EUROPEAN SYMBOLISM TRANSFORMED: THE CASE OF POLAND

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the intersection of concepts of nationalism and identity in Polish Symbolist painting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It argues that characteristics of the Symbolist mode in painting, such as formal distortion and ambiguity, mysticism and pessimism, were ideally suited for the expression of complex ideas about nationhood and identity in Polish territory. These ideas related to the status of the Polish nation as a politically subjugate entity, as well as the newly contested status of the individual artist as spokesperson for the nation. The dissertation argues that Symbolist painters forged a compromise in their work between the demands of tradition and modernity by investing well-worn themes and motifs with new, more nuanced meanings. In so doing, they perfectly articulated the state of cultural and political suspension particular to the Polish situation.

The dissertation makes comparisons between examples of Symbolist painting in Poland and that of selected Western European cities. An examination of similar themes and motifs across cultural borders demonstrates the impact of their transpositions to the Polish context. The dissertation also examines the influence of Symbolism on the *Sztuka* group, the preeminent

modernist artists' organization of the period. It argues that Symbolism represented a crucial component of *Sztuka*'s understanding of itself and its profile in a local and international context. Finally, the dissertation examines in detail the work of two Symbolist painters, Jacek Malczewski and Jan Stanisławski, against the backdrop of traditional scholarly categorizations of Symbolist painting into synthetism and thought-painting. It asserts that the mix of characteristics and strategies in these artists' work problematizes this categorization and encourages a reshaping of the scholarly discourse on Symbolism.

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Chapter One

The Case of Poland

This dissertation examines Symbolist painting in Poland and its engagement of concepts of modern nationhood and identity. It explores the ways in which Polish Symbolism unfolded within a particular socio-economic context and cultural tradition and compares its manifestations to those of Western Europe. Symbolism in Poland was not merely another stylistic phase in a progression towards modernism that imitated Western models. Rather, its adaption was a fortuitous, timely articulation of anxieties about the divided nation's political future and past traditions.

From 1795 to the outbreak of World War I, Poland was deprived of its political sovereignty through a series of diplomatic maneuvers and was divided by its neighbors into three politically dependent zones – it formed part of the Kingdom of Prussia in the west, the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the south (the region of Galicia, including the cities of Krakow and Lwów) and the Russian Empire in the east, including Warsaw. [1] Polish artists who adapted theories and styles of European Symbolism consciously transformed them into vehicles of commentary on issues of nationalism and modern identity. Indeed, the ambiguity inherent in Symbolist art – its dependence on allusion and anti-naturalism -- proved ideal for expressing the longing, frustration, and traumatic condition of a nation without sovereignty.

[1] For an overview of this period in Polish history, see Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, *vol. 2: 1795 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 81-162.

Though originally French in its theory and practice, Symbolism was uniquely suited to express Poland's condition of political and cultural suspension. Theories of Symbolism developed in Western European urban centers found novel and strategic application in the particular realities of Warsaw and Krakow. The ways in which they were transformed provides key evidence of the intentionality of Polish artists as they consciously adapted Symbolist visual language to nationalist sentiments. Theirs was a nationalism, however, that could never be expressed in fully open or idealized terms, like that of the Western European artists from whom they borrowed, who sprung from fully-formed, historic, and unified national states. The appeal for Polish artists lay precisely in the fact that Symbolist ennui, ambiguity, and dissonance provided an appropriate indirectness with which to express the stymied national identity, an indirectness, moreover, that allowed for the articulation of nationalist sentiments under the condition of foreign occupation. Whereas Western European Symbolism largely responded to the alienating effects of modernization and urbanization, Polish Symbolists addressed a different source of alienation: a historical legacy of unrealized nationhood, for which they often looked back in time and availed themselves of traditional Polish motifs.

Indeed, Polish culture throughout the nineteenth century was indelibly stamped with concerns about history and autonomy, identity and nationhood. Issues of national identity arose again and again in Poland's Romantic era (1820-1850), in which Polish painting and literature were marked by mysticism, pessimism and a sense of separation from quotidian reality. Artists, authors and critics were obligated to create a parallel reality through their work, which pictured an imaginary autonomous "nation," far from the actuality of foreign occupation and geographical division. Painters such as Piotr Michalowski (1800-1855) focused on scenes of battle and

nationalist uprisings, painting them in typically Romantic style with loose brushstrokes, intense palettes, intense focus on nature, and dynamic compositions.

These themes remained with the rise of history painting in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Painters such as Jan Matejko (1838-1893) and Henryk Siemiradzki (1843-1902) depicted scenes of martyrdom, military triumph and significant political events from a wide spectrum of Polish history, focusing especially on the First Republic (1505-1795). Their compositions were naturalistic, historically researched and highly detailed. In these works, the mystical overtones of Romanticism were jettisoned in favor of straightforward didacticism. The pessimism inherent to the Romantic era, during which an autonomous Polish nation was seen as an unattainable reality, was replaced by a pragmatic attitude about the preservation of historical knowledge. For history painters, reinforcing the collective memory of past sovereignty was a means of ensuring future national self-realization.

Modernist artists in Poland were mindful of the legacy of these attitudes about art and nationhood. The weight of Polish history and nationalism and the need to communicate it didactically, however, seemingly conflicted with the modernist focus on the expression of individual experience.[2] As a result, many critics and artists initially reacted negatively to the advent of modernist styles such as Impressionism, Symbolism and Expressionism, which arrived in overlapping waves from 1890 until the First World War.

Yet Symbolism provided mechanisms for continuity. For one, the theory of the Symbolist artist as seer allowed for a reframing of the Romantic tradition of the inspired suffering artist. Further, many Symbolists continued to work in what appeared, on the surface, to be a descriptive

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[2] This nationalist emphasis in nineteenth-century Polish art will be discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation and has been to date most thoroughly analyzed by Wiesław Juszczak. See Wiesław Juszczak, *Malarstwo Polskiego Modernizmu* [The Painting of Polish Modernism](Gdansk: Słowo/obraz/terytorium, 2004).

naturalist style, even as they subtly disrupted the structures of composition and narrative to emphasize further the increasingly dreamlike unreality of late nineteenth-century Polish nationhood.

As in Western Europe, Symbolist painting in Poland was not characterized by a strictly prescriptive program or one cohesive group of adherents. Instead, it was one of many simultaneously occurring styles in the context of early modernism at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century.[3] In Poland, the early modernist movement of which Symbolism was one aspect has been termed the "Young Poland" movement (1890-1914),[4] a phenomenon that spanned all three sectors of the politically partitioned country. The "Young Poland" movement consisted primarily of groups centered in Krakow, which enjoyed relatively greater cultural freedom under the administration of Austro-Hungarian authorities.[5] Yet connections were also made with artistic activity in Warsaw, then under Russian authority, and artists from both cities often exhibited together. Polish cultural activity in the Prussian sector was largely absent; a heavy-handed policy of Germanization in public education and the dominance of Berlin as a cultural center actively discouraged Polish nationalism.[6]

Krakow, the center of the modernist movement in Poland, was a regional city of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and as such was subject to relatively lax cultural policies. Poles

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[3] For an overview of the multiplicity of modernist mentalities among creative individuals in modernist Poland, see Teresa Walas, "Dynamika wewnętrzna swiatopoglądu Mlodej Polski [Internal Dynamics of the Young Poland Worldview]," in Roman Zimand, ed., *Porownania: Studia o kulturze modernizmu* [Comparisons: Studies in the Culture of Modernism] (Warsaw: Panstwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1983): 10.

[4] Tadeusz Dobrowolski, *Sztuka Młodej Polski* (Warsaw: Panstwowe Instytut Naukowy, 1963): 12.

[5] Ibid. This disparity was conducive to the development of independent and nationally conscious cultural activity in Krakow. For an historical overview of Young Poland cultural activity in Krakow and Warsaw, see Tadeusz Dobrowolski, *Sztuka Młodej Polski*.

[6] Davies, *God's Playground*, 112-130.

served in important positions in the Empire and were generally given relatively free rein in cultural matters, unlike their counterparts in Prussia and Russia.[7] Polish modernists in Krakow were confronted with political oppression that was more subtle than explicit. The ability of the Polish intelligentsia to flourish under Austrian authorities – with certain conditions attached – engendered ambivalent attitudes among them with regard to overt nationalist agitation. They belonged to a privileged social elite, or at the very least, impoverished gentry, trapped between an imposed political administration and the peasant majority, whose aspirations and goals were not always synonymous with their own. These feelings of class ambivalence and being "in-between" found full expression in the Symbolist work of the period.

Paradoxically, the divided and subservient political status of Poland within its partitioned borders resulted in the fact that Polish artists received more exposure internationally than at home. Exhibition venues were scarce in Poland – among them the Chimera Gallery and the Krywult Salon in Warsaw and the Society of the Friends of Fine Arts in Krakow. As a result, Polish artists submitted their works to exhibitions in Berlin and Paris, albeit as members of the "Austrian" or "Russian" sectors. Polish Symbolism, in particular, had critical international exposure through the Krakow-based *Sztuka* artists' association, which was under the aegis of the Vienna Secession at the turn of the century. By confidently asserting a group identity in an international setting, the *Sztuka* artists offered a unique brand of Symbolism rather than an imitation. At the same time, local press accounts of the foreign exhibitions provided public reception of Polish Symbolists that placed them on an equal footing with Western painters. The opportunities for comparison of the work of Polish artists with Western artists of the Secession

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[7] Franciszek Klein, *Notatnik Krakowski* [Krakovian Notebook] (Krakow, Wydanie Literackie, 1965) and Tadeusz Boy-Zelenski, *Znasz-li ten kraj?* [Do You Know this Country?] (Wroclaw: Zaklad Narodowy im. Ossolinskich, 2004).

and the International Exhibition also helped to contextualize Polish Symbolism for its exponents and highlight both its ties to and differences from larger European currents.

To understand the novelty and peculiarities of the Polish case, it is necessary to consider the historiography of the Symbolist movement on the whole -- beginning with the term *movement* itself -- for Symbolism never vaunted itself as a programmatic approach and has been notoriously difficult to define as a unified style. Broadly speaking, the historiography on Symbolist painting can be divided into three phases – the initial coinage of the term in the late nineteenth century and its critical application to certain Post-Impressionist painters, the resurrection of the term in the early twentieth century to identify painting with particular themes, and efforts beginning in the 1980's to recuperate the significance of the trend and its relation to mainstream modernism on both formal and thematic grounds.[8]

Symbolism has been traditionally understood as a highly individualistic and antisocial artistic phenomenon that has as its foundation the rejection of straightforward representation.[9] Its reliance on the irrational, mysterious and ungraspable represents an alternative to the rationalized systems instituted in the process of industrialization, as well as the Enlightenment legacy of classical order and the growth of positivism in the mid-nineteenth century. With melancholy and estrangement, Symbolist painting echoes and addresses the consequences of social modernization, such as urban decay, psychological alienation, and the decline of religious faith in favor of empirical positivism. Odilon Redon's unsettling works that could be understood as nightmarish alternatives to Darwinian theory, Fernand Khnopff's escape into schematized

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[8] For a useful summary of the historiography of Symbolist study prior to the mid-nineteen eighties, see Patty Chelap, "Bibliography: Symbolist Art, 1974-1984," *Art Journal* 45 (1985): 171-180.

[9] For examples of this interpretation, see Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), Pierre Théberge, ed., *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe* (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1995), and Robert Delevoy, *Symbolists and Symbolism*, trans. Barbara Bray, Elizabeth Wrightson and Bernard C. Smith (New York: Skira, 1978.)

medieval romance, and James Ensor's and Ambrose Vuillard's psychologically distressing urban scenes all represent alternatives to the dominant social narrative of urbanized western Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. With its escapist and occult themes, Symbolism has often been interpreted as negating the importance of quotidian reality. It does not appear obvious that social and political issues occupy a place of great importance in Symbolist work.

Furthermore, the chronological and stylistic boundaries of Symbolism have been subject to continuous debate. Unlike Impressionism or Expressionism, which have generally agreed-upon visual characteristics, form part of a Hegelian dialectic of styles, and boast a canonical list of practitioners, Symbolism has functioned as a more vague and all-inclusive term. It can encompass the spectrum from naturalism to post-impressionism, as well as both representational and abstract art. In art historical scholarship, the Symbolist umbrella has extended retroactively to include artists and groups such as Eugene Delacroix, the Pre-Raphaelites, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Odilon Redon, and forward to Expressionism and the Surrealists. [10] In between, the Nabis, artists who participated in the Rose+Croix Salon (1892-1897) or were associated with modernist societies such as Les XX (1883-1893), and Post-Impressionists have all been examined from a Symbolist standpoint. While stylistically diverse, these artists were believed to share a common philosophical bent that informed their works – that of preoccupation with a conceptual space beyond the quotidian which Symbolists works strove to capture.[11]

[10] For example, the exhibit "The Sacred and the Profane in Symbolist Art" (Turin and Toronto 1968-1969) included artists such as William Blake and J.M.W. Turner, who fall chronologically outside the generally accepted chronological boundaries of Symbolism but who were argued to be Symbolists because of the stylistic and conceptual traits of their art. See Luigi Carluccio, *The Sacred and Profane in Symbolist Art* (exh. cat.) (Turin: Associazione Amici Torinessi dell'Arte Contemporanea, 1969).

[11] Hans Hofstatter, *Symbolizm* (trans. Sławomir Błaut) (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo artystyczne i filmowe, 1980). Also, see note 9.

Symbolism's origins are found in French poetry of the later half of the nineteenth century; the term was coined by Jean Moréas in a discussion of poetry in *Le Figaro* in 1886. In Moréas' understanding, Symbolist poetry avoided objective description and didacticism and embraced elusiveness, in this way alluding to an ultimately ungraspable "Idea" in a form "perceptible to the senses." [12] Moréas' conceptualization of Symbolism found reflection in two essays by art critic Georges-Albert Aurier that identified and described Symbolism in contemporary painting.[13] Aurier's essays were responsible for articulating an understanding of what he termed "Synthetist" painting that proved crucial in shaping later understandings of the Symbolist style. Synthetist painting was based on the concept of the idea: it made use of symbols in order to express a higher, more perfect reality. Aurier's contemporary Maurice Denis also wrote on what he termed Symbolism in painting,[14] but the trend as an object of art historical study faded from view until the nineteen-thirties, blindsided by the rise of modernist abstraction.

For the most part, artists associated with Symbolism avoided total abstraction and focused on themes of degeneration, illness, interiority, metaphysics and the occult. This emphasis on content at the expense of a unified style encouraged twentieth-century interpretations of Symbolism as a diversion from the path of self-referential formalism.[15] To be sure, the Symbolist penchant for moving away from empirical reality was seen to have provided

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[12] Jean Moreas, "Le Symbolisme," *Le Figaro: supplement litteraire*, September 18 1886, 150, quoted in Henri Dorra, ed. *Symbolist Art Theories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 150.

[13] G.-Albert Aurier, "Le Symbolisme en Peinture: Paul Gauguin" and "Les Peintres Symbolistes," *Revue Encyclopedique*, April 1892.

[14] Maurice Denis, *Théories 1890-1912*, ed. L. Rouart and J. Watelin (Paris: 1972): 113-123.

[15] Robert Delevoy, *Symbolists and Symbolism* (London: MacMillan, 1978), argues that Symbolism is characterized by "atmosphere". See also Philippe Jullian, The Symbolists (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977).

a springboard for abstract art – notably in the cases of Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky.[16] But such a teleological interpretation dismissed other Symbolist practitioners who focused on patently figurative idioms to express otherworldly content. Because the themes of Symbolism were viewed as being very much "in the moment" – psychological unrest, the femme fatale, illness, perversion, introversion and the occult – there was an unspoken assumption among scholars that as these fascinations fell out of favor, so too did the painting that celebrated them.

In 1979, at the height of modernist formalism, Robert Goldwater wrote a highly influential text on Symbolism that codified the prevailing two–tiered model of Symbolism.[17] He made an emphatic distinction between the *synthetist* line deriving from Gauguin, in which forms were flattened and integrated through line, and Aurier's model, and that of *gedankenmalerei,* or naturalist "thought painting" with its proclivity for more traditional narrative and allegory. The ability of Synthetist painting to suggest another world and the means it used to do so – formal distortion and spatial ambiguity foremost among them – were seen as forerunners to early abstract work, such as that of Mondrian and Kandinsky. In terms of subject matter, the morbid preoccupations and pessimism of Symbolism were connected to early Expressionism, as in the cases of Edvard Munch and James Ensor. "Allegorical" Symbolists such as Fernand Khnopff, Carlos Schwabe and Edmond Aman-Jean were demoted to a secondary category of importance. The work of *Gedankenmalerei* painters was understood as inferior in terms of modernism; the work of Synthetist painters was seen as part and parcel of the progression towards the avant-garde. The Polish case, as I will argue, overturns Goldwater's binary model, for the symbolists of

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[16] Rose-Carol Washton Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

[17] Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

Young Poland availed themselves of modernist inflections and spatial distortions in order to communicate deeply philosophical and conflicted meditations on their state of "suspension" and "in-betweenness." In Polish Symbolism, minute surface description often works in tandem with anti-naturalistic compositional strategies and synthetist, decorative distortions.

The Polish case also benefits from revisionist models of scholarship that have demonstrated the emphatic links between Symbolist painting and the culture in which Symbolist painters lived and worked. Working on countries in Western Europe, Debora Silverman, Reinhold Heller, Michelle Facos, Sharon Hirsh have questioned the previous view of Symbolism as a flight from reality, describing it as a concerted response to, rather than an escape from, the social issues of fin-de-siècle society. The prevalence of the femme fatale, notions of the inevitable morbidity and tragedy of interactions between genders, and the proliferation of mythological figures are most often related to fears about sexually transmitted disease and the evils of urbanization. The content of Symbolist work, to borrow from the psychology being developed during the period, is seen as occupying a space between the latent and the manifest.[18]

Facos, in a survey of Symbolist art in context, as well as a more detailed anthology of national case studies,[19] illuminates the ways in which modernist painters relied upon Symbolist devices of deformation and ambiguity to articulate notions of nationhood and identity. Her study of Swedish National Romanticism shows that Swedish modernists, including Symbolists, flirted with medievalist references and folk art in their work, which was able to embrace social

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[18] Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989): 75-109.

[19] Michelle Facos and Sharon Hirsh, eds., *Art, Culture and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

modernity without abandoning concerns linked to national tradition.[20] Taking a thematic approach, Hirsh shows the ways in which the tropes of Symbolism effectively represented aspects of late nineteenth-century urbanity in Belgium, France and Scandinavia, such as new and claustrophobic mappings of urban space and fears associated with the diseased woman.[21] In her study on French Art Nouveau, Silverman reveals the connection between new notions of psychology and modernist style.[22] In her more recent book on the paintings of Paul Gauguin and Vincent Van Gogh, Silverman argues that their differences derive from individual responses to traditions of spiritual expression, arguing that Gauguin's seminary education and Van Gogh's protestant background influenced their stylistic decisions, showcasing Symbolist approaches to spirituality in modern society.[23]

Recent work on Symbolism argues for the interconnectedness of its formal investigations and contemporary social and cultural phenomena. Rather than suggest that Symbolism was a rejection of the contemporary, it reveals the ways in which artists made use of the style to formulate careful responses to their milieu. The decline of organized religion, concerns about

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[20] Michelle Facos, *Nationalism and the Nordic Imagination: Swedish Art of the 1890's* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1998.)

[21] Sharon Hirsh: *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.) As Patricia Tilburg has pointed out, Hirsh's book is seen as an attempt to revitalize Symbolist historiography and "retrieve" Symbolists. See Patricia Tilburg, review of *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society*, by Sharon Hirsh, *Journal of Modern History* 78 (September 2006): 698-99. See also Michelle Facos and Sharon Hirsh, eds., *Art, Culture and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[22] Debora Silverman, ibid.

[23]Ibid., *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004). See also Judy Sund, *Art & Ideas: Van Gogh* (London: Phaidon Press, 2002) and for a discussion of contemporary literature in relation to Van Gogh, *True to Temperament: Van Gogh and French Naturalist Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

national identity and the development of fears about degeneration and urbanization found full expression in the tropes, motifs and formal decisions of European Symbolists.

Whereas the literature on Western European Symbolism has deepened over the last two decades, Polish Symbolism remains understudied. Its treatment in the secondary literature -- particularly its relation to issues of nationalism and identity -- is not so much disputed as unexamined. Recent commentaries on early modernism in Poland such as those by Jan Cavanaugh and Anna Brzyski have fleshed out the social and political dimensions of artists' work, exploring the ways in which modernism was adapted to the needs of the Polish audience.[24] In doing so, they have moved beyond the focus on formal similarities between Polish modernism and that of Western Europe that characterized most of the earlier scholarship. This dissertation aims to build upon the foundations of that work by turning to the specifics of the Symbolist mode and its manifestations in Polish territory.

The earliest sources on Polish Symbolism, contemporaneous with the artwork itself and consisting largely of exhibition reviews and essays, tended to fall into two opposing camps. Symbolist art was implicated in an ongoing argument between those critics who supported modernism, and those who viewed it as a threat to the standard expectations of patriotic didacticism in painting.[25] It should be noted, however, that the contemporary understanding of

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[24] Anna Brzyski, *Modern Art and Nationalism in Fin-de-Siecle Poland*. PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1999, and "Constructing the Canon: The Album *Polish Art* and the Writing of Modernist Art History of Polish19th-Century Painting." *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 3 (2004), http://19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/spring04/284-constructing-the-canon-the-album- polish-art-and-the-writing-of-modernist-art-history-of-polish-19th-century-painting. Jan Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In: Early Modern Polish Art, 1890-1918*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

[25] For an example of the former, see Ludwik Szczepański,"Sztuka Narodowa [National Art]." *Życie* 2, no. 9 (1898) : 97-8; *Życie* 2, no.10 (1898): 109-110. For an example of the latter, see Piast [Stanisław Szczepanowski]. Dezinfekcja prądów europejskich [Disinfection of European Currents]." *Słowo Polskie* no. 40 (1898): 34-43.

the term Symbolism often conflated it with the term modernism, and reviews and discussions of Symbolist works shied away from labeling them as such.

The first significant sustained study on Polish modernism, including Symbolism, was the serial album "Polish Art," which was published beginning in 1903.[26] This album contained commentaries on reproductions of the works of several modern artists, including Symbolists Wojciech Weiss, Jacek Malczewski and Józef Mehoffer. As Anna Brzyski has demonstrated, the album definitively established a canon of Polish art which has had an enduring influence on subsequent generations of art historians. Scholarship on Polish Symbolism remained dormant during and between the two World Wars; a new wave of scholarly activity focused on early Polish modernism began in the 1960's with the publication of works such as Tadeusz Dobrowolski's "Art of Young Poland."[27] Dobrowolski provided a sweeping overview of Polish modernism, and later works, such as exhibition catalogues, monographs on individual artists, and other overviews of modernism, have expanded upon individual artists and currents within this broad field. However, all of these works tend to overwhelmingly descriptive stylistic analyses, and their sometimes cursory treatment of Symbolist artists does not expand to a focused analysis of the implications of the Symbolist mode for the Polish situation. [28]

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[26] Jasieński, Feliks and Adam Łada-Cybulski, eds., *Sztuka Polska: Malarstwo* [Polish Art: Painting] (Kraków : Drukarnia W. L. Anczyca i Spółki: 1903).

