burghers, and it was only after the abolition of serfdom that peasants joined them” [“zajęcia w pasiekach leśnych były domeną drobnej szlachty, służb dworskich oraz mieszczan i dopiero po zniesieniu pańszczyzny dołączyli doń także chłopię”] (Wróblewski, 1998, pp. 58–59).

he did not speak any language well himself” [“który na pniu swego izraelskiego narodu zaszczerpił we własnej osobie aż trzy narodowościowe płonki: niemiecką, polską i rosyjską, sam żadnym językiem dobrze nie władał”] (Świętochowski, 1965, p. 5). And it is Tabor who calls the Podolian a “bonehead” (Świętochowski, 1965, p. 5), it is he who is bothered by the impure Polish language Capenko uses (Świętochowski, 1965). Even the Motylińskis do not object to marrying their daughter to Capenko, but she herself, with a feudal sulk, points to the corporal’s low, probably peasant origins, but not his nationality. Świętochowski does not record any ethnic tensions between the Poles and the Little Russians. Podolia (real and imagined) seems like “common ground” (ours). This is something that Tarnowski pointed out. He asked:

Since when and where is a man born near Kamianets considered to be a stranger? We can see that the new geography is also followed by a new ethnography, because in the past the “Little Rus” of Podolia did not need to be a brother because he was born one. (Tarnowski, 1881, p. 36)⁸

And this “new geography”? Let us refer to Tarnowski again:

Like Columbus once knew the roundness of the Earth, like today’s brave Englishmen know Central Africa, so great minds can know that Little Russia stretches to Kamianets, as they have already learned that Warsaw is not in Poland, but in Vistula Land. (Wróblewski, 1998)⁹

We should take into account the comments of Marian Płachecki (2001, pp. 39–44), who argued that in A.D. 1879, the publications of the Apostle of Truth could have been grist for the Russian mill, escalating conflicts between nationalities. Regardless of our approach, Capenko is not a brother for Tabor, instead, he is an enemy, a competitor, an obstacle to the realisation of his plans. Tabor is just as much an ethnic newcomer (or “one of us” in the former multinational Commonwealth) as Capenko, but he is “one of us among strangers,” who took better root, who is better situated and unwilling to welcome others of the same status with open arms.

You wanted to be my brother. Capenko is a Slav, just like Bróg and Motylińska. Brother Slavs is an important myth of the 19th century, as Lilia Moroz-Grzelak’s (2011) studies prove, and shared by many influential European intellectuals. As it seems, it was also shared by the Bróg and Motyliński families. A well-known aphorism says: “let us love each other like brothers, let us do business with each

⁸ “Gdzie i odkąd człowiek urodzony pod Kamieńcem uchodzi za obcy gatunek człowieka? Widać, że za nową geografią idzie i nowa etnografia, bo dawniej „*małoros*” podolski nie potrzebował być bratem, bo się nim rodził.”

⁹ “Jak niegdyś Kolumb okrągłość ziemi, jak dziś odważni Anglicy środkową Afrykę, tak wielkie umysłu mogą poznać, że Małorosja rozciąga się po Kamieniec, jak już poznały, że Warszawa nie leży w Polsce, ale w Przywiślańskim Kraju.”

other like Jews.” From Tabor’s perspective, his “younger brother” in Przesmyk cannot be allowed to stay, since this space is already occupied and calculated with the future in mind.

The argument between the brothers, concludes with the murder of the weaker and righteous one, must bring to mind the archetypal battle between Cain and Abel. In a great study devoted to *Chawa Rubin*, Barbara Szargot (2001) showed how incomplete the readings that stop with the realistic plane of the novel are. A parabola is its essential dimension of that novel. Abel cannot “win” in light of this myth. What is more, he does not have to, and he should not! To become great, he should become a suffering being. Again, one has to reach for *Dumania pesymisty* (in the author’s opinion, the *O życie* series is a narrative continuation of that discursive statement). The work states, *expressis verbis*, that only a suffering person moves the imagination, that egoism and selfishness closes the recipient’s sensitivity, and does not reach it.¹⁰ As long as Capenko was doing well, one could argue over his choices, sometimes controversial (marrying a cynical simpleton who perceived existence in materialistic terms, or bringing his old mother to him, thus forcing her to move at the request of her son), but when he lost his life as an innocent man, at the hands of the deceived Pustułka, also suffering from the loss of a child, one cannot fail to feel pity for him, not to take the side of the loser. All the more so because the recipient’s pain is intensified by his mother’s pain and her dramatic journey from Podolia to Przesmyk (for her son’s funeral, instead of his wedding), and her outrage fuelled by the sight of Tabor and Motylińska among the mourners (Świętochowski, 1879b, p. 29).

Oh life. A careful reading of the series reveals tensions, cracks, and inconsistencies. If Świętochowski decided (instead of an enigmatic preface¹¹) to give it as a motto Krasicki’s fairy tale of *The Lamb and the Wolves*:

¹⁰ “It is thus safe to say that the happy are suspect in their human nature. [...] The fat, smiling bodies passed, lay down in their graves without leaving any trace. Only minds tormented by uncertainty, only hearts torn by despair have earned us what we live on and are proud of. Strength is the genius of exceptions, suffering is the genius of ordinary people; so, if it is worth loving them for anything, then above all and perhaps only it is for being unhappy. [...] as Krasieński said: »misfortune is the greatness of man on earth«” [“Wolno więc prostym domysłem powiedzieć, że szczęśliwi są w swym ludzkim charakterze podejrzani. [...] Wypasione, uśmiechnięte ciała przeszły, położyły się w grobach, nie pozostawiając po sobie żadnego śladu. Tylko umysły dręczone niepewnością, tylko serca szarpane rozpacz zapracowały nam to, z czego żyjemy i jesteśmy dumni. Siła jest geniuszem wyjątków, cierpienie jest geniuszem zwykłych ludzi; jeżeli więc za co kochać ich warto, to przede wszystkim i może jedynie za to, że są nieszczęśliwi. [...] jak powiedział Krasieński: »nieszczęście jest wielkością człowieka na ziemi«”] (Świętochowski, 2002, pp. 68–69).