[27] Tadeusz Dobrowolski,Sztuka Młodej Polski [The Art of Young Poland.] Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1963.

[28] Some prominent examples of this approach include Anna Gradowska, *Sztuka Mlodej Polski,* [The Art of Young Poland]. Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1984), Stefania Krzysztofowicz-Kozakowska, *Sztuka Młodej Polski* (Kraków: Kluszczyński, 1999), and Adam Grzymala-Siedlecki, *Niepospolici ludzie w dniu swoim powszednim* [Unusual People in their own Day] (Krakow: Universitas, 1962).

A significant exception to this general rule is Wiesław Juszczak's lengthy essay of 1974 "Modernism," in which the author linked the first waves of modernism, including Symbolism, to earlier nineteenth-century traditions.[29] But Juszczak's emphasis on continuity led him to ignore the entirely novel contributions of the Symbolist style to these well-known and well-worn themes by reducing the work of leading Symbolists, such as that of Jan Stanisławski, to a mere homegrown extension of naturalism.[30] Several years after Juszczak's essay, the next sustained work on Symbolism as a discrete modernist entity occurred with an exhibition for the Detroit Museum of Art, curated by Agnieszka Morawińska. The accompanying catalog and book of essays, published in Polish and English, brought Polish Symbolism to a wider audience for the first time and established a "canon" of Symbolist artists based upon thematic grounds. [31] However, the catalogue did not extensively contextualize Polish Symbolism, nor did it delve into the pressing issue of Symbolism as the "national style" of unrealized sovereignty.

The most recent work on Polish Symbolism continues to occur within the context of exhibitions and surveys of Polish modernism in its entirety. Some of these sources make explicit connections to social and political realities; but they do not relate these connections to the characteristics of the Symbolist mode. The exception to this general trend are a few analyses of the work of Wojciech Weiss and Jacek Malczewski. The multivalency of Malczewski's allegories and the complexity of his style has led Piotr Piotrowski, for one, to explain his

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[29] Wiesław Juszczak, "Modernizm [Modernism]," in *Malarstwo Polskiego Modernizmu* [The Painting of Polish Modernism](Gdansk: Słowo/obraz/terytorium, 2004): 7-128.

[30] Ibid., *Jan Stanisławski* (Warsaw: Arkady, 1997.)

[31]Agnieszka Morawińska, *Symbolizm w malarstwie polskim: 1890-1914* [Symbolism in Polish Painting: 1890-1914]. Warsaw: Arkady, 1997. See also *Symbolism in Poland: Collected Essays*. Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1988.

paintings as a series of complicated philosophical exegeses, while Łukasz Kossowski has related Weiss' work to contemporary Symbolist conceptions of death and creation.[32] Most recently, Irena Kossowska and Łukasz Kossowski provide an updated canonical overview of Polish Symbolism, but focus upon the phenomenon within the context of the "Young Poland" movement.[33]

The English-language literature on Polish Symbolism is scant. Whereas individual artists such as Jacek Malczewski and Wojciech Weiss have been included in broad surveys such as Jean Clair's *Lost Paradise*, and Elizabeth Clegg's *Art and Architecture in Central Europe*, the wider field of artists and concerns remain unexplored. Language and access to paintings have been two impediments for Anglo-American scholars. But overall, the lack of attention may well be due to the strong presence of a descriptive naturalism combined with allegory, even though it is precisely these attributes that, in Polish Symbolist hands, become the focus of novel, modernist strategies of representation. The most focused work on Polish Symbolism in English is a chapter in Jan Cavanaugh's 2000 book on early Polish modernism, *Out Looking In*, which covers the flowering of Impressionism, Expressionism, and Symbolism in Poland after 1890, and addresses aspects of the institutional history of Polish modernism.[34] In more general terms, Anna Brzyski has explored the convoluted path to critical and public acceptance of modernism in Poland in the

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[32] Piotr Piotrowski, *Sztuka wedlug Polityki: Od Melancholii do Pasji* [Art According to Politics: From *Melancholia* to *The Passion*] (Krakow: Universitas, 2007). See also Piotr, Juszkiewwicz, ed., *Melancholia Jacka Malczewskiego: materiały seminarium Instytutu Historii Sztuki UAM I Muzeum Narodowego* [Jacek Malczewski's *Melancholia*: Materials from the Seminarium of UAM and the National Museum] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo PTPN, 2002). Łukasz Kossowski, *Totenmesse: Munch –Weiss – Przybyszewski* (Warsaw: Adam Mickiewicz Museum, 1995).

[33] Irena Dżurkowa-Kossowska and Łukasz Kossowski, *Malarstwo Polskie: Symbolizm I Młoda Polska* [Polish Painting: Symbolism and Young Poland] (Warsaw: Arkady, 2010).

[34] Jan Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, 171-210..

above-mentioned works, and Justyna Drozdek's dissertation provides an analysis of the role of the two key modernist periodicals, *Chimera* and *Życie*, in the formation of Polish modernism.[35]

The more recent analyses of Western European Symbolism discussed above offer a new methodological framework with which to address the political realities of fin-de-siècle Krakow and Warsaw, the lasting legacy of nineteenth century Polish history painting, and the pressures brought to bear in modernizing both Polish society and its culture. Adapting the Western European interpretetive model wholesale, however, creates difficulties. The two cities that saw the development of Polish Symbolism – Krakow and Warsaw – did not follow patterns of large-scale urban concentration and industrialization. Krakow, in particular, was recognized by local artists and intellectuals as a sleepy, provincial city in an impoverished outlying region of the Austro-Hungarian empire.[36] While French Symbolists responded to anxieties about urban dystopias, Polish Symbolism was a response to a larger, more generalized dystopia of national space, in which rural landscapes were equally fraught with uncertainties about class and identity. The new psychology of the interior space, understood in domestic context in Western Europe, assumes novel significance when applied to Poland's nation in suspension, existent only in the interior space of the artist's Symbolist imagination. Using overlapping, but not identical, archetypes and motifs Polish Symbolism managed to address a novel range of concerns unique to its particular milieu.

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[35] Justyna Drozdek, *Life and Chimera: Framing Modernism in Poland* (PhD. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2008).

[36] Franciszek Klein, *Notatnik Krakowski* [Krakovian Notebook] (Krakow, Wydanie Literackie, 1965) and Tadeusz Boy-Zelenski, *Znasz-li ten kraj?* [Do You Know this Country?] (Wroclaw: Zaklad Narodowy im. Ossolinskich, 2004).

Polish critics, writers and artists formulated their theories of Symbolism in tandem with ideas of nationalistic expression. In their work, pan-European anxieties merged with specifically Polish concerns about national identity and political integrity. Polish Symbolism reveals a deep-seated ambiguity and pessimism about the future of an integrated state; elusiveness and insubstantiality of its motifs constituted rebuttals to the strident and didactic bent of earlier nationalist art.

Lastly, the deep and detailed stylistic analyses provided by Silverman in her work on Van Gogh and Gauguin has helped to bridge the divide between *gedankenmalerei* and synthetism, making a case for the symbolism as an approach that is integrated in its basic themes and concerns in spite of apparent differences of style. The weight and weft of brushstrokes, distortions of space, and combinations of hues all contain symbolic importance that moves beyond a discussion of the relative degree of mimesis. While Silverman limits her thesis to the spiritual and religious goals of the two artists, the tensions she describes -- between accurate representation and suggestive abstraction -- also underscore the conflicted nationalism that pervades the images of Polish symbolists. In a country that was still deeply Catholic, aspects of spirituality in Polish Symbolism were inevitably compared to traditional religious depictions. Furthermore, the specific religiosity of nineteenth-century Polish nationalism, in which the country was styled a “Christ among nations” in its literature, meant that Polish Symbolists were compelled to wrest new meanings from traditional religious symbols; in this, they were aided by the spiritual explorations of Western European artists such as Van Gogh and Gauguin.

The chapters of “European Symbolism Transformed: The Case of Poland” examine Symbolist painting in Poland in multiple overlapping contexts: Symbolism across Europe; the political and cultural environment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in which all the Symbolist

artists discussed here lived or worked; nineteenth-century nationalist traditions in Polish art, and the traditional art historical understanding of Symbolism as a formal style. A chronological structure for the thesis would only have perpetuated a survey of styles and artists. Analyzing Polish Symbolism according to central thematic issues will not only explicate heretofore negated aspects of meaning and intentionality, but will question the boundaries and definitions and of Symbolism on the whole – including that of Western Europe.

Polish Symbolists were hardly the first artists to address issues of nationalism, but as Chapter Two, "Polish Symbolism and Nationalism argues, the possibilities inherent in the style meant that they brought fresh perspective to well-worn issues. Since the Romantic era, Polish art had been dealing with issues of nationalism in a situation where such expression was only feasible in the realm of cultural expression.[37] The weight of Polish history and nationalism and its required representation in the arts conflicted with the modernist focus on the expression of individual experience. The nature of national cultural expression throughout the nineteenth century was marked by pessimism and a sense of separation from the quotidian reality of foreign occupation. Nineteenth-century artists were obligated to create a parallel reality through their work, an imaginary autonomous "nation." This concept of nation was characterized by patriotic, occasionally messianic and mystical overtones. The advent of the Symbolist artist-seer allowed for a reframing of this Romantic tradition of imaginary nationhood.[38]

With modernism came charges from critics that artists had abandoned traditional areas of focus in favor of imitation of foreign styles. The chapter attempts to scrutinize more closely the

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[37] Stefan Morawski, "Polish Theories of Art Between 1830 and 1850," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 16 (1957): 217-236.

[38] For aspects of nationalism and modernism across Europe, see Michelle Facos and Sharon Hirsh, eds., *Art, Culture and National Identity*.

ways in which Symbolism as a style responded to the nationalist urge on the part of Polish modernists. These methods, often subtle, were recognized at the time by modernist critics and the artists themselves, but not by more traditional critics, and, more noticeably, not by subsequent generations of scholars. The strident, unquestioning nationalism of earlier works of art was simply out of touch with the more ambiguous atmosphere and mentality of modernists. Symbolist ambiguity, both formal and in terms of content, became an ideal vehicle for expressing modern issues of identity and nationalism.

Through a close analysis of the Symbolist works of artists engaged in a rhetoric of nation such as Jacek Malczewski, Wojciech Weiss and Ferdynand Ruszczyc, the latter part of Chapter Two pinpoints the elements in these paintings that speak to nationalist issues, such as references to regional lands, the Polish Catholic tradition and specific historical event. The existing literature has assumed that the inclusion of these motifs was inspired by and characterized by the same impulses that drove Romantic and Naturalist painters. While this is partially true, the specific ways in which these traditional elements are woven into a larger canvas of Symbolist ambiguity urges a fresh reading of traditional symbols. Nationalist urges and consciousness were already omnipresent in Europe at the fin-de-siècle; the case of Polish artists provided a unique opportunity for the concurrence of these phenomena and Symbolism.

Chapter Three, “Polish Symbolism on the Margins of Europe,” places Polish Symbolist painting in the context of general European Symbolism. By comparing specific aspects of Western European and Polish Symbolism, it reveals the ways in which ideas and strategies initiated in foreign territory found new validity and application in Poland. The first part of this chapter documents how the transmission of Symbolism between Krakow, Warsaw and cities such as Paris, Berlin and Munich were made possible thanks to the travels and studies of

individual artists, professional teaching activities. In so doing, it traces the influential development of Symbolist critics and writers Zenon "Miriam" Przesmycki and Stanisław Przybyszewski and their impact on Polish Symbolism. Both of these critics were thoroughly grounded in the activities of Western European Symbolism, and the means through which they propagated those ideas affected the development of Polish Symbolism. By tracing the development of their thinking, criticism, and translation of Western texts, a picture emerges of the framework to which Symbolist painters were exposed. The ways in which references were made by both authors to the Polish situation suggests that they were highly aware of Symbolism's potential for commentary on issues of nationalism and modern identity.

The second part of the chapter creates connections between specific examples of Western European and Polish Symbolist painting. Stylistic connections have been analyzed in the past, but the different implications for similar formal devices have not been thoroughly explored. The same issues or images could hold startlingly different meaning in the case of Polish Symbolism. While artists such as James Ensor, Edvard Munch and Carlos Schwabe made use of certain images and devices to explore notions of anxiety, otherworldliness and urbanity at the end of the century, Polish Symbolists such as Jacek Malczewski and Wojciech Weiss used similar images to relate directly to issues of identity and nationalism. In this sense, the chapter seeks to go beyond the stylistic borrowing noted in scholarship to date and to delve into the possible reasons behind the Symbolist philosophy used in these images. The second part of the chapter will consist of comparative case studies of selected works by Polish Symbolists and their Western European counterparts.

Chapter Four, "Exhibiting Polish Modernism: Nationalism and the *Sztuka* Group," a closer look at the organizational aspects of early Polish modernity and Symbolism's contribution

to that modernity, specifically through the lens of the most prominent artists' organization in turn of the century Poland, the *Sztuka* exhibition society. The membership of *Sztuka*, which encompassed Polish artists from all sectors of partitioned Poland, included almost all prominent Polish Symbolists, and its leadership and influential members were drawn from the ranks of Symbolists. Given this fact, it is reasonable to assume that Symbolist ways of thinking about and approaching the creative process were brought to bear on the decisions and initiatives of the *Sztuka* group.

In particular, the exhibition practices of *Sztuka* in such venues as the Vienna Secession revealed the influence of Symbolist thought and helped present a cross-section of Polish modern art, not just Symbolism, in a specific context. The active participation of members of *Sztuka* in the Secession was logical given Krakow's status as a satellite city of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus, the influence of Symbolism presented itself as part of the image of Polishness presented abroad for foreign viewership. Polish modernism was helped in defining itself by Symbolist practice, which encouraged the foregrounding of issues of identity and nationalism in an international context.

The Symbolist guiding notion of the *gesamtkunstwerk* and its application to select *Sztuka* exhibitions encouraged viewers of the organization's shows to understand the separate works on display as being conceptually connected. The demonstrated cohesiveness of these works suggested a united front of Polish modernism, rather than a loose grouping of artists working collectively who happened to share an ethnic identity. It suggested that certain issues of identity and nationalism were the concern of modernists as a group, transcending individual differences without squelching individual styles. This, in turn, reinforced the particularly Polish approach to

Symbolism as a style, an approach characterized not so much by solipsism and the occult as by social engagement with thorny issues of nationalism and identity.

Chapter Five, “Overcoming the Symbolist Divide: Allegory and Synthetism in the Paintings of Jacek Malczewski and Jan Stanisławski,” examines the formal structure of two of the most prominent Polish Symbolists. It examines the peculiar formal characteristics of these two artists against the Symbolist divide of gedankenmalerei and synthetism. At first glance, the work of these artists would not seem to disturb this categorization – Jacek Malczewski’s figural paintings echo those of the Munich painters whom he was acquainted with during his time there, such as Arnold Böcklin, while Jan Stanisławski’s semi-abstracted landscapes appear classically synthetist.

Upon closer examination, however, the characteristics of these works begin to extend beyond the boundaries of the traditional divide. Malczewski’s works, while undoubtedly representational and naturalistic, contain certain formal distortions and incongruities that demand further exploration. These distortions and manipulations of space and relation in Malczewski’s work can be understood as Symbolist commentary on issues of national identity, political autonomy, cultural tradition and modernist angst. By skewing the viewer’s initially firm understanding of time, space and place in his works, Malczewski invites contemplation of how the fluidity of categories normally understood as stable can lead to reevaluations of those categories, and to contemplation on issues of nationhood and modern identity.

This pull between the abstract and the concrete is also present in the works of Stanisławski; in his works, familiar aspects of Polish landscape acquire ambiguity. By refusing to remove identity altogether, Stanisławski maintains reference to key markers of national identity. At the same time, the dissolving masses in his work suggest the fluid and elusive nature

of that identity; the land, the physical foundation of nationhood, is here placed in a position of ambiguity.

The blending of characteristics of both *gedankenmalerei* and synthetism in the works of Malczewski and Stanisławski suggests that each artist discovered a unique means of navigating the array of Symbolist devices to fit their creative imperatives. It also suggests that a blend of these characteristics was the most appropriate means of expressing certain ideas and concerns about traditional Polish topics – landscape, political and personal identity, and nationhood. The nuances of the works of these two artists correspond to the complexity of their response to being Polish modernists in the context of Empire.

Symbolist artists returned repeatedly to the concept of the in-between, a state of immanence between grounded-ness and transcendence, between logical understanding and irrational enlightenment. For the first generation of Symbolists, the notion of the in-between related directly to an artwork's ability to allude to an immaterial idea. Yet is became a fortuitous metaphor for the situation in which Polish modernists found themselves at the turn of the twentieth century; their transformation of the Symbolist style was spurred on by immediate local realities and a national tradition that demanded to be addressed in their creative projects.

Polish Symbolists of the fin-de-siècle were in a peculiar state of suspension between the seemingly conflicting demands of nationalism and modernism. Trained in a tradition that made little distinction between artistic expression and patriotic duty, they were more than cognizant of critical and public expectations in relation to their art. However, the artistic traditions of their teachers, in which grandiose historical references hearkened to a distant Golden Age of landed gentry, were absurdly discordant with the fin-de-siècle reality of Krakow, a mostly complacent

Imperial outpost that retained an air of faded medieval glory. While attitudes towards Polish nationhood in the earlier part of the nineteenth century could be characterized as incorporating the notion of a lost paradise, complete with elements of mystical martyrdom, the environment in which Polish modernists circulated was markedly different. The majority of Symbolist artists came from impoverished gentry; their now tenuous connection to the land, once a sure repository of national identity, and their psychological disconnect from its peasantry reflected the reality of dispossession and the legacy of urbanization in Poland. Symbolists approached the motif of native landscape with caution; its representation in their work is marked by ambiguities, discontinuities and disjunctions. The figure of the peasant, once seen as organically connected to the land, came to be imbued with ambiguous attitudes towards Polish national identity. Likewise, references to the Roman Catholic tradition in which Symbolists were raised are presented in their work in new and startling associations.

If Symbolists were wary of traditional markers of identity and nationhood, they were also dependent upon them as inherent symbols of Polish identity. As individuals from the margins of Europe, in between national identity and subjection to Empire, Symbolists could not afford to abandon these motifs; but the weight of traditional associations inhibited the scope of their creative expression and modernist yearnings. These artists actively sought a means of continuing to express their Polishness while confirming their allegiance to modernity. Prior to the advent of Symbolism in Poland, this contradiction seemed irresolvable – in order to accurately express their Polishness, modernists had to forego new and "foreign" styles.

Symbolism presented a means of bridging the quandary of tradition and modernity. It related to the position of Polish artists as an ethnic minority in a Germanic Empire, struggling with their relationship with a past in which national identity was tied up in narrowly conceived

creative expression, and with a future in which the language of modernism was gaining force as the lingua franca of European culture. It helped artists negotiate the competing demands of allegory and didacticism inherited from history painting and the modernist imperatives of formal innovation and exploration. Thus, Polish Symbolists, who were forced by circumstance to establish a collective identity beyond the borders of their own historical territory in international exhibitions, were able to perpetuate, manipulate and ultimately transform the received vocabulary of an imported idiom. They transformed the previous boundaries of European Symbolism in the process.

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Chapter II

Polish Symbolism and Nationalism

This chapter will look at Symbolist painting in Poland against the backdrop of one of the greatest cultural clashes in the late nineteenth-century "margins" of Europe: the emergence of the modern artist against the backdrop of traditional nationalism and a changed understanding of art's social and patriotic mission. First, it is necessary to chart the development and reception of specifically Symbolist aesthetic and creative theories by thinkers such as Ignacy Matuszewski, Stanisław Przybyszewski and Artur Górski, often considered the most characteristically modern in Poland, and the ways in which they collided or agreed with nationalist tradition. Second, the chapter will attempt to reveal the ways in which Symbolist painting formed a bridge between nineteenth-century heritage and twentieth-century modernism, one that allowed nationalist concerns to be expressed and explored in an era of increasing emphasis on "pure" painting. Finally, it will look at selected works of Polish Symbolist painters who have not been traditionally associated with nationalism, among them Krzysztof Krzyżanowski, Ferdynand Ruszczyc and Józef Mehoffer. Selected works of these artists will be divided into three general categories: domestic interiors, self-portraits and landscape. These categories, rendered in Symbolist style, also provide unique spaces in which to express ideas about nationalism.

> Krakow pleases me very much – so strange, some kind of melancholy dignity of 300 centuries has blown through its streets and edifices so that it appears as an old man who looks upon ever-diminishing numbers of people – Because the people here, taken as a whole, are rather apathetic, empty types, who look like wax figures moving around among the monuments.[39]

This description of the most important cultural center of Polish modernism was written by a seventeen-year-old art student fifteen years before Jean Moréas' Symbolist Manifesto and nineteen years before the arrival of modernism in Polish territory.[40] Malczewski's description captures an artistic and urban center oppressed under the weight of history and tradition, where even current activity was pemeated by a sense of collective fatalistic resignation. Malczewski's similes could be aptly applied to contemporary history painting in Poland, which was very much engaged in commemorating the past and ignoring the politically hopeless present. With the advent of modernist styles, such as Impressionism and Symbolism, in Polish territory in the 1890's, it would seem that the concerns of nationalist painting would have been abandoned in favor of celebrating modern technique and the creative potential of the individual artist. But while Modernism's techniques may, at first glance, have seemed incompatible with the traditionalist agendas of history painting, Malczewski and many of his Symbolist contemporaries who embraced new trends from Western Europe continued to address many of the same themes and concerns as the preceding generation of history painters. This chapter will chart explorations, not only of new formal strategies but also of innovatiove approaches to modes of nationalism.

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[39] "Kraków bardzo mi się podoba – taka dziwna, jakaś smętna powaga 300 wieków owiała jego ulicę i gmachy że wygląda jak starzec który spogląda na coraz bardziej malejących ludzi – Bo ludzie ogólnie tutaj wzięci tacy jacyś apatyczni, próżni że wyglądają jak figurki woskowe przesuwające się między pomnikami." Jacek Malczewski to Maria Malczewska, 7 September 1871, manuscript 7, nr. 202, Special Collections, Library of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw.

[40] Tadeusz Dobrowolski, *Sztuka Młodej Polski* [The Art of Young Poland] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1963): 14-16.

Malczewski's Krakovian "wax figures" find an echo in Wyspiański's painting *Capsheaves*, which ventures into the realm of supernatural possibility by combining Polish folklore and Romantic pantheism. *Capsheaves* (fig. 1), like Malczewski's countryside scenes, features a blend of realism and symbol. The work ostensibly depicts a circle of trimmed rose bushes covered by grain sheaves, situated in the garden area surrounding Krakow's medieval city walls. The sheaves are intensely anthropomorphic, seemingly communicating or perhaps conspiring with each other. Their transformation into sentient beings has roots in Polish folklore, but also indicates the regenerative qualities of the land itself, and by extension the nation.[41] In *Capsheaves*, Wyspiański has begun with a realist scene and stretched it to the bounds of plausibility in order to evoke an otherworldly, Symbolist atmosphere.

This sentiment can similarly be found in Wojciech Weiss' *Poppies* (fig. 2), in which a young boy and girl rise from sleep in the midst of a blindingly bright poppy field. The poppies and the sleep of the children make reference to recreational opium use in fin-de-siècle Europe and its assumed links to an increase in creative powers; the altered state of consciousness brought about by drug use was advocated by Przybyszewski as a gateway to creation.[42] The privileged vision of the child is here equated with the notion of the privileged vision of the artist-seer. At the same time, the overtones of apathy and childishness could indicate social and political immobilization.

While not explicitly nationalist in content at first glance, works such as *Capsheaves* and *Poppies* were deeply implicated within an ongoing discourse on art, nation and identity in Polish

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[41] Zofia Kossak, *Rok Polski: Obyczaj i wiara* [The Polish Year: Customs and Faith] (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy „Pax", 1974.)

[42] Roman Taborski, "Stanisław Przybyszewski and the 'New Art'," in *Symbolism in Polish Painting*, Charazińska and Morawińska, eds., 17.

territory. In order to understand their specific ramifications, as well as the ramifications of nationalism and Symbolism in Poland, it is necessary to be acquainted with the indigenous nineteenth-century understanding of the artist as a "nationalist" actor and the ways in which this role produced and shaped conceptions about art. As elsewhere in Europe, modernism and social modernity were often met with alarm by the established critical elite and educated segments of the population. The advent of modernism in the arts became inevitably tangled up in the political debate that had been going on since the partitions of the late eighteenth century, when the country was divided between the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires and Prussia. As Norman Davies has demonstrated, post-partition cultural activity in Poland was essentially hijacked by political imperatives. Because Polish political identity became practically impossible, the intelligentsia relied upon cultural activity to preserve a binding national consciousness: for the educated elite, the artist became the universal embodiment and preserver of traditional and national values.[43] The Romantic movement coincided with national uprisings and thus had a particularly strong resonance: Poland's premier poets, among them Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Krasiński, were active during this period. The impact of a series of failed insurrections throughout the 19th century helped bolster rebellious patriotism. The mysticism inherent to Romantic philosophy encouraged a dramatic understanding of the

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[43] Norman Davies, *Serce Europy* [The Heart of Europe] (London: Aneks, 1995): 240-245. For a useful summary of the national mission of the 19th century Polish artist, see Alain van Crugten, "W poszukiwaniu zagadki jedności narodowej [In Search of the Riddle of the National Unit]," trans. Ewa Pukalak et. al., in *Młoda Polska: Bruksela-Kraków 1890-1920* [Young Poland: Brussels-Krakow 1890-1920] (exh. cat.), ed. Marcin Jasionowicz (Krakow: Muzeum Narodowe, 1997):11-27. See also Jan Cavanaugh, "Art Theory and Criticism in the Service of a National Cause," in *Out Looking In: Early Modern Polish Art, 1890-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 15-24.

political fate of the Polish nation and underpinned links drawn between Christian ideas about martyrdom and resurrection, and the body of the nation itself.[44]

Many Poles reacted to the absence of political autonomy in one of two ways – physical emigration and internal emigration. The former strategy took Poles to Western Europe, particularly Paris, which became their de facto cultural center. The latter was characterized by willful ignorance of current political realities and a focus on what were assumed to be eternal or timeless values. In internal emigration, the patriotic Polish citizen preserved indigenous culture by absorbing and discussing literature, art and music. While political realities were assumed to be beyond the control of the patriot, the values expressed in Polish culture were considered transcendent and therefore worthy of constant protection. The notion of transcendence appealed to Romantic sensibilities, as it would also prove influential for later Symbolist artists in Poland. The strategies of internal emigration can be compared in many ways to the philosophies of Symbolism, in which formal cues evoke a world beyond banal reality. Cultural activity that accompanied internal emigration was intended to evoke the eternal Poland, a nation that was a concept rather than an actual state. As Stefan Morawski explained of the Romantic period, "…It was in art that the chief problems of Polish national life were being discussed."[45] Since national life could not operate on the level of actual government on sovereign territory, art created an autonomous realm of projection.

This mindset, nourished in the decades of the 1830's through the 1850's, found itself faced with powerful opposition in the form of the rise of positivism in the 1870's. Krakow was

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[44] Wiesław Juszczak, *Malarstwo Polskiego Modernizmu* [The Painting of Polish Modernism] (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2004): 30-32.

[45] Stefan Morawski, "Polish Theories of Art Between 1830 and 1850," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 16 (1957): 217.

the center of the so-called Stańczyk movement, which advocated political cooperation with the imperial authorities. Three painful and bloody insurrections had failed earlier in the century, and the philosophy of positivism was characterized by the notion of "organic work" as a means of ensuring Polish political, social and economic growth.[46] Interestingly, positivism found full expression in Polish literature but not in painting, which maintained traces of Romanticism into the twentieth century. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, however, painting met with the most acclaim when it combined rational content and didacticism in its presentation of key historical events in Polish history. The most prominent representative of this school of thought was the historical painter Jan Matejko, who was the teacher at the Krakow School of Fine Arts for many of Poland's Symbolist artists. The vast majority of Matejko's work was a documentation of significant historical moments, often heavily dramatized and didactic.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Positivism began to be challenged by the emergence of modernist theories, initially from abroad and eventually by a new generation of Polish critics. The rejection of positivism by most fin-de-siècle thinkers and writers in Poland reflected a larger European trend. The advent of modernism in Poland resulted in a painful break with traditional imperatives of artistic activity and split art critics and writers into two opposing camps. While generational conflict accounts to some extent for this split, it can be argued that the fundamental theories of modernism represented a paradigm shift in ideas about art, the artist, and the processes and purposes of creative activity. Just as Positivists had rebelled against the foolhardy impracticality of Romanticism, so too did they react violently against the "unhealthy" strains of the new modernism. Positivist theorists such as Piotr Chmielowski decried what they

[46] Davies, *Serce Europy*, 162-65.

termed "art for art's sake," or any modern art that lacked traditional content, taking the phrase at face value and failing to understand the origins and worldview which led to its formulation.[47]

Given the socio-political circumstances, cultural production in Poland was considered politically crucial throughout the nineteenth century and the drift away from Naturalism and positivism in the late nineteenth century was alarming to those who believed that art's edifying mission was undergoing swift erosion. Positivist thinkers and politicians who advocated "organic work" as a means of conserving Polishness and dismissed that which was intangible did so out of a conviction that real progress could only be made on empirical grounds. Critics like Stanisław Szczepanowski were convinced that the illegibilities, ambiguities and foreign appearance of works of modernist art were the output of ill minds.[48] Some writers and social commentators attempted to find an explanation for new art styles in vaguely Darwinian understandings of human evolution. The most prominent example of this in Poland was the collaborative volume of three prominent writers, Wacław Nalkowski, Maria Komornicka and

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[47] Piotr Chmielowski, "Jeszcze o celu w sztuce [Further on Purpose in Art]," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (1904): 9. Polish positivists' refusal to engage with the philosophy behind this slogan's formulation reflects widespread contemporary reactions to the popularization of Nietzsche's philosophy among modernists and later charges of decadence leveled at modern artists. As Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska summed up, "The positivists were irritated by the rising cult of the artist in a society wanting in scholars as well as the rapid development of lyricism. The young were criticized for exaggerated egotism, emotionalism, detailed analysis of their own psychic states, an apotheosis of nervous illnesses, war against logic, eroticism and the like, who using for such charges exactly the term "decadents." [Pozytywistów drażnił zarówno wzrastający kult artysty w społeczeństwie pozbawionym uczonych, jak i szybki rozwój liryki. Krytykowano u młodych nadmierny egotyzm, uczuciowość, drobiazgową analizę własnych stanów psychicznych, apoteozę chorób nerwowych, wojnę z logiką, erotyzm itp., posługując się przy tym często – właśnie – określeniem „dekadenci."" As this chapter argues, all of the traits outlined by Podraza-Kwiatkowska were in fact extraordinarily fruitful for an innovative exploration of social and national issues. Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, *Programy i dyskusje literackie okresu młodej polski* [Programs and Literary Discussions of the Young Poland Era], 3rd. ed. (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Im. Ossolińskich, 2000): XXI.

[48] See, for example, the controversial and influential article of critic Stanisław Szczepanowski entitled „Disinfection of European Currents," which argued that the arrival of foreign works by writers such as D'Annunzio and contemporary French poets (Szczepanowksi referred to d'Annunzio's work as "guano") represented an "infectious" plague that could disperse and destroy national traditions. The language of hygiene used by the critic reveals fin-de-siecle conceptions about the modern mind as "diseased" and degenerate. Piast [Stanisław Szczepanowski], "Disinfection of European Currents [Dezinfekcja prądów europejskich]," *Słowo Polskie* no. 40 (1898): 34-43.

Cezary Jellenta. Entitled *Forerunners of Psychic Evolution and Troglodytes*, the book argued for the division of the human race into four distinct types: "Nervous types," represented by artists and constituting the leaders of human evolution, as well as three forms of "troglodytes" representing the vast majority of the population: "Wooden people," "Bulls," and "Swine."[49] In the authors' assessment, the artistic nervous types represented an evolutionary leap forward. Their senses were refined, hence the conflict between the rougher realities of the "troglodytes" and the oversensitive, nervous reactions of the artist. By analyzing the new psychological "type" represented by the modern artist, these and other critics prepared the ground for the creative theories of Symbolist activity.

The work of modernist thinkers in Poland was in large measure defensive, created in response to these charges. Some critics and writers chose to defend the modernists' perceived lack of patriotism by arguing that they were deeply influenced by the same stimuli as those in Western Europe, and therefore their art was an authentic response to a pan-European reality.[50] Others simply asserted that national art could take any form; its lack of obvious programmatic content did not mean that its creator was unpatriotic. Some applied both theories of modernism and nationalism, and analysis of their theories sheds light on the heretofore overlooked nationalistic nuances of Symbolist painters.

Three of the key modernist writers in Poland who contributed to these new formulations were Ignacy Matuszewski, Stanisław Przybyszewski and Artur Górski. Their writings on topics and themes common to pan-European Symbolism provided new understandings of creative

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[49] Wacław Nałkowski, Maria Komornicka, and Cezary Jellenta, *Forpoczty* [Forerunners]" (Lviv: privately printed, 1895).

[50] A prime example of this attitude can be seen in the writings of the founder of *Life*, Ludwik Szczepański. See, for example, his essay "National Art [Sztuka Narodowa]," *Życie* 2. no. 9 (1898) : 97-8; *Życie* 2, no. 10 (1898): 109-110.

activity that could encompass and re-express nationalistic themes. Their national sentiment was explicit; their fascination with new understandings of art and new modes of production meant that they welcomed and encouraged formal experimentation. Each believed that the new art could be thoroughly nationalistic. Their work validated and supported the modernist notion of the autonomy of art, yet argued that this autonomy did not necessarily indicate autonomy from social engagement. Further, the close-knit artistic community of Krakow ensured that painters and writers were familiar with one another's work, met in a few common locales, and cooperated on joint projects, such as the cultural periodical *Life* and the renovation of the Society for the Appreciation of Arts building.

According to contemporary literary critic Ignacy Matuszewski, the generational conflict between the positivists and those who came after them could be explained by a fundamental disagreement on the nature of reality. Positivists saw modernist activity as the unhealthy reaction of a generation that had failed to absorb the lessons of "organic work." But, as Matuszewski argued in an article entitled "Backwardness or Reaction," the modernist generation "…begins to understand the older less and less, which grew up in a separate spiritual atmosphere…We are going forward, obedient to the natural law of evolution; in restraining us, you are being faithless towards the most noble deity of your temple – progress!"[51] This citation underlines a crucial difference between Polish "decadents" as they were termed, and those against whom the charge was leveled in Western Europe – no Polish modernist, even those who

[51] "…zaczyna sie coraz mniej rozumiec ze starszym, ktore wzroslo w odmiennej atmosferze duchowej…My idziemy naprzod, posluszni naturalnemu prawu ewolucji; wstrzymujac nas, sprzeniewierzacie się najszlachetniejszemu bostwu waszej swiatyni – postepowi!" Ignacy Matuszewski, 'Wstecznictwo czy reakcja: Zamiast wstępu [Backwardness or Reaction: In Place of an Introduction]," in *Czarnoksiestwo i mediumizm, Studium historyczno-porownawcze* [Sorcery and Mediumism: A Historical-Comparative Study] (Warsaw: Nakład Gebethnera i Wolffa,1896): 3.

followed the examples of Baudelaire, d'Annunzio or Sâr Peladan, willingly admitted to embracing a decadent worldview.[52]

Matuszewski believed an understanding of reality required acknowledgment of humanity's spiritual nature and the necessity of its presence in art. Quoting St. Matthew's maxim that "man does not live on bread alone," Matuszewski noted its relevance to the entire modernist project, which he described as deploying "emotion and fantasy against the exclusivity of the rule of reason, but not against reason itself – and that is a significant difference!"[53] Matuszewski maintained that the central tenet of the Symbolist project – expressing the ineffable in art – ran counter to positivism, which responds to and make use of brute sensual reality, and is thus incapable of uncovering the transcendental essence of objects and the mysterious causes behind quotidian reality. For Matuszewski, the project of transcendence could be achieved through one of the key Symbolist processes, synthetism, which he compared to the metaphysical approach to the sciences. Both the new art and the new science, he wrote, "endeavor to synthetize and to group together a kind of harmonious and monolithic whole of diffused facts, phenomena or observations."[54] Seen in this light, Symbolism and modernism are more adept than positivism at addressing and exploring the world's visible and invisible phenomena.

Matuszewski elaborated upon his analysis of Symbolist style and its social implications for Poland in the article "Mood, Suggestion, Symbol," in which he praised rejection of fact as the foundation of art, arguing that a primary focus on emotion creates a more authentic product.

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[52] See Roman Zimand, "*Dekadentyzm" Warszawski* [Warsaw "Decadentism"] (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964): 13-15.

[53] "uczucia i fantazji przeciwko wyłączności panowania rozumu, ale nie przeciwko rozumowi samemu – a to wielka różnica!" Ignacy Matuszewski, „Wstecznictwo czy Reakcja," 8.

[54] "dąży do zsyntetyzowania i ugrupowania w jakąś harmonijną i jednolitą całość rozproszonych faktów, zjawisk czy obserwacji." ibid., 9-10.

Furthermore, Matuszewski argued for a distinction between the symbol of the "classicists" – that which is "transparent, artificial and cold" and the symbol used by his contemporaries. According to Matuszewski, the use of the modernist symbol in art allows the viewer to intuitively understand, by means of discreet allusion and delicate suggestion, the chain of associations and feelings that reveal the mood of the artist.[55] The allusion and suggestion described by Matuszewski proposed an innovative means of addressing national issues in opposition to the allegorical vehicles employed by naturalist and history painters.

Writer and critic Stanisław Przybyszewski was one of the most influential actors in the Krakow environment at the turn of the century and a representative of the most strident modernism in Poland. He believed in the absolute autonomy of art and a rejection of all conventional social mores. Przybyszewski began his activity in Krakow in 1897, when he assumed editorship of the periodical *Life.* Previously, he had lived for several years in Berlin, where he joined modernist artists and writers in the bohemian group that met at the *Schwarzen Ferkel* tavern, among them August Strindberg and Edvard Munch. Przybyszewski was heavily influenced by this circle – particularly by Friedrich Nietzsche – and his activity in Krakow represents a continuation of the group's convictions. In particular, Przybyszewski exalted creative activity as the only means of connection with the higher reality of the universe, a reality he termed "the naked soul." In communing with this "oversoul," the artist adopted a Nietzschean viewpoint, to transcend bourgeois restrictions and prescriptions regarding morality and social duty. Many of Przybyszewski's ideas corresponded to Symbolist notions of an allusive higher reality accessible only through artistic activity. Interestingly, while advocating

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[55] Ignacy Matuszewski, *Słowacki i nowa sztuka (modernizm). Twórczość Słowackiego w świetle poglądów estetyki nowoczesnej. Studium krytyczno-porównawcze* [Slowacki and the New Art (Modernism): Slowacki's Oeuvre in the Light of Modern Esthetic Views: A Critical-Comparative Study] (Warsaw: Nakład Gebethnera i Wolffa,1904).

art as a goal unto itself, Przybyszewski allowed for the development of national characteristics and patriotic statements within modern painting.

Przybyszewski held that the modern artist is uniquely equipped to explore and recreate the higher reality of the naked soul. Although the artist is doomed to alienation because of the nigh impossibility of capturing the essence of reality or the naked soul, his mission was a sacred one involving rejection of outward appearance and a continual search for a higher truth. Like Matuszewski, Przybyszewski believed that the Symbolist mode was that which was most useful for the artist's innate mission and creative development. In an essay entitled "From the Psychology of Creative Individuals," Przybyszewski described the psychological development of the artist in search of the naked soul. His mention of synthesis, catalepsy and auto-illusion refer to the dreamworlds often described in Symbolist painting:

> "What marks this type of development is an immeasurable tension of all forces at every moment, it is a grand brain with gifts, that hears grass growing, hears that which is inaudible, at every moment, in every feeling operates with its entire content; it is a synthetizing soul, which is capable of engaging every object in its most far-flung relations, in its most subtle radiance and in this way lift it to its highest power: it is a constant spiritual arousal with its cataleptic states, its auto-illusion and its forced imaginings."[56]

Przybyszewski's "synthetizing soul" was at once universal and national. In an early manifesto entitled "Confiteor," he acknowledged dependence on nineteenth-century German writers when he argued for an inherent national soul in all authentic art. For Przybyszewski, "The nation is a particle of eternity and in it thrive the roots of the artist…from it, from familial

[56] "Co znamionuje ten rodzaj rozwoju, to niezmierne napięcie wszystkich sił w każdej chwili, to wielki mózg ze zdolnością, która słyszy, jak trawa rośnie, słyszy to, co niesłyszalne, w każdej chwili, w każdym odczuciu działa pełna swojej zawartości: to duch syntetyzujący, który każda rzecz umie ująć w jej odleglejszych związkach, w jej najsubtelniejszych promieniowaniach i w ten sposób podnieść ją do najwyższy potęgi: to stałe duchowe podniecenie z jego stanami kataleptycznymi, jego samozłudzeniami i wyobrażeniami przymusowymi." Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Zur Psychologie des Individuums. I. Chopin und Nietzsche* (Berlin: 1892, Fontane & Co.), reprinted as "Z psychologii jednostki twórczej Chopin i Nietzsche" in Roman Taborski, ed., *Stanisław Przybyszewski, Wybór Pism* [Stanisław Przybyszewski: Collected Writings] (Wrocław: Biblioteka Narodowa, 1966): 9-10.

land, the artist derives his most vital strength…this is why it is stupid nonsense to accuse the artist as we understand him of antinationalism, because it is in the artist that the "essential," internal soul of the nation appears."[57] This Romantic understanding of the "national soul" is a parallel manifestation to the "naked soul" of higher reality and the "synthetizing soul" of the artist. Przybyszewski's rhetoric allows for the expression of national sentiment in paintings without explicit national content and proves itself particularly relevant to Symbolist painting in Polish territory.

A third important writer on modernism and national art was Artur Górski, editor of the modernist periodical *Life*. While Matuszewski and Przybyszewski made little direct reference to nationalist policies, Górski's manifesto, entitled "Young Poland," (1898), contains crucial allusions to the Polish Symbolists' understandings of how the new art could remain faithful to patriotic imperatives. Górski saw no inherent contradiction between modern style and nationalist content. In fact, he argued that the possibilities afforded by the modernist's process offered deeper and more vital possibilities than the practical action espoused by positivist critics. He posits that the programmatic mentality of the bourgeoisie prevented them from discovering and exploring the dangerous and instable aspects in art – aspects that open avenues to spiritual liberation. As he explains,

> Let programs be created by those who want to act. We absolutely do not aim to do so. Indeed, we write precisely in order to not act…We throw out forms and thoughts like the seatide throws fish, mussels, medusas and drowned men on the shore…-You, however, act like fishermen: you take for yourselves what is digestible, and renounce what is not.[58]

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[57] „Naród to cząstka wieczności i w nim tkwią korzenie artysty, z niego, z ziemi rodzinnej ciągnie artysta najżywotniejszą swą siłę...Dlatego jest głupią niedorzecznością zarzucać artyście w naszym pojęciu beznarodowość, bo w nim najsilniej przejawia się „istotny," wewnętrzny duch narodu..." Stanisław Przybyszewski, "Confiteor," *Życie* 3, no. 1 (1899): 3.

[58] "Programy niech tworzą ludzie, co chcą działać. My tego wcale nie zamierzamy. Owszem, piszemy właśnie dlatego, aby nie działać....Rzucamy myśli i formy tak, jak przypływ morza rzuca na brzeg ryby, muszle, meduzy,

For Górski, the possibilities afforded by unknown territory provided opportunities for modernist artists to reject the safe, programmatic imperatives of the proscribed patriotism of an earlier generation. Górski insisted that the artist who worked according to his inner individual was capable of "true, great art" and that art made according to old notions of "tradition" and "national spirit" was the product of mere industry.[59]

Art historians most readily identify nationalist themes in the work of Symbolist painters Jacek Malczewski and Stanisław Wyspiański. Malczewski's work – with its scenes of Polish manors, countryside, and ancient mythological material -- contains obvious connections to Poland's political situation, although art historians have not fully reconciled the nationalist tenor of his work with the parameters of Symbolism. In a review of a recent exhibition of Malczewski's work, Elizabeth Clegg noted that this combination is not "readily acknowledged in the prevailing notion of Symbolism; in this view, the Symbolist artist avoids any such close association with the specific in order to engage all the more directly with the absolute."[60] Hence, Malczewski's programmatic patriotism is left virtually unexplored, "the intensely patriotic character" of Malczewski's works tactfully introduced as a special case within an ostensibly unchallenged definition of Symbolist art."[61]

Part of the problem lies with the collision of competing understandings of the symbol in traditional nineteenth-century culture and in Symbolist theory. As Clegg notes, Symbolism

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topielców...-wy zaś róbcie tak, jak robią rybacy: bierzcie z tego dla siebie, co jadalne, a co niejadalne, poniechajcie." Artur Górski, "Young Poland [Młoda Polska]," *Życie* 2, no. 15 (1898): 170.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Elizabeth Clegg, "The Siberian Tea Party: Jacek Malczewski and the Contradiction of National Symbolism," *Apollo* 129 (1989): 255-6.