¹¹ Let us quote it, so as not to make baseless claims: “When the locusts fall on our fields, we only grieve over the havoc they have wrought, or rejoice in their end. But we cannot feel their joy when they destroy us or their sorrows when they die. We often have a similar relationship with people. If we

The predator's cause is always good.

Two wolves attacked a lamb in a dark wood. It said, "I want your legal rights defined".

"You're weak and tender, and it's dark".

They dined. (Krasicki, 1779)¹²

it would explain the main message of the narrative. The cycle would also have been more coherent if it had not been for the author's pathos-filled, absolutist commentary, which is very difficult to comprehend¹³ if one wants to keep faith in the ability of Świętochowski the novelist. Of course, one can assume that this is Władysław Okoński's fiction debut, and one must forgive him for stumbling if it were not for the fact that Aleksander Świętochowski, while writing his novellas, had been working not only as a journalist but also as a (sometimes ruthless) literary critic. The contents of the three short pieces, which evoke the spirit of *Dumania pesymisty* in the punch line, this extremely strategic place, call forth a voice from the beginnings of the positivist campaign with mechanically added forgiveness, which is, in fact, a frustrating incrimination and warning.

Musings. The author cannot explain it any other way than in the light of *Dumania*. Editors of the *Przegląd Tygodniowy* [*Weekly Review*] (as one can guess – under the pressure of the reading public) cancelled their publication after seven parts (Paczoska, 2001, p. 17). It was not the kind of Świętochowski – questioning the original diagnosis of the "young press" – they expected or wanted to listen to. They preferred the convinced ironist, a freethinker and so on, to a sceptic who revised the previously proclaimed views. Later, Świętochowski cancelled the printing of *Dumania* on the pages of the newspaper, although he published the prepared material in a separate print

consider a species to be alien and harmful, we consider only our feelings in its fate, not caring that our pain is the joy of these creatures and our joy is their pain. Our individual and social selfishness is based on this. This selfishness is split into numerous branches of self-behavioural nerves in the organism of a nation; however, while at the top of the social circles of this organism, it becomes the source of conscious motives for fighting for the sake of the highest and general human needs, at the bottom it turns into the basest lusts of blind instincts. The Author" ["Gdy na pola nasze spadnie szarańcza, bolejemy tylko nad zrządzonym przez nią spustoszeniem lub radujemy się jej zgubą. Nie umiemy jednak odczuć ani jej radości, gdy nas niszczy, ani jej boleści, gdy sama ginie. W podobnym stosunku znajdujemy się często do ludzi. Jeżeli jakiś gatunek uznamy za obcy i szkodliwy, uwzględniamy w jego losach tylko nasze uczucia, nie dbając o to, że nasza boleść jest radością tych istot, a nasza radość boleścią. Na tej podstawie opiera się nasze samolubstwo jednostkowe i społeczne. Samolubstwo to jest w organizmie narodu rozszczepionym na liczne gałęzie samozachowawczych nerwów; podczas jednak gdy u wierzchu społecznych kręgów tego organizmu staje się ono źródłem świadomych pobudek do walki w imię najwyższych i ogólnych potrzeb ludzkich, u dołu zmienia się w najniższe żądze ślepych instynktów. Autor"] (Świętochowski, 2002, p. 70).

¹² "Zawždy znajdzie przyczynę, kto zdobyczy pragnie. / Dwóch wilków jedno w lesie nadybali jagnię; / Już go mieli rozerwać; rzekł: »Jakim prawem?« / »Smacznyś, słaby i w lesie!« – Zjedli niezabawem."

¹³ This is what Tarnowski had already pointed out.

in Ljubljana.¹⁴ Interestingly enough, Orzeszkowa wanted to write *Rojenia optymistki* [*Delusions of an Optimist*] in response to the writer, but ultimately she did not write her text. Instead, she wrote the bitter *Widma* (Paczoska, 2001, p. 29).

A year after the publication of *Dumania*, Świętochowski the fiction writer did his homework. He shared his doubts, observing an ill-constructed world, given over to instincts: a world of violence, deception, and constant fratricidal combat. However, he added a two-verse conclusion that distracted attention from the main message. It prompted the readers to look for the guilty where they were not, it disregarded the proportions. It reflected the angry zeal of the polemical fighter, making accusations, passing judgement over the world using moralistic, humanistic slogans. A judgement that was somewhat backwards. However, this is how the *O życie* series can also be read – better than sorrow and trepidation, lamenting the weakness of human nature and the superfluosity of being.

Translated into English: Lingua Lab

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¹⁴ “It is difficult today to say with certainty whether Ljubljana really was the place of publication, as the inscription on the title page says. Certainly, such an ascribing of the book to the place was symbolic in Świętochowski’s intention; it was another sign of his independence from Polish public opinion” [“Trudno dziś z całą pewnością stwierdzić czy rzeczywiście miejscem wydania była Lublana, jak głosi napis na stronie tytułowej. Na pewno takie przypisanie książki do miejsca miało w zamyśle Świętochowskiego znaczenie symboliczne, było kolejnym znakiem jego niezależności wobec polskiej opinii publicznej”] (Paczoska, 2001, p. 18).

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