[61] Ibid.

functions through loosely suggestive images. Charles Baudelaire considered words' power to evoke multiple associations magical. Influenced by Plato and Emanuel Swedenborg, Baudelaire invokes the forest of symbols in nature in his *Correspondences*. Subsequently, for Paul Verlaine and Stephane Mallarmé, symbols seek suggestion that allows for a multitude of possible understandings.

In contrast to this openness of the symbol theorized by French literati, nationalist symbols appear to be closed, or, in the formulation of Matuszewski, "dry, artificial and cold." They are intended to lead the viewer to an inevitable understanding of their meaning. According to Clegg, this one-to-one correspondence is "undermined" by open-ended suggestion of the sort Symbolists vaunted.[62] This collision of opposing modes was precisely what made Malczewski's works effective in new interpretations of known elements, events and moods in Polish history. Trained in Krakow in Matejko's studio, Malczewski's early paintings, from the 1880's, follow the general outline of naturalistic history painting. Beginning in 1890, the artist began to adopt a Symbolist approach. Rather than rejecting the historical components of works by Grottger and Matejko, Malczewski reframes them in an allusive, open-ended manner.

Two works by Malczewski that have been interpreted as direct commentaries on the artist's mission as related to the fate of the nation are *Melancholia* (1890-94) (fig. 84), and *Vicious Circle* (1895-97) (fig. 103).[63] In *Melancholia*, we see the artist seated with his back to us in the far left corner of a large studio. A baroque multitude of figures, including the lauded hussar warriors of seventeenth-century Poland, swirls out into the foreground, while on the far

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[62] Clegg, "Siberian Tea Party," 255.

[63] Agnieszka Ławniczkowa, "Poland," in Clair, *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe*, 296.

right, an old woman, interpreted by Piotr Juszkiewicz as representing the nation,[64] stands in an open window, gazing out onto local countryside. *Melancholia* speaks to the voluminous powers of the artist's imagination, or, perhaps, in another sense, to the ultimate failure of the artist, and, by extension, the nation. The figures seem destined to swirl aimlessly and to disperse, and the old woman is entirely heedless of the historical procession just behind her. Robert Rosenblum has interpreted the image as "an allegory of Poland's cruel fate," adding that Malczewski manages "to create, with still rational tools, a space for dreams and nightmares."[65] Rosenblum writes that figurative Symbolism of this type mediated two models, "as if the nascent twentieth-century goals of an art that transcended the earthbound limitations of the visible world were still tethered to the materialist foundations of a nineteenth-century art education." In Malczewski's work, he notes, "these components are stretched to the breaking point."[66] If Malczewski's *Melancholia* is an allegory, it is not only a representation of nationalist ideas, but the record of an uncomfortable in-between state. The components of nationalist propaganda are as carefully detailed as in Matejko's paintings, but they exist in senseless profusion, defying any sense of rational narrative.

Vicious Circle operates on much the same level. Here, a young stand-in for the artist is perched on top of a ladder in the center of a barren studio. In a fashion reminiscent of scenes of the Last Judgment, two groups of figures on either side of the ladder either succumb to torture or

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[64] Piotr Juszkiewicz, "Wstęp: między fizyką a metafizyką obrazu [Introduction: Between the Physics and the Metaphysics of an Image]," in *Melancholia Jacka Malczewskiego: materiały seminarium Instytutu Sztuki UAM i Muzeum Narodowego w Poznaniu* [The Melancholy of Jacek Malczewski: Material from a Seminarium of the Art Institute of UAM and the National Museum in Poznan] (Poznan: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 1998): 11.

[65] *1900: Art at the Crossroads* (exh. cat.), ed. Robert Rosenblum, Maryanne Stevens, and Ann Dumas (New York: H.N. Abrams, 2000): 36.

[66] Ibid.

laughingly revel in a circular dance. The space of the composition is ambiguous, and almost claustrophobic in its extreme closeness. While the figures may easily be interpreted as the product of the young boy's imagination, their inherent unruliness, like the groups in *Melancholia*, suggests the overwhelming power of the inner whim described by Górski. In its contrast between foreground naturalism and blank abstraction in the background, *Vicious Circle* does not represent the flattened synthetism of Aurier's conception, but neither is it a stable, allegorical scene in the *gedankenmalerei* style. The viewer is immediately encouraged to identify with a passive being unable to affect the course of events around him.

In a national context, the work may be read as a pessimistic commentary on the weight and force of history and the oppressiveness of tradition. The figural group on the left side of the composition is composed of a mixture of antique archetypes – a nude faun among them – as well as a couple dressed in traditional peasant dress. The group on the right, painted entirely in shades of somber gray and brown, consists of destitute and dispossessed figures, a few of them wearing scraps of clothing reminiscent of that worn by Siberian exiles in Malczewski's earlier history painting. In this context, the theatrical anguish of the latter group and the clichéd mirth of the former represent two halves of the title's "vicious circle," neither sufficient to address the real social problems of the Polish nation. Malczewski's work criticizes two cultural phenomena in fin-de-siècle Poland - melancholy martyrology and peasant mania – as a pair of false alternatives. Their presentation in an illogical, irrational Symbolist space adds a further note of discontinuity to the picture.

Another major conduit for nationalist expression in Malczewski's Symbolist work is the Polish countryside, which, as he presents it, often includes reference to the traditional aristocratic

manor.[67] The manor [*dwór*] tends to follow a standard architectural formula, and traditionally acts as a locus and repository of national sentiment; it may be seen as the aristocratic counterpart to the figure of the Polish peasant. Both Malczewski and Wyspiański came from "manorial" backgrounds; both also married peasants in self-consciously laudatory fashion. The Polish peasant was praised by Przybyszewski and others as the last true repository of national values. Here too, the modern shattering of a complete pictorial illusion has been pointed out by Agnieszka Morawińska. As she states, Malczewski's paintings "show only elusive walls, corners, parts of a porch, or fragments of a roof, set in the wide countryside, which seems to be floating by. In Malczewski's world, the paradise of memories is wider than the width of a house."[68] While Morawińska does not explicitly relate these fragments to Symbolist theory, the fantastic atmosphere of Malczewski's countryside scenes and the tendency to allude to rather than explicitly describe are Symbolist characteristics. In *Death* (fig. 3), we see the Greek mythological figure of Thanatos as a country peasant, leaning against the wall of a house while her presumed target looks fearfully out of a window. The seamless combination of a quotidian scene from Polish village life with a larger, menacing personification suggests Malczewski's uneasiness with the fate of the Polish peasantry and, in a larger sense, Polish native cultural tradition. In *Vision* (fig. 4), *Tobias and the Fates* (fig. 5), and *Portrait of Władysław Reymont* (fig. 6), we see portions of architecture but are unable to fully determine the setting. The country manor is evoked, but not directly described, and the mythological creatures in the foreground disturb the rational congruency of the works. The fragments of architecture in these works reject

[67] Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, 143-47.

[68] *Symbolism in Polish Painting 1890-1914* (exh. cat.), Elżbieta Charazińska and Agnieszka Morawińska, eds., (Detroit: Detroit Institute of the Arts, 1984): 30.

the closed symbol of classic allegory and reflect Matuszewski's and Przybyszewski's understandings of the provocative modernist creation.

Malczewski's mixing of elements from history, memory and fantasy blurs the boundaries between traditional categories of Symbolism as either allegorical or synthetic. Are we to read these paintings as documentaries of a subject's visionary experience? Or are they intended as allegories with no implied connection to objective experience? The eerie emptiness of the manorial complex behind Reymont suggests recent catastrophe, evoking current political events.[69] Reymont was best known for his novel *Chłopi* (Peasants) that celebrated and chronicled the life cycles of Polish peasantry in one particular village; the scene behind the writer in Malczewski's painting may be viewed as a product of his imagination or a documentary from real-life observation. The ambiguity of the portrait echoes the gap between Reymont's imagined community and the actual plight of the Polish peasant under partition; it also underlines the political limits of the culture of self-critique of the intelligentsia.

Malczewski's *In the Dust Cloud* (fig. 7) contains allusions to Polish folklore within recognizably typical countryside, but the otherworldly atmosphere of the work universalizes it as an example of the international Symbolist idiom. As one critic noted, the strongly horizontal elements and relative blandness of the landscape mean that the artist has created "a poetic, visionary world that is both 'everywhere and nowhere'."[70] The slightly anti-natural coloration of the scene and the oddly massed row of trees in the background contribute to this atmosphere of alienation. In Polish folklore, the image of a dead mother and her children ascending into the

[69] The political uprisings of January 1863, for example, often centered on skirmishes in local administrative centers and resulted in the destruction of manorial seats by Russian or Prussian authorities. Davies, *Serce Europy*, 122.

[70] *Symbolism in Polish Painting*, Charazińska and Morawińska, eds., 54.

skies is associated with the martyrdom of the nation;[71] though exhibited, to a certain degree of success, in Vienna and St. Louis, one can assume that a foreign audience would not have grasped the specifically Polish cultural implications of the figural group. The in-between quality of the work caused by the intersection of naturalist setting and otherworldly elements, as well as the limitation of its associations for a non-Polish audience, suggests something other than a straightforward nationalist agenda on the part of the artist. Malczewski manages to evoke the hopelessness of the current political situation while also leaving room for multiple interpretation of the work's content. Its strange flatness and the presence of unsettling figures suggest an irrational inner vision that is in part a direct response to the relegation of political expression to the realm of culture.

Two other paintings by the artist, *St. Agnes* (fig. 8), and *Landscape with Tobias* (fig. 9), feature compositions that draw the viewer into the distance, oddly peopled by biblical figures. The strange geometric rendering of both landscapes discourages comfortable perusal, in each case, a furrowed trench, suggesting both traditional agriculture and division, provides the focal point. The stork in *Landscape with Tobias*, a traditional symbol of Poland, hovers strangely, immobile and incidental to the composition. In *Go Along the Stream Bank* (fig. 10), a bizarre grouping of mythological creatures pays homage to a peasant Mary and child, evoking Poland's ubiquitous roadside shrines.

While elements of these works were recognizable to foreign critics, they were not scrutinized beyond their reflexive quality as symbols of Polish identity. By inserting creatures common to greater European Symbolism into his evocations of regional countryside, such as the chimera or the harpy (figs. 11-12), Malczewski combines elements of international artistic

[71] Ibid.

language with more arcane aspects that would only have been legible to Polish elites, thereby echoing the peculiar colonial situation of the young Poland artist. As Andrzej Rottermund has postulated, Malczewski "saw the past less in terms of subjects and plots and more in terms of ideas and philosophies. The sources for many of the symbols in Malczewski's paintings are to be found in the constellation of meanings traditionally accepted by European culture, which reflects the national mythology and both European and Polish history."[72] Malczewski's use of pan-European elements reflects both anxieties about Polish identity and the desire to claim European heritage, particularly common to the Polish elite. In an era when many Polish critics saw "European"culture as a degrading influence on Polish national purity, blending of national and international elements on the part of the artist could be perceived as particularly provocative.

A combination of the real and the symbolic also characterizes Malczewski's *Thanatos* series, which dates from 1895-99 (fig. 11). For the artist, the figure of death was related to notions of spiritual transcendence and the acquisition of knowledge through irrational means.[73] In his painting entitled *Thanatos I*, from 1898, the figure of the title is an androgynous youth holding an extinguished torch. In the background, an older man hobbles forward towards the death figure, whose head is framed by the entryway of a typical Polish aristocratic manor. While the background of the painting is a direct rendering of the artist's family estate, the figure of Thanatos in the foreground is clearly artificial, rendered with sharp outlines and imposed like a paper cutout on the rest of the composition. In this sense, the painting is neither a naturalistic reportage of a vision, as in the work of more realistically oriented painters, nor an attempt to induce a new way of seeing, but a combination of multiple modes of representation. This

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[72] Andrzej Rottermund, "The Chivalric Myth in the Art of Jacek Malczewski, Stanisław Wyspiański, and Witold Wojtkiewicz," in Charazińska and Morawińska, eds., *Symbolism in Polish Painting*, 35.

[73] Elizabeth Clegg, "Paris: Jacek Malczewski," *Burlington Magazine* 142 (2000): 252-54.

engagement with Symbolist modes suggests a deeper and more sustained engagement with nationalist issues than the simple quotation favored by earlier artists.

While Stanisław Wyspiański's paintings, pastels and stained-glass windows are more visually legible and at first glance than those of Malczewski, they, too, contain fluid and changeable commentary on issues of national rebirth and regeneration. As in the case of Malczewski, the presence of known national symbols in the artist's work has been commented on by critics and art historians, but the mode in which they are presented has not been adequately explored. Best known as a playwright whose most famous dramas revolve around questions of national revival, Wyspiański's graphics range from pastel portraits of children and friends to stylized renderings of flowers to programmatic stained glass windows. Three sets of works have been repeatedly singled out in the literature on Wyspiański for their nationalist content – a series of pastel renderings of a monument in Krakow known as the "Kościuszko mound," and two sets of stained glass window projects, one for a cathedral in Lviv, Galicia's capital city, and a second for the cathedral in Krakow.

The series of pastels of the Kościuszko mound were created by the artist during a period of convalescence in his Krakow studio (figs. 12-14). Each of the works reveals a different version of the view from Wyspiański's studio window. The mound in the title, one of several in Krakow, was constructed to honor patriot and Revolutionary War hero Tadeusz Kościuszko, who led battles for Poland's independence from the Russian empire at the close of the 18th century.[74] The association of a specific historical incident with the mound series reveals the changing nature of contemporary conceptions of the artist as spokesperson for the nation, which could

[74] The mound as a commemorative structure in Polish tradition derives from the burial and ceremonial mounds constructed by early Slavic tribes. Thus, the mound as well as its namesake would have been understood by a contemporary audience as a symbol of Polishness itself.

become more than an artistic conceit. During the creation of the series, which coincided with the Russo-Japanese war of 1905, Marshal Josef Pilsudski paid an unexpected visit to Wyspiański's studio. From Poland's point of view, the war represented an opportunity to capitalize on Russia's preoccupation and possibly gain independence. The marshal, who would later become the de facto leader of interwar Poland, urged the artist to issue a spiritual call-to-arms to the Polish people in order to drum up public support for the Japanese armies. Wyspiański, in the words of one reporter of the event, appeared confused and nonplussed by the Marshal's pleas.[75] Nevertheless, the obvious parallels between the Kościuszko mound in the series of pastels and the historical anecdote related to their creation created a conceptual framework through which the pastels have been interpreted by contemporary and later art historians.[76]

However, upon closer inspection, the programmatic nature of the series suggested by the literature and surrounding Piłsudski mythology is undermined by Wyspiański's Symbolist tactics in creating the works. In all versions, the mound is a small part of the entire composition. Clearest in the versions executed in sunny weather, such as *View from the Window on the Kościuszko Mound* (fig. 12) it all but disappears from view in the version with a blizzard (fig. 13) and is barely distinguishable during the "season of thaw (fig. 14)." In each case, the structure is obscured by the patterns of emphatic diagonal lines and strong shades of pastels. The surrounding landscape seems much more personally emotive than didactic – Wyspiański's dramatic focus in each case is on the varying weather and atmospheric conditions. The streaks of sky and wind and looming clouds overpower the signifying potential of the mound. Despite

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[75] Agnieszka Morawińska, "A View from the Window," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 21, no. 1-2 (1987): 70.

[76] Ibid.

this visual insignificance, Morawińska insists on reading the work from an overdetermined nationalist perspective: "The work evokes a sense of the history that weighs upon contemporary Poland…Even when made hazy by a blizzard of snow, one feels the mound standing in its place: the past weighs upon the present…The view from [Wyspiański's studio] was essentially an image of Poland, a synthesis and a symbol."[77] If the Kościuszko Mound is an undeniable symbol of nation, it is one which, in the words of Patrick McGuinness, is "the oblique, the allusive, and the inexplicit," a creative device which requires "from reader or spectator, a capacity for ambiguity, multiple meaning or radical paradox."[78] The ambiguity of the symbol as described by Matuszewski, and of the painting, speaks to its possible interpretation in more universal terms, not simply as a statement of the Polish nation. Likewise, the ambiguity of Symbolist strategy allows Wyspiański to create room for uncertainty of message in his work.

This same sense of ambiguity and dual function deeply informs Wyspiański's most public works, two programs for stained glass windows in the Lviv and Wawel Cathedrals. While Wyspiański was most famous for his art nouveau influenced windows for the Franciscan Church in Krakow, those windows lacked any more specific reference to Polish history or politics. The program for Wawel Cathedral (figs. 17-19) was conceived as part of an extensive reconstruction plan for the entire Wawel fortified complex, which included a formal royal castle. Wawel was occupied by Austrian troops until 1905, when Emperor Franz Joseph granted Polish Galician authorities jurisdiction over the complex. Immediately subsequent to the decision, various municipal and regional societies and government organizations cooperated in projecting and executing plans for renovation. Wyspiański, who was very active in the plans for reconstruction,

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[77] *Symbolism in Polish Painting*, Charazińska and Morawińska, 28.

[78] McGuinness, *Symbolism, Decadence and the Fin-de-siècle*, 2.

envisioned the stained-glass windows for the Wawel Cathedral as a tryptych of three monumental figures, King Henry the Pious, St. Stanisław, the patron saint of Poland, and finally, King Kazimierz the Great. The choice of Kings Kazimierz and Henry may be explained by their prominent role in Polish history; while Kazimierz was responsible for the expansion of the newly unified Polish kingdom, Henry died battling the Tartars in an effort to defend a Polish province. The rendering of Kazimierz was directly inspired by Jan Matejko's documentary drawing of the relatively recent unearthing of the King's tomb.[79] Here, the king is a corpse, a specter of the undead, and a pessimistic testament to rulership. All three figures in the tryptych are subsumed by some exterior force and physically and spiritually tortured. Despite the possible implications of this deformation of the king's physical features, some art historians have focused exclusively on the window's content: as one scholar described the windows: "Like his master [Matejko,] Wyspiański wanted to remind the Polish people, living in three foreign organized nations, of Poland's ancient, holy past, awakening the ambition to battle for liberation."[80]

The importance of the windows as showpieces in the Wawel Cathedral, which served as the coronation and burial place for centuries of Polish kings, would hardly have been lost on Wyspiański. Indeed, the artist's original plan for the Cathedral complex entailed the resurrection of a Polish acropolis to create a new locus of nationalistic sentiment. Wyspiański created detailed architectural as well as artistic plans for the project, which never came to fruition.

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[79] The choice of Kings Casimir and Henry may be explained by their prominent role in Polish history; while Casimir was responsible for the expansion of the newly unified Polish kingdom, Henry died battling the Tartars in an effort to defend a Polish province. Anna Gradowska, *Sztuka Młodej Polski* [The Art of Young Poland] (Warsaw, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1984), 56.

[80] "Podobnie jak mistrz, Wyspiański chciał przypomnieć społeczeństwo polskiemu, żyjącemu w trzech obcych organizmach państwowych, dawną, świętną przeszłość Polski, pobudzić ambicję walki o wyzwolenie." Helena Blum, *Stanisław Wyspiański* (Warsaw: Auriga, 1969): 33.

Wyspiański's Symbolist treatment of the subjects of the Wawel windows reveals a fundamental shift in ideas about the communication of nationalist content in a public context.

The scheme of Wyspiański's *Polonia* (fig. 15) for the Lviv Cathedral is much more complex than that of the three Wawel windows. The figure of Polonia, at the right of the composition, is uncrowned and appears to be in a faint. A group of horrified observers, including Wyspiański himself in a self-portrait to the figure's immediate right, looks on helplessly.[81] Jan Cavanaugh has argued that the emotional quality of the scene, as well as the placement of the figures themselves, suggests the model of the assumption of the Virgin and, by extension, national renewal.[82] Despite the vertical emphasis of the composition and the sinuous organic lines, however, the cartoon offers no sense of dramatic apotheosis. The space of the composition is not clearly legible, and the strange disconnect between groups of figures does not allow for an easy resolution to the progress of any possible narrative. The incapacitated nationalism of the scene echoes the chaos and confusion of Malczewski's *Faulty Circle* and *Melancholia*.

The works of Malczewski and Wyspiański make use of allegory and instantly recognizable symbols to summon nationalist arguments, while simultaneously casting doubt on the ability of the Polish nation to realize itself. Because of the surface transparency of some of the works, art historical scholarship has not delved into the more subtle allusions to the fragility and pessimism of the nationalist project. These subtle allusions also exist in the paintings of other Polish Symbolists who have never been traditionally associated with nationalist commentary. By reexamining some key works, and relating them to the broader scope of

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[81] As in the case of Malczewski's paintings, Wyspiański's insertion of his self-portrait into the scene emphasizes his dual role as passive observer and as representative of the nation.

[82] Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, 189.

Symbolist theory, one can begin to shape a more inclusive vision of nationalist commentary in Symbolist Poland.

One of the most frequent "spaces" in Symbolist painting is that of the domestic interior. While the analysis of empty rooms has tended to concentrate on the psychic characteristics of the fin-de-siècle individual and the stresses related to social upheaval and urbanization, there has been little connection made between public nationalism and the private interior space. In particular, Symbolist conceptions of space and of reality find parallels in Poland's national situation at the fin-de-siècle. The influential notion of interior emigration, enduring political purpose in the sphere of cultural activity and the spiritualization of the nation all led to the development of an alternative, abstract space in which patriotic sentiments could be expressed. Because the aristocratic salons of nineteenth-century Poland were the meeting places for cultural activity and continuity, a contemporary viewer would have understood depicted domestic interiors as charged and culturally significant spaces. These three nineteenth-century trends found particularly fertile ground in Symbolist practice in Poland. All of these tendencies cultivated a framework of understanding in which nationalist sentiment had little to do with the concrete and logical and became firmly attached to the realm of the insubstantial and emotional. Symbolist paintings that made reference to, reinforced or embodied the ambiguous or otherworldly made implicit reference to the alternative 'space' of Polish mystical nationalism. The Polish Symbolist interior can be understood as a representation of national consciousness in a creative process that blended public and private spheres.[83]

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[83] The migration of rational and elite public discourse into the private sphere in the face of rising mass media and political oppression has been analyzed by Jürgen Habermas in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991.) Polish Symbolist interiors may be understood as visual responses to and representations of the process described by Habermas.

Symbolist painter Konrad Krzyżanowski created several such interior scenes. Unlike Malczewski and Wyspiański, Krzyżanowski was trained in St. Petersburg at the Academy of Fine Arts, and worked and taught in Warsaw in the first years of the 20th century. In Warsaw, Krzyżanowski became intimately involved with the modernist journal *Chimera*, and developed a close relationship with Stanisław Przybyszewski. Krzyżanowski's distance from Krakow allowed the artist to develop alternate strategies of national commentary in his works – strategies that have not been analyzed in the understanding of the artist as a more "European" Symbolist.[84] In fact, this assertion ignores the implications of some of Krzyżanowski's works for the Polish situation.

Krzyżanowski's *Fortepiano* from 1905 (fig. 16) distorts space in a manner redolent of the work of Vuillard, Ferdnand Khnopff and Vilhelm Hammershøi. Scholars have interpreted these artists' works to contemporary discussions of perception and psychology in the fin-de-siècle era. In domestic interiors such as the one portrayed in Khnopff's *Listening to Schumann*, the space of a room becomes an analogy for the space of a human psyche, and its distortion or disturbance reflects the mental anxieties of the era. The claustrophobic or disorienting effect of the artist's manipulation of interior space creates an emotional response in the viewer, projecting the invasiveness of mental anxieties such as loneliness, isolation, and neurasthenia lurking behind seemingly well-ordered domestic space.[85]

In Krzyżanowski's *Piano*, we see a large room bare except for four pieces of furniture, arranged obliquely along the left and far walls: a stuffed chair, slatted bench, piano and a second long bench with an unidentified white object on top. The corner between the left and far walls is

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[84] Lija Skalska-Miecik, *Konrad Krzyżanowski* (Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1985): 11.

[85] Susan Sidlauskas, *Body, Place and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 91-123.

marked with the very faintest of lines, and the lines of the floorboards create a dynamic effect in which the viewer's eye is sucked towards the piano. Thanks to the neutral color scheme of the remainder of the composition and Kryżanowski's manipulation of line and space, the piano becomes the emphatic center of the composition and its most commanding object. It, too, however, is subject to the odd gravitational pull of the composition; the bottoms of its legs dissolve into the inexact soup of the room's floor. While the rest of the space is in the process of dissolution, the piano gathers solidity and presence from the bottom up. The visual solidification of the musical instrument seems to offer a hint of the enduring cultural legacy of "internal emigration," in which performed art in intimate domestic settings, particularly that of Fryderyk Chopin, provided a means of preserving and temporarily resurrecting the nation through cultural performance. Krzyżanowski provided an example of this activity in the more naturalistic *At the Piano* (fig. 17). The contrast between this work, almost documentary in tone, and the altered space of *Piano* reveals the ability of Symbolist distortion to simultaneously depict outer and inner states of reality.

Krzyżanowski's painting *Girl at a Piano* (fig. 18) could be said to represent a middle ground between the lone instrument in *Fortepiano* and the rather straightforward scene in *At the Piano*. As in *Piano*, the musical instrument is more clearly delineated than the surrounding room space, creating the impression of emergence. Here, the piano and young girl sitting with her back to the instrument evoke impressions of psychic energy, at the same time suggesting the abstract nature of music. The expectation created by the presence of a potential player for the instrument and the simultaneous absence of actual play tease the viewer, hinting at but failing to satisfy Symbolist notions of synaesthesia. This sense of impotence and frustration echoes the ultimate futility of nationalist sentiment as also expressed in the works of Wyspiański. By

creating an altered space and engaging themes of creation, frustration and mental agitation, Krzyżanowski's private space coincides with the alternate public of the Polish nation.

Like Krzyżanowski, Ferdynand Ruszczyc was a painter associated with Warsaw rather than Krakow. Ruszczyc also attended the St. Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts, from 1892 to 1897, and later settled in Warsaw in 1904. The living room in his family estate (fig. 19), unlike Krzyżanowski's spaces, features a spatially consistent interior. Although unpopulated, the room is occupied by two flowering branches of mallow, a plant often used by preeminent landscape painter Jan Stanisławski. The prominent placement of the branches in the room and their extended outgrowths present a striking contrast with the dull inertia and bourgeois respectability of the rest of the furniture: the stiff portrait of the military personage, the mahogany furniture and the murky right corner, shaded by heavy curtains. The mirror in the central corner, which should logically reflect the viewer, reveals only the flowers. Their insistent color and large scale encourage the viewer to invest them with anthropomorphic qualities, and their natural growth and vitality contrast with the stuffiness of the salon. Its dead interior, made all the more so by the mallows, suggests the futility of stale tradition against the vital life forces represented by the plants. In creating this contrast, Ruszczyc seems to suggest the shortcomings of interior space as a site for cultural continuity. Instead, the vitality of the only living beings in the salon points to an alternative source of national regeneration – that of Polish land. Anthropomorphic plants appear in other Symbolist paintings by Ruszczyc and Wyspiański and reference longstanding Slavic folk tradition, in which sorcery and magic are able to transform the natural landscape. These folk understandings of the living landscape dovetail with political-mystical understandings of the Polish nation as a single body in search of rebirth and regeneration.

Leon Wyczółkowski's interior in *Stańczyk (Satirical Performance)* (fig. 20) makes reference to historical painting and cultural tradition in Krakow. Wyczółkowski, like Malczewski and Wyspiański, a student of Matejko, began his works in realistic style, switching to a more Symbolist mode in the 1890's. One of Matejko's most famous and popular works depicts the famous court jester Stańczyk at the sixteenth-century court of Polish Queen Bona Sforza (fig. 21). According to legend, Stańczyk was deeply reflective and philosophical and expressed pessimistic concerns about the future of the Polish kingdom. In nineteenth-century Poland, Stańczyk became a cultural symbol for the Polish nation, and his persona was likened to that of Hamlet.[86] For Matejko, the court jester, depicted in melancholy meditation, was the encompassing symbol of Poland's political death. The jester's pose and expression are in ironic contrast with his role at court and vivid costume.

Wyczółkowski's portrait of Stańczyk places the jester in a close interior, perhaps the dressing room of his apartments at court and therefore a metaphor for the national psyche. The jester is overcome by melancholy, inertia and pessimism in the midst of preparing a *szopka* – a satirical performance at court, in this case making use of puppets. The prominent political and social figures represented in the puppets appear to stand on the shelf to the right of the jester, but their sticks are clearly visible beneath the shelf. The empty impotence of their position is made clear. In opening a trunk, Stańczyk hovers over a Polish pandora's box, as if searching in vain for effective actors to ensure the nation's political endurance. Wyczółkowski's intense, grating color scheme, in which the red of the jester's costume and that of the walls bleed into each other,

[86] Somewhat ironically, "Stańczyk" was also the name of a conservative political group in Krakow founded in 1869 by four journalists who argued for full cooperation with Austro-Hungarian authorities in the name of political pragmatism. In the eyes of the Stańczyk circle, romantic nationalism was harmful and self-destructive. This contemporary cultural association with the Stańczyk figure would not have been lost on either Matejko or Wyczółkowski. For a description of the Stańczyk circle and an analysis of their writings, see Rett R. Ludwikowski, *Continuity and Change in Poland: Conservatism in Polish Political Thought* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1991).

enforces the emotionally charged mood of the scene and updates the gloom of Matejko's vision. The exaggeration of color and brushstroke lend expressionist overtones to the scene and buttress its intense pessimism.

The self-portrait is another area in which notions about nationalism found extensive expression in Polish Symbolism. While the Symbolist self-portrait engages the viewer with the issue of identity and plays with notions of creativity and authenticity, the additional dimension lent to the Polish Symbolist as sincere national spokesman who must address a knowing public complicates the genre. Previous literature on Symbolist self-portraits has not explored the complex contrast between the roles of modernist creator and national messenger. At first glance, these two roles appear diametrically opposed. In fact, Symbolist artists did not abandon the nationalist project in their self-portraits, but chose to combine traditional and modern elements in new fashion.

As noted, in the generation preceding that of the Symbolists, the Polish artist aspired to be an unobtrusive carrier of nationalist messages. Critics praised the work of Jan Matejko, Józef Chełmoński and other painters for their technical skill in successfully conveying significant content in their work. The idiosyncrasies of personal style were tolerated as long as they were not perceived to reduce the clarity of the work's content and message.[87] With the advent of modernist thought in Poland, the personal vision of the artist was considered to be the crucial element of a successful work of art. The concerns raised by older critics about the loss of

[87] As Hanna Filipkowska explains, the modern aesthetic in Poland "…rebels against the interference of the intellect with its rules of rational thought, is liberating from normative rules of traditional composition, and becomes a domain insubmissive to external verification, an esoteric domain of the indoctrinated […buntuje się przeciw ingerencji intelektu z jego regułami racjonalnego myślenia, wyzwala z normatywnych reguł tradycyjnej kompozycji, staje się domeną nie podlegającą zewnętrznej weryfikacji, ezoteryczną domeną wtajemniczonych.] " Hanna Filipkowska, "Młodopolska idea "sztuki dla sztuki" wobec Francuskich pierwowzorów [The Young Poland Idea of "Art for Art's Sake" and French Prototypes]" in *Porównania: Studia o kulturze modernizmu* [Comparisons. Studies on the Culture of Modernism], ed. Roman Zimand (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1983): 48.

collective meaning in works of art failed to take into account the new possibilities offered by Symbolism and Expressionism, and it was only in the early twentieth century, when the pressing need for didactic nationalist agitation was perceived to have passed, that modern art was considered to be sufficiently "nationalist" and collective in the contemporary sense. Art historical analysis has yet to explore the strategic merger of nationalist rhetoric and Symbolist devices as they manifest themselves in the self-portrait.

The self-portraits of Wojciech Weiss offer many possibilities in this regard. Weiss is often understood as the closest in Symbolist spirit to Edvard Munch and other artists who were engaged with notions of the degenerate. Weiss is also often referred to as a second-generation Polish modernist. Born twenty-one years after Malczewski, Weiss began regular studies at the Krakow School of Fine Arts in 1892, and created his most characteristic Symbolist-expressionist works in 1899. He traveled extensively throughout Western Europe in the late 1890's and came under the intense influence of Przybyszewski in 1898. It would seem that Weiss' "European" categorization would deny the artist's engagement with Polish realities, yet some of these so-called degenerate characteristics invite comparisons with the position of the heroic artist as spokesperson for the nation prevalent in the earlier part of the 19th century.

In Weiss' *Melancholic (Totenmesse)* (fig. 22), Weiss presents himself as a typical fin-de-siècle dandy, self-absorbed and lost in his own morbid musings. The subject's modernist alienation from society is overwhelming in this portrait – the viewer is not exhorted to action or even noble sentiment, but instead pulled into the negative vortex of the young man's contemplation. Closer examination of the portrait reveals Symbolist idiosyncrasies that suggest a more ambiguous reading. In particular, three items stand out: the peculiar shadow on the wall cast by the subject's head, which is not an accurate rendering but in fact bears an eerie

resemblance to a skull, the observant eyes on the wallpaper behind, and the defiantly vivid dandelion attached to the dandy's lapel. All of these items evoke Symbolist obsessions with death, regeneration and an underlying life force behind everyday reality. In the context of Polish reality, they suggest the struggle between morbidity and regeneration, in a parallel to Wyspiański's plan for the Wawel acropolis, Malczewski's reanimated Polish militants or Stanisławski's suspended Tyniec monastery. For Polish Symbolists, the personal became the political – unable to sustain bombastic or cheery rhetoric in the face of centuries of defeat, depression and invasion, the Polish artist-spokesman intertwined optimism with the fatalism born of experience.

A later self-portrait by Weiss, while containing no direct nationalist connotations, instead makes reference in Symbolist style to the role of the national artist-spokesman. In *Self-portrait with masks* (fig. 23), from 1900, the artist looks searchingly at the viewer, holding a pile of masks for the theater. The masks look oddly rubberized and at the same time uncomfortably anatomical. The most clearly delineated mask, furthest to the left, is also the only one that appears feminine, and its proximity to Weiss' coat creates the illusion of a framing head of hair. This blending of gender recalls works such as those of Munch, in which the clash of genders is an omen of mutual disaster. Here, the literal absorption of the mask creates an organic bond between Weiss and the female persona. The remaining masks look bloodless, less specified, as if waiting to be reanimated by being donned by the artist. These suggestions of gender play by the artist question basic notions of identity and render the artist's persona changeable. The presence of various ramifications of the spokesperson indicate that the fixed, historicist actor of nineteenth-century tradition has become open-ended and more nuanced. Given the fact that the artist and the national spokesperson were automatically identified in the nineteenth century as

mutually complementary and inseparable personas, Weiss' use of and interaction with theatrical masks and gender experimentation suggests a loosening of the prescriptions surrounding the role. In introducing ambiguity and flexibility to the spokesperson role, Weiss' self-portrait rejects rational didacticism, making reference instead to the irrational and unpredictable psyche of the individual as portrayed in Symbolist art.

The creative possibilities of the artist are also outlined by the division of the self-portrait's composition into two areas – that of the higher red section of the background wall and the grayish tones of the lower section of the wall. While the murky, clearly visible brushstrokes surrounding the body of the artist reinforce the eerie quality of the masks and create a primordial atmosphere, the ordered geometrics of the red section of wall, with its three framed pictures and possibly patterned wallpaper, suggest rational order. The dividing line between order and chaos in the work occurs at the level of Weiss' cerebrum, suggesting the struggle over the finished, rational artistic product and the unbridled, dangerous possibilities of the creative mind. Symbolist philosophy argues for the transmission of these latter possibilities into concrete form through the use of specific devices such as that used by Weiss.

The 1903 *Self-portrait* (fig. 24) of Julian Fałat makes an immediate and obvious connection to nationalist issues – the artist is posed in front of a window embrasure, against a scenic background of the landmarks of Krakow's medieval center. Immediately to the artist's left looms the Florian Gate, part of the medieval city walls, while the more distant cathedral silhouette is that of St. Mary's Cathedral. To the right of the Cathedral stands the barbican, a fortified garrison. All three structures held intense national significance for Poles and their quotation in this context could only be understand as straightforwardly nationalist. Fałat was a prominent figure in fin-de-siècle Krakow; trained in Munich in the 1870's, the artist took over

the directorship of the Krakow School of Fine Arts in 1895, introducing the reforms that would lead to its elevation to academy status in 1900 and revolutionizing the curriculum to include modernist professors.

The manner in which Fałat rendered the entire composition of this self-portrait lends a more complicated nuance to the painting. The framing of the misty, faded background scene creates an air of artificiality, and the framing device itself, prominently displayed, calls our attention to the artist's deliberate selection of the background scene. While this is a self-portrait, the artist himself occupies very little compositional space, and is placed, like a guide, to the extreme left of the composition. The sweeping dimensions of the Krakow townscape encourage associations with traditional topographic prints and painting as well as panorama paintings and theater; Fałat's intermediary role suggests that he is the author not only of the reproduction of these well-known landmarks, but at once the result of their inspiration and interpretor. Steeped within the atmosphere of Krakow and its attendant historical weight, the artist is simultaneously a passive product and active carrier of historicism. Fałat is poised between the actual frame of the physical painting, and the created inner frame of the embrasure behind him. In this sense, the artist is suspended between a nationalist narrative, made fictional by political reality, and the "real world" of the viewer, who must acknowledge the artificiality both of the narrative and the painting itself before engaging with the scene. This highlighting of surface in Fałat's work calls to mind Reinhold Heller's assertion that Symbolist paintings share a concern with the "structure of the surface" and willingly expose their artificialities to the viewer.[88]

The Polish Symbolist artist most known for his self-portraits and his nationalist sentiments is Jacek Malczewski. Any analysis of Malczewski's self-portraits becomes

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[88] Reinhold Heller, "Symbolism and the Structure of the Surface," *Art Journal* 45 (1985): 146-153.

complicated when one considers that many of his works not titled as self-portraits per se, prominently display a figure with his own features. In general, this tendency of Malczewski's has been attributed to the artist's egoistic fascination with his own identity as artist. Additionally, it should be pointed out that the fluctuation of identity embraced by Malczewski in works such as *St. Francis* (fig. 25) was hardly alien to Symbolist notions of identity or current Young Poland writers such as Przybyszewski and Wyspiański. These Symbolist understandings of performed identities also inform Malczewski's officially titled self-portraits and here too include the artist's audacious self-identification with the Polish nation. This is redoubled by the artist's many embodiments of Christ such as in various versions of *Christ and the Samaritan Woman* (fig. 26) or *Christ Before Pilate* (fig. 27) prolong the 19th-century tradition of viewing Poland as the "Christ of Nations" – with the modernist difference of Malczewski's bold self-insertion within the figure of Christ.

Malczewski, who depicted himself into over one hundred fifty of his own paintings, occasionally as a lone figure but more often attended by figures from myth or the bible, played a double role of the artist as spokesperson for a nation and the artist as communicator of privileged vision. In works such as *Polish Hector* (fig. 28) or *Christ and the Samaritan Woman* (fig. 26), the artist imposes his own visage on the composition, taking pride of place as a martyr for the nation. In these instances, Malczewski seems fully in control of his creative tools, and the seamless character of both compositions suggests a lack of rupture in favor of a smooth intersection of the work of the artist and the ideals he is grappling with in his imagery.

In other works, however, Malczewski the artist figure is struggling with common inhabitants of Symbolist visions. In *Moment of Creation – Harpy in a Dream* (fig. 29), we see the head of the artist emerging awkwardly and almost hesitantly from the lower frame of the

composition. Malczewski is dwarfed by the enormous figure of the sleeping harpy, whose left wing ominously bisects the artist's neck, while her extended claws mirror his gesturing fingers. In other images, such as *Intermezzo* (fig. 30), Malczewski the creator is an unsure and insignificant interloper in the world of fantasy, or, as in *Artist and Chimera* (fig. 31), destroyed by a creature of his own imagination.[89] In *Self-Portrait with Fauns* (fig. 32), Malczewski occupies the center panel of a triptych, with young and elderly fauns on either side. The background of each panel reveals a typical Malczewski Polish countryside: populated by real and mystical figures engaged in mysterious activity. On his head, the artist wears a torture device used during the Inquisition to "extract the truth" from accused heretics. At the same time, he holds a violin. This schizophrenic division between the knowledgeable creator and uncontrolled heretic recalls Przybyszewski's statements about the process of creation and the persona of the artist. Malczewski's "unhinged" persona in *Self-Portrait with Fauns* suggests his receptivity to supernatural forces and events and subverts the real Poland to his beloved imaginary one. In this sense, the artist's stance is one of defiant retreat into fantasy in the face of political impotence.

Another unnamed self-portrait, *Finis Poloniae* (fig. 33), continues to develop Malczewski's idea of the artist's embodiment of the nation. The work's title, "It's the end of Poland!" is an apocryphal quote believed to have been uttered by Tadeusz Kościuszko on the eve

[89] Works such as these, which are similar in content to German paintings such as those by Lovis Corinth, have been criticized for their "bombastic" or "theatrical" aspect, more evidence of the reigning prejudice against "*gedankenmalerei*." As one critic said of Corinth, "the modern viewer is no longer susceptible to the ostentation and theatricality of such pictures, to their superficial realism, or their echoes of vulgarized Nietzschean Superman ideology or of Weininger's concept of the sexes." Gert Schiff, "An Epoch of Longing: An Introduction to German Painting of the Nineteenth Century," in *German Masters of the Nineteenth Century: Paintings and Drawings from the Federal Republic of Germany*, ed. Gert Schiff (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1981): 36. Apparently, the lack of stylistic deformation or idiosyncratic rendering of form made these pictures open to criticism. Criticism of Gustave Moreau has been made along similar lines. See McGuinness, *Symbolism, Decadence and the Fin-de-Siècle,* 129.

of a battle preceding Poland's final partition, a charge that Kościuszko vehemently denied.[90] The *finis* of the work's title can be alternatively translated as end, boundary or purpose, each of which lends a different shade of meaning to its interpretation. Malczewski has placed himself at the center of a schematized, symmetrical composition: two female antique nudes, their torsos encircled with serpents, stand on either side of the seated artist and seem to threaten the artist with the nation's, and hence his own death. Directly behind his head, a muse figure leads Pegasus – a possible symbol of personal and national redemption – but that potential is seemingly denied by the woman's deathly pallor and downcast eyes. In the far background, we see a peasant woman holding a scythe – a standard countryside element with hidden nuances. While the scythe conjures up notions of bucolic order and tradition, it also has inevitable mythic associations of death and was the weapon of the 1846 peasant uprising called the "Galician Slaughter."[91] All of these foreboding figures in the work's composition foretell the death of the nation, but their literal and figurative focal point is the large, gleaming head of the artist. The two nudes gaze unmistakably at Malczewski's skull, creating diagonal lines of force that are mirrored by Pegasus' wings. The viewer is left to ponder the role of the artist within the composition – is he the creator of a fantastical vision and therefore a victim of his own pessimistic psyche, or the martyrological figure who embodies the sufferings of an entire nation? Malczewski's insistent self-identification with the fate of Poland mirrors fin-de-siècle fatalism and contains parallels to contemporary notions of the enormous creative powers of the artist.

[90] Edwards, Sutherland, *The Polish Captivity*, 2 vols. (London: Wm. Allen & Co., 1863).

[91] The "Galician slaughter" was led by peasant Jakub Szela in the area around the Galician city of Jasło, and was directed against local landowners and clergy, of whom 1,200-3,000 were murdered. It lasted several days. Szela was interned but later honored by the Austrian authorities. The national disunity demonstrated by the class conflict of the massacre was a source of deep cultural anxiety at the fin-de-siecle and the figure of Szela was referenced, among others, in the plays of Wyspiański. For an account of the slaughter, see R.F. Leslie, "Politics and Economics in Congress Poland, 1815-1864," *Past & Present* 8 (1955): 43-63.

One of Malczewski's later self-portraits, painted on the eve of the First World War, places these same issues under scrutiny. Titled *Farewell to the Studio* (fig. 34), the painting suggests the futility of creative activity and the tempting possibilities beyond the world of fantasy. Dressed in a flamboyant white blouse, the artist stands out against a murky studio background. His suspended brush, contemplative gesture and frontal, piercing gaze focus the viewer's attention. Three model/muses surround the artist, seemingly unaware and inert, impervious to their surroundings. A ladder is the sole object in the studio; its placement suggests immediate comparisons with Malczewski's *Faulty Circle*. In that work, the young artist used the ladder as a vantage point to observe and transcend the overwhelming swirl of historical figures. Here, the ladder stands pointlessly, leading to an unknown space beyond the visible. All of the elements of the work's composition imply a life of creation suspended.

By the date of *Farewell to the Studio*, Poland had passed through a brief period of cultural optimism instigated by the 1904 Russo-Japanese war. Russia's involvement in that conflict and consequent distraction on its Western territory was seen by many Poles as an opportunity to make definitive strides towards asserting independence. However, these hopes proved to be short-lived.[92] At the same time, Symbolism and its accompanying fin-de-siècle mentality were perceived as outdated, a development fostered in large part by the emergence of the *Grupa pięciu* (Group of Five), a dissatisfied splinter group of artists from *Sztuka* have run its course, and Malczewski's usual Symbolist mode was seen as outdated.[93] The muse at left holds

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[92] Davies, 56.

[93] Andrzej Jakimowicz states that "…the means of treating [historical-patriotic painting] by Malczewski over the course of the long years of his activity glaringly demonstrates the process of progressive crisis which this genre of painting underwent at the close of the 19th and the beginnings of the 20th centuries […sposób traktowania go przez Malczewskiego w ciągu długich lat jego działalności jaskrawo ukazuje process postępującego kryzysu, jakiemu ten gatunek malarski podlegał u schyłku XIX i w początkach XX w.]" Andrzej Jakimowicz, *Jacek Malczewski i jego epoka* [Jacek Malczewski and His Era] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970): 8.

a pair of scissors, evoking the Fates; the inevitable conclusion is that the artist's creative powers are on the verge of exhaustion. Malczewski makes use of Symbolist devices in order to question the practical viability not only of Young Poland artistic beliefs but also the resurrection of the nation through mystical means.

Finally, Edward Okuń's *We and the War* (fig. 38), painted after Poland gained national sovereignty at the close of the First World War, places the Warsaw-based artist and his pregnant wife against a brilliant art-nouveau backdrop of dragons flattened to give the appearance of wallpaper. Dressed in mourning and barefoot, they appear to purposefully stride forward, intimating Poland's awakening from national inertia. An archetypal hag figure threatens the couple's apparent intentions; springing up from below, her hand fastens on Okuń's wife's dress. As well, the extended wings behind the head of one dragon protrude in front of Okuń's cloak, threatening the possibility of absorption of the couple into the separate dimension of the background. Like the dragonfly in Józef Mehoffer's *Strange Garden* (fig. 36), the butterfly wings of the dragon confuse the spatial logic of the composition and force the viewer to consider multiple interpretations of its space. The title of the composition evokes Poland's particular relation to the First World War and its accompanying liberation; the dynamism and guarded optimism displayed by Okuń and his wife are counterbalanced by the inherent threat of the composition's background and the hag figure. The dragon wallpaper suggests creation and modernity, but also threat and instability. In this sense, it evokes the archetypical Symbolist trope of the uncertain, claustrophobic interior and its analogies to the human psyche. Okuń's placement within this environment suggests the psychological effects of not only the war but also independence, the fear of new loss, and the accompanying struggles to transcend the captive, impotent mentality that had accompanied Polish fin-de-siècle pessimism.

A third category of painting to be considered as a vehicle of Polish nationalism is the landscape. While the identification of soil and topography with nation is an obvious one in nineteenth-century painting, Symbolist landscape has been less explored on these terms.[94] Many Polish artists made use of identifiably Polish markers and dramatized them in order to create scenes of conflict, change and dynamism and the status of the nation's "captive land." The anthropomorphized elements of fields, forests and distant dwellings become identified with the Polish population and the land itself becomes a subsitute for the people. In this sense, the pantheism often found in Symbolist thought and contemporary notions of forces of psychic energy help inform Polish nationalist expression. Symbolist landscape makes use of these current ideas in order to reinterpret nationalism and refresh old arguments about the effects of alienation of Polish land.

The landscapes of Ferdynand Ruszczyc contain many dramatized scenes in which fields, trees and sky exude psychic tension. A lawyer by training, Ruszczyc began painting classes at the St. Petersburg Academy of the Arts under Ivan Repin. Later, he studied with Arkhip Kuindzhi, whose philosophy of pantheistic landscape painting he found extremely influential. Kuindzhi advocated an understanding of landscape as a reflection of the "state of the soul."[95] In Ruszczyc's work, the "state of the soul" articulated in Polish landscape necessarily incorporates the politically contested status of that landscape. The most commented upon image, *Earth* (fig.

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[94] As usual in scholarship on Polish Symbolism, the exception to this rule is the work of Jacek Malczewski. His Polish landscapes, populated with peasant figures, aristocratic manors and mythical figures, have long been analyzed in relation to nationalism and national issues. See Jakimowicz, *Jacek Malczewski*, 113-143.

[95] *Ferdynand Ruszczyc (1870-1936.) Życie i dzieła* [Ferdynand Ruszczyc (1870-1936) Life and Works] (exh. cat.), Agnieszka Fryz-Wiecek, ed., (Krakow: National Museum in Krakow, 2002.)

37), is a heavy-handed drama with a monolithic composition.[96] A peasant drives a team of oxen across a hill: the mundane action is made theatrical by the low point of view and the intense contrast between the turbulent sky, filled with billowing white clouds, and the oppressive weight of the plowed field, painted in dark colors. The homogenous palette of the lower half of the composition creates a striking continuation between the man, oxen and earth, giving rise to an autochthonous association between people and the land. The lowered heads of the oxen and the bent back of the peasant, who is in the midst of cracking his whip, encourage a sense of backbreaking labor. This contrast between the dynamic sky and sluggish earth is a pessimistic commentary on human dependence on land for sustenance and survival as well as an inescapable self-identification with working the soil. Ruszczyc emphasizes the inevitable bond between humans and earth, calling into question the organic philosophy of earlier, naturalist painting such as that by Józef Chełmoński (fig. 38). While here the peasant was viewed as an unproblematic extension of nature's cycles, in Ruszczyc's work their relationship is problematized. *Earth* also represents an unusual commentary on the peasant in the era of "peasant mania" common among Young Poland artists.[97] While the peasant was valued for his assumed simplicity, natural ties to the land and picturesque lifestyle, Ruszczyc's composition creates visual and conceptual equivalency between peasant, animal and land, revealing the less aesthetically appealing side of the majority of the nineteenth-century Polish population. This pessimistic view of the peasant also reflected social divisions between landed gentry and the uneducated masses, who as the

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[96] The Polish title of the painting, *Ziemia*, may be translated as earth, land, or soil. In this sense, the title contains nuances not fully encompassed by its English translations.

[97] This "peasant mania" was harshly criticized in Wyspiański's play *The Wedding*, a fictionalized account of an actual wedding between Young Poland poet Lucjan Rydel and a peasant from a village on the outskirts of Krakow. *The Wedding* examines the divergent experiences of Polish aristocracy and peasantry and notes the failure to communicate across classes. This failure of communication is partially responsible for the failure of nationalist regeneration. Stanisław Wyspiański, *The Wedding: a Drama in Three Acts*, trans. Noel Clark (London: Oberon Books, 1998.)

inheritors of a system of bondage were necessarily less sensitive towards issues of national independence. Those Young Poland artists who did engage with the theme of the peasant were always careful to emphasize the role of the educated elite as outside observers and interpretors of village life; remaining in a given scene but not of it (fig. 6.)

The struggle between man and land and its accompanying suppression echoes the contested status of Polish territory, and questions the ability of human effort to bring about liberation. Ruszczyc continued this theme in the later work *Into the World* (fig.39), in which two hooded peasants, reminiscent of wandering religious, trek through a barren agricultural landscape, their journey marked by a series of telegraph poles. The crude, closely described strips of furrowed earth in the foreground and the heavy layer of cloud cover overwhelm the viewer with a sense of the oppressive ubiquity of the atmosphere. This process is multiplied and made explicit in *Refugees* (fig. 40), in which a crowd of exiles trudges through countryside. As the viewer's eye progresses from the left to the right of the composition, the densely packed group thins out, along with the birch trees lining the countryside road. The dilution of the group into the overwhelming, vast landscape on the right reinforces the sense of indirection and uncertainty in newly alien territory.

By comparison, Wojciech Weiss' *Frenzy* (fig. 41) can be viewed as a more extreme, Przybyszewski-esque interpretation of the same phenomenon described in *Refugees*. Weiss studied under Leon Wyczółkowski in Krakow and came under the intense influence of Przybyszewski as well. *Frenzy* maintains only the most basic connections to realistic description; against a crudely drawn landscape, a mass of people, ghosts or possibly spirits spills from left to right in an agonized mass convulsion. The glaring red of the mass of people carries obvious emotional connotations, while the striking scrap of white on a blindfold worn by one

figure is simultaneously an ironic mockery of the concept of justice and a commentary on the helplessness of the individual to control fate. At the feet of the group, Weiss has allowed the red of the figures to bleed into the dark green of the earth, suggesting an organic but also damning connection between the population and the land. The gray shape in the sky behind the frenzied mass is vaguely reminiscent of the Polish eagle – a national symbol transformed into a threat.

The effects of dispossession on Polish territory are seen in Ruszczyc' *Empty Space (Old Nest)* (fig. 42), in which an abandoned manor house stands in the midst of a dynamic, windy landscape. While the plants in the foreground and the trees to the right are visually integrated elements of the scene, the house's stubborn straight angles alienate it from the surrounding nature. In stark contrast is Ruszczyc' painting of his own family's home, *Old Home (Manor in Bohdanów)* (fig. 43), in which the manor of the title is mystically integrated with the land. The geometric angles of the building are softened by the enormous overgrowth of creeping ivy over the front entrance, which gently protrudes into the dense, close clouds. The symmetry of the two flowering lilac bushes in the foreground echo the side windows and chimneys of the house; its low roof and cropped sides give the viewer the impression that the manor could be an organic outgrowth of the land. This treatment of the aristocratic residence makes the subtle political argument for the educated classes as the carrier and preserver of national identity in turbulent periods.

While his *Earth* describes antagonism between people and land, Ruszczyc's *Old Apple Trees* (fig. 44) draws upon folk beliefs about animation of plants in order to add theatrical nuance to this relationship. In the work, several apple trees appear to explore the surrounding space with twisted, gnarled limbs. The lack of sky within the composition and the network created by the tree branches creates a cloisonné effect similar to that seen in the works of the

Nabis. While the Nabis were interested in discovering and exploring the underlying order of nature, Ruszczyc's anthropomorphic trees also interrogate the physical affinities and psychical bonds between man and nature. The tangled interdependency between land and community means that the nation can only become fruitful through its reliance upon the land. Like the mallow branches in his *Salon Interior in Bohdanów*, the apple trees are instinctually recognized by the viewer as the protagonists of a dramatized landscape.

These animated protagonists also characterize the artist's *Cloudlet* (fig. 45). Here, the interaction between elements of the landscape is made starkly dramatic by the elimination of descriptive detail and the use of a limited, intense palette. In *Cloudlet*, a small cloud soars across a sky, appearing to be on a crash course with the weighty clump of a tree. A sense of dynamism within the composition is created by the diagonal white brushstrokes under the cloud, as well as the waving green lines of the grass on the hill. The near absence of perspective within the work also encourages the viewer to focus on the abstract play of shapes and colors in the composition, foretelling Ruszczyc' formal investigations in modernism.

Another of Ruszczyc' works that deserves analysis against the background of nationalist issues is the quasi-fantastic *Nec Mergitur (Sailor's Legend)* (fig. 46), in which a glittering ship heaves across a turbulent night sea. The otherworldly glow of lights on the ship and the dramatized starry sky and foaming waves underline the legendary connotations of the scene: *Fluctuat nec mergitur*, the motto of the city of Paris, a place of cultural refuge for Poles, describes a ship that is tossed by waves but does not sink. In the context of Ruszczyc's work, the ship becomes a stand-in for the autonomous Polish nation.[98] The shortening of the Latin phrase

[98] Paris was the center of Polish national activity and the heart of its cultural "government in exile." See Davies, *Serce Europy*, 56-58.

to the crucial element "does not sink," demonstrates Ruszczyc's belief in the spiritual endurance of nationhoodThe mystical strain continues in Weiss' landscape *Radiant Sunset* (fig. 47), in which a flaming sun on the lower horizon extends its rays over the fields in the foreground, illuminating individual plants as if endowing them with supernatural qualities. The landscape is molded and changed by the transformative and possibly resurrecting rays of the sun, which also appears in the work as a schematic cross. This reference makes an explicit connection to the nineteenth-century Polish tradition of identifying the "martyrdom" of the nation under partition with Christ's martyrdom, updating the romantic tradition in abstract fashion.

While his *Capsheaves* draws inspiration from Polish folklore, Wyspiański's *Park at Dawn* (fig. 48) makes reference to Polish national heritage by portraying the Wawel Castle and Cathedral at the outskirts of the same garden area in Krakow. The composition of *Park at Dawn* is marked by a severe separation between foreground and background; in the foreground, bare trees with grasping, animate limbs contrast with the misty, dreamlike portrayal of Wawel. Like the plants in Ruszczyc' salon interior, the trees appear to be psychically animated, the natural protagonists of the scene, while the cultural heritage of the cathedral and castle are abstract and insubstantial. *Park at Dawn* rejects the allegorical symbols of earlier painting and invests its tree protagonists with the intuitive energy described by Przybyszewski and Matuszewski.

Symbolist theory in Western Europe hinted at the existence of a sphere of reality above and beyond the rational boundaries of the individual, group, and the nation. Its inherent drama and tension resulted from the belief that the creative individual was caught between a waking, rational world and an all-encompassing reality accessible through the unconscious. For Western

European Symbolists, this transcendent escape from boundaries represented a near-complete break with categories of society and state imposed upon the individual. However, the peculiar political status of the Polish Symbolist meant that these categories could not be parsed as easily. In his curtain speech for the play *Ubu Roi*, Alfred Jarry noted that the setting of the play was to be nowhere, thought of in terms of Poland – "a country sufficiently legendary and divided to become this NOWHERE."[99] As a Symbolist, Jarry instinctively grasped the possibilities of Poland's situation for a particular brand of commentary. In their image of a nowhere nation, Polish modernists created in an environment that could be understood as de facto Symbolist and emphasized the notion of an in-between state which expanded the possibilities for creative expression. Their formal strategies of distortion, emphasis and displacement allowed for traditional nationalist sentiment to reinvent itself and become revitalized on the eve of the nation's independence.

As Anna Brzyski has related, the process of acceptance of modernism in Poland could only be accomplished as part of a trend of international modernism and the growing conviction that Polish identity was not incompatible with new directions in the visual arts.[100] The notion of national identity and the fight to preserve and articulate it in the arts, however, was an integral part of the early modernism represented by Symbolist painters. By using modern strategies and creating nationalist content, Polish Symbolists demonstrated that nationalism and internationalism are not necessarily antithetical. In their works, Symbolists combined traditional concerns about the nation, among them independence, class relations and individual expression,

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[99] Alfred Jarry, "Preface," in Alfred Jarry, *Ubu Roi*, trans. Beverly Keith and G. Legman (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003, orig. published 1893): 3.

[100] Anna Brzyski, „Nationalism and Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Poland" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1999.)

territory, religious heritage and its visual manifestation with the type of formal strategies encouraged by the Symbolist theories of dissonance and multi-dimensionality. Jacek Malczewski, speaking of an ongoing debate he had with Stanisław Wyspiański on national content, remarked "[Wyspiański] often took me to Wawel [Cathedral and Castle complex] and said: This is Poland. But I always explained to him, that Poland is those fields, field boundaries, roadside willows, the atmosphere of that village at sunset, that moment, like this moment – all of that is more Polish than Wawel; it is this that the artist-Pole should attempt to express."[101] The discussion between both artists reveals the automatic identification of an abstract notion – that of the independent, integral nation-state – with the concrete symbols of either rulership, religion or territory. The ways in which these two artists and all Polish Symbolists handled concrete symbols in their painting allows for a fuller, more nuanced understanding of nationalist expression in early modernism.

[101] "Często prowadził mnie na Wawel...i mówił: To jest Polska. Tymczasem ja mu zawsze tłumaczyłem, że Polska – to te pola, miedze, wierzby przydrożne, nastrój tej wsi o zachodzie słońca, ta chwila, tak jak teraz – to wszystko jest bardziej polskie, niż Wawel; to jest to, co artysta-Polak powinien się przede wszystkim starać wyrazić." Maria Suchodolska and Bogdan Suchodolski, *Polska: naród i sztuka* [Poland: Nation and Art] (Warsaw: Arkady, 1988): 172.

Chapter III

Symbolism on the Margins of Europe

Western European Symbolism first made its mark in Polish territory in the last decade of the nineteenth century among certain artists and writers of the Young Poland movement. The ways and means of reception were two-fold: Polish artists saw the works of foreign Symbolists while they were living or travelling abroad, and they also read the works of leading European and Polish critics who championed Symbolism. The combined effects of experience abroad and local writings on the style helped create a modernist artistic milieu colored by Symbolist modes of thought and expression, particularly in Krakow. Polish Symbolist paintings were characterized by many of the same themes and motifs as their Western European counterparts; their usage in local context, however, invites reevaluation of the capabilities and boundaries of the style.

Artists working in a Symbolist style were overwhelmingly located in either Krakow or Warsaw. Of these two cities, Krakow was the most preeminent for the development of modernism. The School of Fine Arts in Krakow received academy status in 1900, becoming the most desirable place to study for young artists. Prior to the end of the nineteenth century, Paris and Munich were among the most popular cities for young Polish artists studying abroad.[102]

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[102] Paris was popular among Polish artists thanks in large part to historical ties between Poland and France extending to the aftermath of the first Polish Republic in the eighteenth century and Napoleon's positive stance toward Polish independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As Roman Zimand argues, political bonds between the two countries led naturally to cultural ones. See Roman Zimand, "Czarny sterotyp Zachodu [The Dark Stereotype of the West,]" in Zimand, ed., *Porównania*, 65.

Additionally, modernist artists and supporters of art in Krakow formed a number of groups and associations in support of artistic activity in the city. The most famous and enduring of these groups was the society *Sztuka* (Art), founded in 1896, an association that organized exhibitions locally and internationally and helped cement a sense of modernist identity in a city with a rather parochial reputation.

Furthermore, Krakow café culture and local periodicals such as *Życie* provided forums for artists, critics and writers to exchange ideas on modernism, while local theaters reproduced the works of Symbolist playwrights such as Maeterlinck and Ibsen. The two most prominent modernist artists of the time, painter Jacek Malczewski and painter, playwright and designer Stanisław Wyspiański, were based in Krakow, as were fellow Symbolists Jan Stanisławski, Józef Mehoffer and Wojciech Weiss.

While Warsaw was considered to be less artistically progressive and more materialist than Krakow, it also had its share of modernist artistic activity. The local art school, the Warsaw School of Drawing, obtained academy status in 1904, and the influential modernist periodical *Chimera* operated in Warsaw from 1901-1907. *Chimera* drew its contributing artists from Krakow and Lwów as well as Warsaw. Because of its location in the Russian-controlled sector of partitioned Poland, Warsaw had artistic connections with St. Petersburg, and Warsaw Symbolists Konrad Krzyżanowski and Wojtkiewicz, among others, were graduates of the Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts. Among the Polish artists who had some connection with both Warsaw and Symbolism were Julian Fałat, Leon Wyczółkowski, Konstanty Laszczka, Jan Stanisławski, Józef Pankiewicz, Ksawery Dunikowski, and Józef Chełmoński.

Munich as a place of study was very popular among Polish painters, who were able to establish a collective presence in the city, including a periodical devoted to the arts, *Jednodniowka* [The Daily.] See Halina Stepien, "Modernisci z Monachium i Miriam [Modernists from Munich and Miriam]," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 1989 (1):45-63. The intended audience of this periodical was the Polish community in Munich.

Despite the aforementioned Symbolist presence in Warsaw, the combination of a more repressive political environment under Russian authority and the influence of two conservative thinkers on art – Wojciech Gerson and Stanisław Witkiewicz – held back the intellectual flowering of modernism in Warsaw at the fin-de-siècle. Wojciech Gerson, probably the most influential Polish artist in Warsaw in the late nineteenth century, also happened to be the main representative of an uncontroversial national art. As the head of the Warsaw school of drawing, he was naturally in a position to influence local artistic production. The theories of Stanisław Witkiewicz, who championed Naturalism, contained two key elements antithetical to the practice of Symbolism: he supported a kind of pat verisimilitude that ignored the realities of contemporary urban life, and was simultaneously uninterested in work with any literary or poetic allusions.[103]

Due to the political and economic situation in nineteenth-century Poland, young artists were *de facto* obligated to acquire an academy-status education abroad. The three centers of education for Polish painters were Munich, St. Petersburg and Paris. In St. Petersburg, the presence of proto-Symbolist artists such as Archip Kuindzi influenced the development of Polish Symbolists Konrad Krzyżanowski and Ferdynand Ruszczyc. In Munich, the work of Arnold Böcklin was particularly influential for Jacek Malczewski, and in Paris, Malczewski and Stanisław Wyspiański looked at the work of Odilon Redon while Władysław Ślewiński associated with the circle of Paul Gauguin and Paul Sérusier in Brittany.

Exhibition venues in Polish territory were scarce, a state of affairs which further prompted Polish artists to travel abroad to absorb European trends-- either independently or as

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[103] For a summation of Warsaw's artistic status during the period, see Roman Zimand, *Dekadentyzm Warszawski* [Varsovian Decadence] (Warsaw: Państwowy Wydawnictwo Akademickie, 1964.)

part of exhibition groups such as *Sztuka*. While direct evidence does not always exist to document which exhibitions and studios they visited, one can safely assume that most Polish painters who were in European cities as students were also keen followers of local events. Les XX, the Symbolist association in Brussels, held yearly exhibitions from 1884 to 1893. In Paris, Polish artists attended the Universal Exposition of 1889 and the attendant Café Volpini show and in Munich, the Secession exhibitions were the subject of study for Polish students.[104]

While the study abroad of Polish artists helped acquaint them with the practice of Symbolism in Western Europe, the work of two particular writer-critics and, most importantly, the two modernist journals with which they were associated, *Life* and *Chimera*, was equally vital for the growth of Symbolism in Krakow and in Warsaw. While strikingly different in personality, writing style, and philosophy, these two thinkers – Stanisław Przybyszewski (1868 - 1927) and Zenon "Miriam" Przesmycki (1861 - 1944) shared a passionate commitment to the relevance of modernism to Polish artists, as well as its crucial ability to preserve Polish identity. Jan Cavanaugh has provided an overview of the ways in which these two writers and the periodicals of which they were editors helped pave the way for general acceptance of modernism and Young Poland at the turn of the twentieth century.[105] A more focused examination of their interactions with the West, however, demonstrates the ways in which Symbolist ideas were selected and transformed to embody nationalist content as well as issues of personal and collective identity.

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[104] For an overview of Polish artists in Paris during this period, see Ewa Bobrowska-Jakubowska, *Artyści polscy we Francji w latach 1890-1918. Wspólnoty i indywidualności* [Polish Artists in France in the years 1890-1914: Communities and Individuals] (Warsaw: DiG, 2004).

[105] Jan Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In: Early Modern Polish Art, 1890-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 27-38.

Both *Życie* and *Chimera* were characterized by a high degree of direct participation with native Symbolist painters. Local artists were not only consumers and passive receivers of the ideas propagated in these journals, but their co-creators as well. By absorbing the ideas of Western Symbolism and contributing their own ideas and products to *Życie* and *Chimera*, Polish Symbolists claimed pan-European modernism as their own.

The editor of *Życie*, Stanisław Przybyszewski, was born in the Kujawy region of Poland, which was annexed to the Kingdom of Prussia from the close of the eighteenth century until Poland regained its independence in 1918. The Prussian authorities in Polish territory were aggressive in their repression of Polish cultural identity, banning the use of Polish language in schools and public arenas. It is therefore unsurprising that the young Przybyszewski relocated to Berlin, where his ideas about art, creativity and identity were developed.[106] While Przybyszewski is known primarily as an Expressionist writer, his earlier essays on the role and mission of the contemporary artist and the function of the symbol in drama have far-reaching implications for Polish Symbolism. His texts, such as "Confiteor," "On the New Art" and "The Role of the Symbol in Drama," reveal the author's theory of the process and goals of artistic creation. Heavily influenced by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and the modernist artistic milieu in 1890's Berlin of which he was an integral part, the author returned to Poland in 1898 in order to take over the editorship of *Życie* (Life.)[107] Przybyszewski's essays became synonymous with

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[106] Roman Taborski, "Stanisław Przybyszewski and the 'New Art'," in Agnieszka Morawińska, ed., *Symbolism in Poland: Collected Essays* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1984): 17-18.

[107] Partially thanks to Przybyszewski, the dionysian aspects of Nietzsche's theories significantly influenced the Young Poland mentality and helped link Symbolism with earlier messianic/creative understandings of national art. For an overview of the popularity of these elements of Nietzscean work, see Dankowska, "Filozofia Epoki Jacka Malczewskiego [Philosophy of Jacek Malczewski's Epoch]," in Teresa Grzybkowska, ed., *Muzyka w obrazach Jacka Malczewskiego: materiały z konferencji zorganizowanej przez Akademie Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie w 150. rocznice urodzin malarza* [Music in the pictures of Jacek Malczewski] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo-DiG, 2005):132.

early modernism in Krakow, and his involvement in the visual arts continued into the twentieth century with his association with Polish Expressionism. In particular, Przybyszewski's understanding of the symbol as a creative device and his metaphysics of artistic activity find intriguing parallels in the work of Symbolist painters such as Jan Stanisławski (fig. 49).

Against the background of Krakovian artistic provincialism, the arrival of Przybyszewski from Berlin was jarring. The seeming incongruity between the parochial conditions of Krakow and the outlandish personality of Przybyszewski has often been commented upon, but the consequences of his theories for local Symbolist activity have been overlooked. Przybyszewski's ideas and international perspectives allowed for something more than a cosmetic change in artistic style for modernist artists in Krakow, and prompted artists to consider their social tasks more decisively. Because of his position as editor of the only modernist journal in Krakow, Przybyszewski had an extremely effective means of broadcasting his call to embrace modernism. In addition to his own artistic theories, the smallest editorial decisions about the content, appearance and overarching philosophy of *Życie* were influential in propagating a modernist philosophy that provided effective underpinning for Symbolist painting in Poland.

In assuming the editorship of Krakow's *Życie*, Przybyszewski made clear his commitment to the Young Poland movement, including its Symbolist aspects, while making a case in print for the connections between artistic activity in Poland and similar developments elsewhere in Europe. He revealed a comprehensive understanding of the structure of modernism in Europe and Poland's possible place within that structure. As he explicitly stated:

> …I have decided to take over *Życie* in order to sustain the focal point around which the most outstanding forces of Young Poland have concentrated for a year, and finally because I have faith, strong faith, that this society will finally want to understand that [Poland's] true rebirth lies in science and art. In this case

> we perhaps give proof of our most powerful vitality, if our unconsumed spiritual force conquers Europe in such a way and effects such an influence on her, as has the Scandinavian soul, for example.[108]

This statement suggests that Przybyszewski understood the development of modernism across Europe as a bi-directional phenomenon. His nineteenth-century view of the distinct "character" of a given nation formed the basis of his belief that the Polish "soul" could influence and even rejuvenate mainstream European modernism, as had already occurred in the analogous case of Scandinavia and the art of Edvard Munch.

A typical issue of *Życie* under Przybyszewski's leadership would contain the writings of Western European modernists and Symbolists, as well as critical notes on art, literature, and theater.[109] In particular, its notes on local events provided a practical bridge for its readership between the ferment of ideas and events in Western European centers and local activities. For a population that was accustomed to viewing itself as being on the periphery of European culture, the inclusion of local manifestations was crucial to social acceptance of modernism as a phenomenon that also held relevance at home. In addition, Przybyszewski's philosophy of artistic creation transcended geographical borders, which encouraged an understanding of Polish Symbolist art to be as authentic as the journal's reproductions of Western examples.

Przybyszewski's guiding motif in his creative theory at the turn of the century was that of the "naked soul," a reference to a universal and transcendent reality that could supposedly be

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[108] "…postanowiłem objąć Życie, aby podtrzymać ognisko, przy którym przez cały rok skupiały się najwybitniejsze siły „Młodej Polski," a wreszcie dlatego, bo mam wiarą w nasze społeczeństwo, silną wiarę, że to społeczeństwo zechce raz wreszcie rozumieć, iż nasze prawdziwe odrodzenie tkwi w nauce i w sztuce. Wtedy chyba damy dowód naszej najsilniejszej żywotności, jeżeli niespożyta nasza siła duchowa tak Europę opanuje i taki na nią wpływ wywrze, jak np. duch skandynawski." Stanisław Przybyszewski, "Statement after Assuming the Editorship of *Życie* [Wypowiedź po objęcie redakcji *Życie*]," *Życie* 2, nos. 38/39 (1899): 497-98.

[109] Justyna Drozdek provides a complete listing of the contents of *Życie* as well as an analysis of its role in shaping Polish modernism in *Life and Chimera: Framing Modernism in Poland*. PhD. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2008: 74-165; 251-308.

accessed through the act of artistic creation. This reference to the naked soul began with the critic's writings on the work of Edvard Munch. Przybyszewski's writings on the Norwegian Symbolist, another key participant in the Berlin artistic scene of the 1890's, helped him develop a theory of artistic creativity that later proved crucial to Krakovian modernism. In his writings on the artist, Przybyszewski interprets Munch's works such as *The Voice* as depictions of fundamental human drives (fig. 50).[110] While the critic felt that artists such as the Parnassists focused on line, precision and above all outward resemblance, he praised Munch for his willingness to transcend realistic forms, colors and shapes. By rejecting or consciously altering external appearance, Munch revealed the nature of inner spirit in his work.

Przybyszewski's hierarchy of artistic values helped pave the way for Polish Symbolist activity. For the critic, creation was not bound by any set of rules other than the imperative to commune with spiritual reality.[111] If an artist allowed himself to follow this intuition, then the resulting work of art would be authentic and therefore valuable. As he stated in "On Drama and the Stage" (1906), "I only care about the intensiveness and tension of feeling, and as to whether it appears in this or that form…let our munificent critics keep on racking their brains about it."[112] This rejection of all didactic precepts in art was similar to the Symbolist belief in the appeal to a transcendent reality. In Symbolist thought, the irrational is more authentic than the rational,

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[110] Stanisław Przybyszewski, "Na drogach duszy [Along the Paths of the Soul]," *Życie* 2, no. 42 (1898): 547-48. See also Shelley Wood Cordulack, *Edvard Munch and the Physiology of Symbolism* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2002): 60-78.

[111] For a succinct analysis of Przybyszewski's concept of the naked soul and its relation to Symbolist conceptions of the *au-delà*, see Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, "'Naga Dusza i Epoka Mundurów (o Stanisławie Przybyszewskim)["The Naked Soul" and the "Age of Uniforms" (on Stanisław Przybyszewski)]," in *Somnambulicy-Dekadenci-Herosi: Studia i eseje o literaturze Młodej Polski* [Somnambulists-Decadents-Heroes: Studies and Essays on the Literature of Young Poland] (Kraków-Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1985): 297-313.

[112] "Mnie obchodzi tylko intensywność i napięcie uczucia, a czy ono się w tej lub owej formie przejawia...nad tym niech sobie nasi łaskawi krytycy i nadal swoje mózgi smażą." Stanisław Przybyszewski, *O dramacie i scenie* [On Drama and the Stage] (Warsaw: Księgarnia naukowa, 1905): 37.

because it was representative of a higher order of truth. By evoking irrationality in their works, Symbolist painters believed they captured this non-material, yet equally valid reality.

The essence of Przybyszewski's artistic theory and its connections to Polish Symbolism may be found in his essay, "Confiteor," published in 1899 in *Życie*. The essay's title, "I state" or "I confess," suggests Przybyszewski's self-styled status as a magus privy to esoteric knowledge. In strident, dramatic terms, Przybyszewski rejects the standard of didacticism and indebtedness of the artist to social "ideas" and stakes a claim for individualism as the essential ingredient of authentic art. For the critic, the rejection of all social and ethical norms allows for pure and unfettered individual expression.[113] As he states, "for the artist in our understanding of the term all manifestations of the soul are equal…he does not take account of their incidental evil or good expression."[114] Przybyszewski's ideas are clearly indebted to his reading of Nietzsche in Berlin. Further along in the essay, Przybyszewski shifts his focus from the work of art to the figure of the artist; the nature of art is such that its creator is not beholden to social and ethical norms but is rather a prophet who "stands above life and above the world." Przybyszewski's Symbolist conception of the artist was deliberately similar in spirit to Nietzsche's *Übermensch* (Overman).

Given this understanding of art's freedom from social or moral obligation, it is understandable that Przybyszewski would be a proponent of art for art's sake, a notion viewed as highly decadent in nineteenth-century Poland. The conflict between critics of an older generation, who viewed modern artists as decadent, and the younger Symbolist generation is

[113] Przybyszewski's insistence on individualism as a defining characteristic of art is similar to Oscar Wilde's assertions that "Art is the most intense mode if individualism the world has known." Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," in *The Soul of Man under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. Linda Dowling (London: Penguin Books, 2001): 125-163.

[114] „...dla artysty w naszym pojęciu są wszelkie przejawy duszy równomierne...nie liczy się z ich przypadkowym złym lub dobrym oddziaływaniem..." Stanisław Przybyszewski, "Confiteor," 2.

exemplified by critic Stanisław Szczepanowski's article "Dezynfekcja prądów europejskich [Disinfection of European Currents]." Responding to an article about Italian writer Gabriele d'Annunzio which had appeared in the periodical *Słowo Polskie* in 1898, Szczepanowski argued that art existed to spur its viewer to acts of patriotism and that it should be a moral force. He negated the idea of beauty as a self-justifying category in art. Szczepanowski's opponents, among them critic Ludwik Szczepański, who wrote for *Życie*, argued that positive moral force and national expression would appear naturally in art in which the artist attempted to authentically express the contents of his soul. In this turn of argument, modern art achieved the same ideological ends endorsed by Szczepanowski.[115]

For Przybyszewski, pure individual expression was synonymous with the expression of the essence of the universe, or the naked soul. Because art is a reflection of the naked soul, it follows that it has no goal but is an end in and of itself. The naked soul could manifest itself on a macrocosmic, microcosmic or individual level. A work of art created according to inner imperatives is both individually unique and universally applicable – it is inherently part of something larger than itself. When taking over the editorship of *Życie* in 1899, Przybyszewski expressed these views in the context of Symbolist painters and musicians. Arguing against the notion of didactic obligations for writers as well as for painters and composers, Przybyszewski praised the progress that had been made in recognizing freedom of creation for Jan Stanisławski,

[115] Ludwik Szczepanski, "Sztuka Narodowa [National Art]" 109. The equation of Symbolism with decadentism and therefore with "asocial"tendencies has continued to influence scholarly understandings of the style. As Teresa Walas has asserted, there were similarities between Polish Symbolism and "decadentism" in their common resistance to social issues. The ability of Polish Symbolist painting to address social currencies while simultaneously appealing to a more enduring reality has been dismissed or ignored. Walas, "Dynamika wewnętzna," 24-25.

Józef Mehoffer, Stanisław Wyspiański and Wojciech Weiss. As he stated, "nobody thinks of searching for social or ethical ideals in the music of Wagner, Chopin, or Schuman..."[116]

Another aspect of Przybyszewski's "Confiteor" finds particular resonance in the content of Polish Symbolism – namely, the author's remarks on national identity in art. While the notion of national identity may at first appear contradictory to the concept of the universal soul, Przybyszewski argued that the nation itself is a universal and fundamental category, a "piece of eternity." In an argument reminiscent of Johann Herder, Przybyszewski states that the artist draws strength from his roots in native land and that which is eternal in a nation – its uniqueness among other nations.[117] By essentializing the concept of nation, Przybyszewski legitimized the work of Polish Symbolists such as Jacek Malczewski and Stanisław Wyspiański, who engaged national themes and use national symbols in their painting without falling into the trap of tendentious or propagandizing art.[118]

Przybyszewski ends the essay with an explicit call to young artists; he pledges that *Życie* intends to inspire the young generation with new thought and new form. This explicit pronouncement indicates the degree to which Przybyszewski saw his own philosophies, and by extension those of *Życie*, as crucial to the flowering of a modern creative community in Krakow. The statement also advocated the existence of the journal as a kind of creative manual for

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[116] "…nikomu nie przyjdzie na myśl szukać społecznych czy etycznych ideałów w muzyce Wagnera, Szopena, Szumana...[it would never occur to anyone to search for social or ethical ideals in the music of Wagner, Chopin or Schumann...]" Stanisław Przybyszewski, "From the Editor [Od redakcji]," *Życie* 3, no. 8 (1899): 145.

[117] For an explanation of Herder's views on nations and culture, see Royal J. Schmidt, "Cultural Nationalism in Herder," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17 (1956): 407-417.

[118] Jacek Malczewski's most famous statement about art, his rector's convocation address of 1912 to the students of the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts, reveals his conviction that valuable art, regardless of style, must address social and national ideals. Jagna Dankowska discusses the speech within the framework of Malczewski's philosophical beliefs in "Filozofia epoki Jacka Malczewskiego [Philosophy in Jacek Malczewski's Epoch]," 132.

Symbolists and other modernists. *Życie* would not merely reflect current artistic events, but would actively encourage and inspire them.

Przybyszewski's essay "On the New Art," printed in the same journal in 1899, contains commentary on aspects of modern art that ally themselves with ideas about Symbolism expressed by French literary critics such as Jean Moréas. One of the fundamental aspects of the way in which literary Symbolism functioned was a rejection of logical association. In poetry, the use of the ellipsis and the allusion resulted in the opening up of the association of word and idea. The hint replaced the emphatic statement. In an anti-positivist spirit, Symbolist activity created open, not closed, associations and resisted the pull of logic. Likewise, Symbolist painting sought to problematize the one-to-one association of image and idea, allowing for a multiplicity of nuance in the interpretation of a given image. Przybyszewski reinforced this rejection of logic in "On the New Art," stating,

> And if the creator up till now placed emphasis on conscious, logical connections of thought, operated with the association of thoughts…operated with external things, that he took for something absolute in the false notion, that "outside" and "inside" entirely eclipsed each other…then to the contrary: the representative of the new art entirely turns away from that "outside"…searches beyond the false image of so-called reality for an entire miniscule network of stimuli, influences, unclear images, things unformulated with the help of logic…[119]

[119] "A jeżeli twórca dotychczasowy kładł nacisk na świadome, logiczne łączenia myśli, operował asocjacjami myśli...operował rzeczami zewnętrznymi, które uważał za coś absolutnego we fałszywym pojęciu, że „zewnątrz" i „wewnątrz" zupełnie się pokrywa, to przeciwnie, przedstawiciel nowej sztuki całkiem odwraca się od tego „zewnątrz"...szuka poza złudnym obrazem tzw. rzeczywistości całą drobniuteńką sieć pobudek, wpływów, obrazów niejasnych, rzeczy niesformułowanych logiką..." Stanisław Przybyszewski, "O nową sztukę [On the New Art]," *Życie* 3, no. 6 (1899):102-04.

Przybyszewski continues his essay with allusions to the theories of Henri Bergson,[120] arguing that "reality" as represented by pre-modern artists is inherently false as it is based on an artificial frozen moment taken from the span of the "continuous being" of time. By moving beyond the information afforded him by the five senses, the modern artist draws upon the well of the absolute soul, in which "sound is simultaneously hue and scent" and the logic of thought is replaced by the faithful representation of emotion. The emphasis on dualism, synaesthesia and the superiority of instinct over logic are all Symbolist characteristics and reveal the influence of these trends in Przybyszewski's theory.

For Polish Symbolists, who made use of formal distortion in their works, this transcendent reality could represent an alternative both to the reality of everyday life under political repression and to the legacy of Positivism that was particularly strong in nineteenth-century Poland. Krakow's political environment was characterized by a policy of conformity and conservatism – local Polish authorities functioned complacently within the Austro-Hungarian empirical administration and were rewarded with rather lax public policies, unlike those in the Prussian sector of partitioned Poland.[121] This lack of risk also characterized artistic activity in Krakow. The main patrons of art throughout the nineteenth century were gentry or bourgeois, who sponsored a series of exhibitions notable for their strict naturalism. Two notable memoirs from late nineteenth-century Krakow, those of doctor Franciszek Klein and poet

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[120] Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska notes Przybyszewski's indebtedness to Bergson's theories in *Programy i dyskusje literackie okresu młodej polski* [Literary programs and discussions of the Young Poland period] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2000): 376.

[121] For an overview of the political, social and cultural situation in nineteenth-century Galicia, see Norman Davies, *God's Playground,* 139-162.

Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, agree in their characterization of Krakow as a bastion of social and artistic conservatism.[122]

By arguing that the true artist transcends the constraints of social mores, Przybyszewski provided Symbolist painters with the moral justification to ignore didactic obligations in their work. The critic's model of artistic expression provided an alternative to the well-worn oppositional tactics utilized by Romantic and Naturalist artists earlier in the nineteenth century. In their poetry and painting, Romantics created an alternate, metaphysical nation composed of mystical elements as a place of cultural and spiritual refuge. Their engagement with current realities extended only as far as necessary to provide a springboard from which to form their own alternative nation (figs. 3 and 4). Naturalist artists, who were allied with Positivist philosophies of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, sought to document Polish history in easily readable terms. Polish positivists argued for a guiding philosophy of "organic work," the belief that working to improve material conditions in Poland would ultimately prove more beneficial to the survival of Polish identity than outright and foolhardy political agitation.[123] The images produced by artists sympathetic to Positivism artfully ignored current politics, placing emphasis on Polish folk traditions and well-known historical events (figs. 5 and 6).

Przybyszewski's modernist, Symbolist approach to issues of social norms and creativity allowed for political commentary as part of the inherent nature of artistic development. If the artist could transcend the bonds of society, ethnicity, and class, yet still operate within the category of nation as delineated in Przybyszewski's essays, then elements of political commentary could be reconciled with the essentialist nature of the "naked soul." Instead of

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[122] See note 9.

[123] Norman Davies, *God's Playground*, 43-52.

taking either an escapist or oppositional stance, the Symbolist artist could include elements of current realities in their work, often set in ambiguous compositions. These combinations allowed for more open-ended and hence ambiguous interpretations of traditional motifs, and, by extension, current political realities.

Przybyszewski's insistence that artistic creation is a vital life process also provided justification and inspiration for the development of a modernist artistic scene in Krakow. By personally setting a deliberately provocative and flamboyant example in Krakow's public life, Przybyszewski helped develop a social praxis of modernism similar to that in which he participated in Berlin. Przybyszewski's time in the German capital and his experience with artists and writers there proved essential to the development of Krakow modernism. In particular, his practice of holding court in Krakow cafes created meeting places for the artistic exchange of ideas.[124] Przybyszewski helped shift the focus of artistic activity in Krakow from the fusty exhibitions of the Society of the Friends of Art and the conservatism of the School of Art to a more democratic environment in which modernist artists did not necessarily have to conform to a set of unyielding expectations.

Like Przybyszewski's *Życie* in Krakow, Zenon "Miriam" Przesmycki's artistic periodical *Chimera* in Warsaw set a standard of modernism sharply at odds with pre-existing notions in Poland about art and its practice. Like Krakow, Warsaw also had a society of Friends of Art which was characterized by similarly conservative taste. The Warsaw School of Fine Arts did not have academy status, and many Warsaw artists, such as Symbolists Ferdynand Ruszczyc and Konrad Krzyżanowski, gravitated to the Royal Academy in St. Petersburg for their artistic

[124] Zeleński, *Znasz-li ten kraj?,*34-36.

training. When in 1890 two Varsovian artists, Józef Pankiewicz and Władysław Podkowiński, returned to Warsaw from Paris and began painting in Impressionist style, their new works were universally lambasted by local critics.[125] Przesmycki's *Chimera* was the first Warsaw journal to defend and laud modernism in art.

Zenon Przesmycki was born into a family of petty gentry in the Russian sector of Poland. After completing legal studies in Warsaw, he spent intermittent periods of time in Paris and Berlin between 1889 and 1900, where he developed his ideas on art that would later provide a conceptual framework for his work in *Chimera*.[126] Przesmycki was particularly influenced by Belgian and French Symbolists, and spent time in Paris within the circle of the Parnassists. For Przesmycki, valuable art was inherently elitist and its primary aim was the expression of beauty, a term always capitalized by the writer. Like Przybyszewski, Przesmycki rejected the notion of artistic programs and maintained that authenticity was best arrived at through an intuitive process of creation. Przesmycki also shared with his Krakow counterpart a belief in art's ability to reveal the essence of reality. In a passage reminiscent of Przybyszewski's formulation of the "naked soul," he declared, "…the vision of things are they are in and of themselves, that is, in permanent union with the absolute, and the magical surrender to and embodiment of this vision, finding the only appropriate form for it – these are the conditions of a true work of art."[127] For this reason,

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[125] Anna Brzyski-Long, *Modern Art and Nationalism in Fin-de-Siecle Poland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999): 23.

[126] For a biography of Zenon Przesmycki, see Barbara Koc, *Miriam, Opowieść Biograficzna* [Miriam – A Biographical Tale] (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1980).

[127] "Wizja rzeczy, jakimi one są w sobie, to jest w stałym związku ze wszystkośćią, i magiczne oddanie, wcielenie tej wizji, znalezienie dla niej jedynej odpowiedniej formy – oto warunki każdego prawdziwego dzieła sztuki." Miriam, "Poezja [Poetry]," *Chimera* 1(1901): 152.

Przesmycki particularly revered Western Symbolism and its reliance on the elusive, irrational, and mysterious.

This value system coincided in the writer's thought with a rejection of popular culture and an insistence on elitism in art, an elitism that was clear from the editorial program of *Chimera*. As Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska has pointed out, in the internal Polish debate between expressing national realities and nativeness and responding to international currents, Przesmycki placed himself firmly in the latter category.[128] He believed that the issues and preoccupations of modern art transcended national or regional loyalties or style; the most important element of successful art would be what he termed "authenticism." At the same time, Przesmycki endorsed international cross-comparisons, seeing them as a means of reinforcing his conviction about the universality of certain concerns and themes in art.

Chimera's underlying philosophy was deeply indebted to Symbolist thought. The figure of the chimera is a specter; like the medusa, it threatens destruction for those in its grasp and may only be overcome through elusive, indirect means. Comparisons have been made between the figure of the chimera and the corrupt, tyrannical rulers of nineteenth-century Poland.[129] As well, the chimerical dreams of Poland's eventual resurrection as a nation and their real cost in terms of human life reveal the double-edged sword of such ambitions. The romantic messianism that was a strong current in Polish cultural life in the nineteenth century exacted a toll on artists as well, who were expected to glorify hopeless military efforts at independence.[130] In the context of

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[128]Podraza-Kwiatkowska, "Żyjąc w pięknie – O Miriamie-Krytyku [Living in Beauty – On Miriam the Critic], " in *Somnambulicy-Dekadenci-Herosi*, 391.

[129] Mirosława Puchalska and Wojciech Chmurzyński, *W kręgu „Chimery": sztuka i literatura polskiego modernizmu* [In the "Chimera" Circle: The Ar t and Literature of Polish Modernism], exh. cat. (Warsaw: Muzeum Literatury im. Adama Mickiewicza w Warszawie, 1980), 12.

Przesmycki's thought, the elusive and dangerous chimera could equally represent the false path of positivist, conformist belief or the elusive goal of authentic artistic expression. In the former instance, trust in outward authority and programmatic didacticism could lead the artist astray from the inner irrational voice that embodied artistic truth. In the latter, the figure of the chimera could represent that inner voice itself. This flexible meaning of the chimera figure reflects one of the main tenets of Symbolist theory, in which meaning is neither fixed nor unitary.

Chimera was strictly devoted to the propagation of modernism in Poland, invariably featuring literary works, lithographs and reproductions, editorial essays on current artistic issues and comments on current events.[131] Its typeface was ambitious and the reproduction standard was noticeably high, while the subscription pool was small. All of these aspects of the periodical were in accordance with Przesmycki's elitism and dedication to elevated standards. The critic viewed his efforts with *Chimera* as an offensive against provincial backwardness in Warsaw and believed that the promotion of modernism would help establish new benchmarks for the local artistic scene. At the same time, Przesmycki bemoaned the lack of financial support for Polish artists: at the time of Chimera's first issues, providers of stipends for artists who wished to study and work abroad were limited to the grants of a Polish count and the Association for the

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[130] In the words of period author Andrzej Strug, "Porwała ich ku sobie zła, przeklęta, nieprzemożona, cudna i straszliwa Chimera Polska. Wabiła wszystkimi czarami marzenia i wciągała w rozwleczone szeroko niechybne sidła. Zatruwała dusze ślepą żądzą, obezwładniała upojeniem trzeźwą myśl. Szeptała, uwodziła szelestem swych skrzydeł, odrywała od życia, osłaniała sobą śmierć, klęskę. Nigdy niesyta krwi – kusiła znowu [Evil, cursed, undefeatable, supernatural and terrifying Chimera Poland kidnapped her victims. She lured them all with the sorcery of dreams and pulled them into her wide-cast, inexorable net. She poisoned souls with blind desire, disarmed sober thought through stupefaction. She whispered, seduced with the whisper of her wings, ripped them from life, shielding death, defeat with herself. Never sated with blood – she tempted once more.] Andrzej Strug, *Chimera, Powieść, Warszawa* [Chimera, Tale, Warsaw] (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze, 1918): 68.

[131] For a complete listing of *Chimera*'s contents, as well as a key discussion of its role in the propagation of modernism in Poland, see Drozdek, *Life and Chimera,* 165-246; 308-341.

Encouragement of Fine Arts (Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych), which held annual salons and established itself as a museum in 1900.[132] Przesmycki's choice of Western European authors and artists to feature in issues of Chimera revealed a noticeable bias toward Symbolism or a Symbolist worldview – authors featured included Conte Adam de Villiers de l'Isle, Albert Giraud, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Georges Rodenbach.

While *Chimera* took note of local art events and artists, Przesmycki also communicated extensively with Symbolist artists in Krakow – Jan Stanisławski contributed a series of lithographs to the periodical, and Wojciech Weiss and Stanisław Wyspiański also worked with the journal. In the periodical's first issue, Przesmycki indicated his intentions to produce a series of reproductions of Western modernist and Symbolist artists such as Arnold Böcklin and Gustave Moreau.[133]

A key aspect of *Chimera* was the series of polemic essays and commentaries written by Przesmycki, in which the author-editor progressively articulated and reinforced the periodical's worldview. These programmatic texts appeared at regular intervals throughout *Chimera*'s six-year existence and were particularly significant for the activity of Polish Symbolists. The philosophy outlined in Przesmycki's contributions is directly reflected in the formal decisions and choice of theme made by Symbolists. In particular, two essays – "On the Symbol and Symbolism" and "Battle with Art," articulate understandings of the artist and creation that owe much to Western Symbolist theory.[134]

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[132] Miriam (Zenon Przesmycki), "Kronika Miesieczna [Monthly Chronicle]," *Chimera* 1 (1901): 535-7.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Miriam (Zenon Przesmycki), "Wstęp [Introduction]," in Maurycy Maeterlinck, *Wybór pism dramatycznych* [Selected Dramatic Writings] (Warsaw: 1894): XLII-LXVII, and "Walka ze sztuką [Battle with Art]," *Chimera* 1, no. 2 (1901): 313-334.

In addition to those texts, Przesmycki's evaluation of specific Symbolist artists in various exhibition reviews in *Chimera* reveals an awareness of pan-European Symbolist aesthetics. *Chimera*'s first issue contains a review of contemporary painting in Warsaw's Krywult Salon, the preeminent showplace for Young Poland artists around the turn of the twentieth century.[135] Przesmycki focuses on two Symbolists in the exhibition – Jacek Malczewski and Jan Stanisławski. Presaging the critical divide between synthetism and *gedankenmalerei* in Symbolist painting, Przesmycki comments negatively on the dry, intellectual elements of Malczewski's painting and praises Stanisławski as an "animator" of nature. Przesmycki goes on to praise the work of Ferdynand Ruszczyc in synaesthetic terms, extolling his pictures as "deafening" in their depiction of nature.

Writing of Jan Stanisławski's landscapes in a subsequent issue, Przesmycki noted their uncanny ability to contain the universal within the fragment and their intuitively synthetic qualities. Interestingly, Przybyszewski's discussion of the same artist's work contains parallel observations. Stanisławski's manipulation of perspective, space and color contain appeals to a higher reality and also dovetailed with Przybyszewski's dualist vision of the physical world and the higher reality of the naked soul. Przybyszewski's discussion of symbols in art as "real figures" that nonetheless give the viewer "an impression of their mysteriousness, their deeper and hidden meaning" are effective descriptions of Jan Stanisławski's Symbolist project in painting.[136]

Although contradictory at first glance, Przesmycki's belief in the elite status of the artist and Przybyszewski's democratism had similar results for the practice of Symbolism in Poland.

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[135] Ibid., "Kronika Miesięczna [Monthly Chronicle]," *Chimera* 2 (1901):163-170.

[136] Miriam (Zenon Przesmycki), "Jan Stanisławski," *Chimera* 1 (1901): 157.

By insisting on independent standards of artistic creation, both critics encouraged creative experimentation and aided the eventual social acceptance of modernism in Poland. Issues of *Życie* and *Chimera* offered exceptional windows into pan-European Symbolist activity and allowed their readers to feel connected to currents of activity beyond Polish borders. Przesmycki praised the efforts of art patrons such as Aleksander Krywult, who brought foreign artworks to his Warsaw gallery. Sensitive to the slightest impediment to the improvement of local artistic standards, Przesmycki even criticized customs fees on books in Polish imported into the country as the product of a conspiracy among Polish printers to continue producing inferior-quality work and suggested a waiver on fees for those publications containing the work of native Polish artists in order to combat low-quality local publications.[137] Instances of such cooperation between critics/editors and artists on particular issues reinforced the development of artistic communities in Krakow and Warsaw.

A survey of contemporary reactions to *Chimera* suggest that Przesmycki's Symbolist-influenced philosophy did not go unnoticed among local critics and writers. Wacław Nałkowski, writing for the newspaper *Głos*, saw *Chimera* as an antidote to Warsaw's crass materialism.[138] While writers with modernist sympathies praised the new projects, traditionalist periodicals such as *Catholic Review* [*Przegląd katolicki*] attacked *Chimera* for its "creations sowing false religious concepts and spreading scandal with the brutality of pornographic images."[139] The deep divide between these interpretations of *Chimera* indicates the degree to which Symbolism

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[137] Ibid., "Cło od książek [Duty on Books]," *Chimera* 2, nos. 4-5 (1901): 313-15.

[138] Wacław Nałkowski, "*Chimera* wobec ewolucji ["Chimera" in the Face of Evolution]," *Głos* 10 (1901): 33-6.

[139] "...utwory siejące fałszywe pojęcia religijne i szerzące zgorszenie brutalnością pornograficznych obrazków..." X [Anonymous], "Nieco o nowej „Chimerze" [Notes on the new *Chimera*]," *Przegląd Katolicki* 10 (1901):10-13.

as a new artistic mode touched upon, and was seen to threaten or liberate, traditional understandings of spiritualism and art.

Beyond exposing Western Symbolism to a Polish audience, Przesmycki's support of Symbolist activity in Poland included agitation for its acceptance as a locally relevant phenomenon. Instead of perceiving local Symbolism as a graft of foreign activity, he implicitly argued for its inherent ability to reflect local realities. Symbolism's validity as an artistic strategy was universal in the editor's view, a position shared with Przybyszewski. It is likely that Przesmycki's impassioned rejection of the decadent label for Symbolists in Poland was related to these very accusations of unhealthy foreign influence on the part of other writers and critics. Przesmycki viewed Symbolism and modernism as a means of maintaining and upholding standards of authenticity in art.

Because of his fervent belief in the universal applicability of modernism, nationality in art was a secondary concern for Przesmycki. His patriotism, though certainly present, was different in nature from pre-modern Polish artists and critics. For Przesmycki, Symbolism was not forced to compete against a more "authentic" artistic precedent because it was able to incorporate national elements in its expression. As he stated,

> Nationality, an earthly, bodily thing, for is [artistic] geniuses the foundation of the edifice, and not the edifice itself. Being national is not an obligation, just as it is not an obligation to have a body and blood as well as a soul…One may be in any case a national creator, speak very powerfully to one's countrymen, and be an entirely deaf tool for foreigners. This testifies that the creator looked and listened, but with his eyes and ears, and that he did not reach into the depths of his soul. The artist must above all be himself, being thus, he will be *eo ipso* national.[140]

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[140] "Narodowość, rzecz cielesna, ziemska, jest dla geniuszów podwaliną gmachu, nie zaś gmachem samym. Nie jest to powinnością być narodowym, jak nie jest powinnością mieć ciało i krew, oprócz ducha...Można wszakże być twórcą narodowym, przemawiać bardzo silnie do swoich rodaków, a być zupełnie głuchym narzędziem dla obcych. Świadczy to, że twórca patrzał i słuchał, ale swojemi oczyma i uszyma, ale że nie sięgnął aż do dna swojej duszy. Artysta musi być przedewszystkim sobą, będąc nim, będzie eo ipso narodowym." Miriam [Zenon Przesmycki], *Chimera* 2 (1901): 341.

Przesmycki's views about nationalism come into sharper focus in the context of the cultural push for applied arts around the turn of the century in Poland, particularly in Krakow. Modernist artists, many of them associated with *Sztuka*, became interested in the preservation of folk design and crafts in the arts.[141] While the desire to perpetuate native design was in large part patriotic, it was also representative of the beliefs about innocence and authenticity that would inform many aspects of modern practice, such as the work of German Expressionists or Fauve painters. In Poland, the trend for the preservation of folk motifs in the applied arts was spearheaded by critic Stanisław Witkiewicz, who also encouraged a shift away from the use of patriotic content in art for their own sake at the expense of artistic quality. Instead of a blanket application of patriotic motifs in painting, Witkiewicz advocated for the use of organically developed folk styles in the applied arts. Modernist artists responded to this way of thinking, forming the Association of Applied Arts in Krakow in 1906.

For Przesmycki, however, the native quality of such designs was secondary – as he stated, a valuable piece of work had to be beautiful before it was *swójski*. Przesmycki argued that the nativeness praised in applied art should be replaced with talent – that talent could be *swójski*, but that the reverse did not necessarily hold true. This view is further indication of the critic's modernist understanding of nationalism in art, and provides ideological justification for contemporary Symbolist experimentations with national themes and issues.

As argued above, Polish artists were familiar with the concerns and preoccupations of Western European modernists thanks to the work of journals and their own studies and travels

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[141] Elizabeth Clegg, *Art in Central Europe*, 12-15.

abroad. However, they could hardly think of Krakow or Warsaw as a similarly diseased and degenerate environment in the manner of Paris or even Brussels. Industrial alienation was absent in Krakow, a city whose medieval heritage dictated its shape and character in the late nineteenth century. Warsaw, while more cosmopolitan and more advanced in terms of infrastructure, was positively provincial in comparison with Western European capitals.[142]

Instead, they could point to the national disillusionment, demoralization of the individual and morbid fascination with heroic martyrdom that was the benchmark of Polish nineteenth century cultural activity. In the latter part of the century, according to Davies, thinkers on the issue of Poland's political potential formed two camps – those who subscribed to a positivist, accommodating philosophy of "organic work" and those who believed in working towards national liberation.[143] The latter camp was not so much involved in practical planning of a revolution as it was in subscribing to a mystical mindset proposed by Romantic poets Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki. In the articulation of these poets, Poland's liberation would occur through mass Christian repentance, making Poland the martyred "Christ among nations."[144]

As art historian Marcin Jasionowicz has pointed out, the artists of Young Poland and Symbolists in particular belonged to the second group: they were inherently anti-positivist and

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[142] Davies, *God's Playground*, 81-112. Prominent contemporary author Bolesław Prus details the cleft between Warsaw and Western European cities in his enormously influential novel *Lalka* [Doll] (trans. David Welsh) (NewYork: Hippocrene ; Sawtry, Cambs , 1993).

[143] Davies, *God's Playground*, 43-46.

[144] In his poem "Grandfathers' Eve," Mickiewicz proclaimed "Ja i ojczyzna to jedno. Nazywam się Milijon [The fatherland and I are one. I am called Legion]." Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady*[Grandfather's Eve] (Krakow: Zielona Sowa, 2005): 67. This mystical understanding of the nation is similar to Przybyszewski's references to the eternal nation and its significance for artistic creation in "Confiteor." See note 23.

therefore inevitably pro-national liberation.[145] Herein, Poland's unique history lends itself surprisingly well to Symbolist thought and strategy. In a country that was politically impotent, and seemingly permanently dependent on the past, Symbolism's morbidity and alienation made perfect sense. While the work of Western European Symbolists was often engaged with the struggle of the individual against the aftereffects of both industrialization and a push for rationalization, Symbolists in Poland struggled to establish individual identity against the political and cultural suppression of the present and the weight of the past.

This articulation of the individual in the fin-de-siècle environment occurs most prominently in the work of Wojciech Weiss as well as that of prominent Belgian Symbolist James Ensor. Much has been written about Belgian Symbolist Ensor's fascination with themes of perversion and morbidity in his work,[146] and Weiss' work invites comparison. Ensor explores the ways in which contemporary Belgian society, with its nationalist-imperialist spectacles and religious rites, was infused with this sense of gloomy perversity. Ensor's Symbolist paintings are intensely personal and contain elements of fantasy; they also engage with current social issues such as the Belgian presence in the Congo and the leisure activities of the Belgian bourgeoisie. By combining elements of social critique with typically fin-de-siècle themes and motifs, Ensor makes generalized symbols of pessimism and arcana relevant to current events.

Wojciech Weiss similarly manipulated otherworldly elements in his work in such a way that they became relevant to social realities. A comparison of Ensor's *My Portrait as a Skeleton*

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[145] Marcin Jasionowicz, ed., *Młoda Polska: Bruksela-Kraków 1890-1920* [Young Poland: Brussels-Krakow 1890-1920] (exh. cat.) (Krakow: Muzeum Narodowe, 1997): 24.

[146] Gert Schiff, "James Ensor: Skeletons in the Studio," *Annual Bulletin of the National Gallery of Canada* 4 (1980-81), accessed online at http://national.gallery.ca/bulletin/num4a/schiff1.html. See also Herwig Todtes, "The Grotesque in Ensor's Oeuvre," in M. Catherine De Zegher, ed., *Between Street and Mirror: The Drawings of James Ensor* (exh. cat.) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001): 203-217.

(fig. 51) with Weiss' *Melancholic* (fig. 22) reveals the shaky status of the individual against the greater forces of morbidity. In Ensor's etching, the artist sits erect in front of an open window, as if posing for a formal portrait. The substitution of a skull for Ensor's face creates an uncanny and disturbing environment. Typically, viewers of portraits look to the eyes of the subject and follow their gaze as a means of establishing the humanity of the subject and a response to the created dynamism of the portrait.[147] In the case of Ensor's etching, this instinctual reflex is thwarted – the viewer is confronted with hollow black spaces in the place of eyes. The glaring emptiness of the eye sockets contrasts absurdly with the insistent physicality of the puffed-out chest in the formal frock coat, the artists' hands resting on his knees, and especially the jauntily curled hair. Ensor's portrayal of himself as a *memento mori* could also be viewed as a commentary on the absurdity of the artificial preoccupations of civilized bourgeois life in the face of human mortality. Additionally, Ensor's self-positioning against the corner of a window embrasure open to blackness hints at unknowable psychic forces in the universe.

In Wojciech Weiss' *Melancholic (Totenmesse)*, the psychic space of the open night viewed through a window has been replaced by wallpaper. At the fin-de-siècle, wallpaper and interior patterns were often viewed as part of a total created environment in which the urban aesthete could take refuge from the chaos of the industrialized exterior and revel in an atmosphere that both stimulated and reflected his refined sensibilities. At the same time,

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[147] Alois Reigl explored this phenomenon in his study of Dutch group portraiture and the evolution of understandings of the gaze of the beholder. Alois Reigl, *The Group Portraiture of Holland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.) See also Catherine Sousloff's overview of the development of art historical approaches to portraiture in *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 25-56. Ensor expanded on this notion in his *Skeleton Painting* of 1896, in which a skeleton artist is observed by three skulls – one perched on top of the painter's easel in a manner reminiscent of cannibalist or militant ritual, the other two at the top and bottom left corners of the composition. The artist himself may or may not be returning the viewer's gaze – its vaguely described eyeballs hang in the empty skull and frustrate the viewer's attempts to make eye contact.

elaborate interiors could be understood as psychic projections – the space of the mind writ large. In *Melancholic*, the wallpaper serves as the point of origin for ominous psychic forces at play, as evidenced by the eye-like leaves and most pointedly by the small projection of a skull shape behind the artist's right shoulder.[148] While Ensor's person in *My Portrait with Skull* has been explicitly transformed into a representative of dark, otherworldly forces, Weiss' self-portrait constitutes a relatively straightforward depiction. The psychic forces at play are instead projected by the artist onto the space of the painting's interior wall. Ensor has abandoned himself entirely to literally illustrating the deformation and alienation of contemporary reality; Weiss maintains the pretense of naturalism in his work while inhabiting the role of the refined dandy. The subtlety of his allusions to irrational elements suggests not so much an embrace of degeneration as the struggle of the individual to resist pessimistic forces. In the context of the Polish situation, it can also be seen as a successive reminder of the role pessimism had played in the cultural activity of the nineteenth century, in which Polish hopes for political self-determination were repeatedly dashed.

A similar mechanism occurs in those works of Ensor and Weiss which incorporate masks. Ensor painted multiple works featuring figures wearing masks, among them *Masks Confronting Death* of 1888 (fig. 52) and *The Intrigue* of 1911 (fig. 53). As has been noted, Ensor's mother sold masks at the Belgian seaside resort of Ostend, so the artist was familiar with their evocative and morbid possibilities from an early age.[149] At the same time, the

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[148] Ensor also explored the expressive possibilities of wallpaper in works such as *Child with Doll*, from 1884. Other Symbolist works such as Edvard Munch's *Puberty* of 1894 use projections of objects onto walls to illustrate the psychic state of their subjects. These projections in Symbolist painting both suggest the split nature of the human personality and problematize the initially naturalistic appearance of the work in which they appear.

[149] Diane Lesko, "Ensor and Symbolist Literature," *Art Journal* 45 (1985): 99-104.

unquestionably Symbolist nature of the mask as something that disguises but also disfigures relates to Ensor's preoccupation with artifice throughout his oeuvre.[150] In both *Masks Confronting Death* and *The Intrigue*, the masks appear to be not so much worn by the figures as fused onto their bodies – the alternative identity represented by the masks has been fully incorporated by the various persona in the painting. In this sense, the personages have succumbed to the transformative possibilities held out by the masks. Connecting the garishly painted second face with a typical element in Symbolist art, that of the femme fatale, Ensor once remarked "Ah! The female and her mask of flesh, living flesh that has justifiably become a papier-mâché mask…"[151]

Weiss also makes use of the motif in his *Self-Portrait with Masks* (fig. 23), but here their transformative possibilities have not yet been actualized. The artist is unable to choose between a group of masks he is holding; each one represents a possible change of identity. Weiss is still predominantly a commentator on the possibilities of shifting persona in the presented scene, while the figures in Ensor's paintings have been literally overpowered by their assumed identities. The position of the artist as commentator in *Self-Portrait with Masks* is another nod to Polish understandings of the artist as expositor, as is the dramatization implied in the choice of masks as choice of identities.

Like Ensor, a fellow member of modernist art association *Les XX*, Belgian Symbolist Fernand Khnopff (1858 - 1921), made use of elements of fantasy, romanticism and historicism in his painting, resulting in otherworldly and unsettling environments. Khnopff frequently

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[150] The figure of the mask was also crucially important for Symbolist literature; French Symbolist writer Remy de Gourmont chose the title "The Book of Masks" for his collection of critical essays on contemporary Symbolist writers, accompanied by the portraits of Félix Vallotton. Remy de Gourmont, *The Book of Masks*, trans. Andrew Mangravite and others (London: Atlas Press, 1994.)

[151] Ulrike Becks Malorny, *James Ensor 1860-1949: Masks, Death and the Sea* (London: Taschen, 2001): 5.

composed mysterious portraits of women in his work, reminiscent of the figures of the pre-Raphaelite paintings of Edward Burne-Jones or Dante Gabriel Rossetti. One such work is the cameo portrait *La Cigarette* of 1912 (fig. 54), in which a woman – a repeated face in Khnopff's oeuvre, that of his sister Marguerite – clenches a cigarette between her teeth while meeting the viewer's gaze. Several aspects combine to create a Symbolist atmosphere – the glazed, slightly unfocused eyes of the subject, the open mouth with prominently displayed teeth and its hint of predatory menace, the clenched cigarette and the woman's jacket, resulting in a strangely serpentine neck. Thanks to these elements, the woman in the painting suggests a chimera, harpy, or other sexually predatory creature in addition to the traditional femme fatale. The subject of *La Cigarette* is at once modern and unpredictable, alluring and threatening. Above all, she is unknowable, a fact emphasized by the darkness from which her head emerges and, ironically, the forced intimacy created by the round frame and close perspective.

Polish Symbolist Konrad Krzyżanowski's portraits of his fiancée and later wife contain similar elements. In *Fiancée by a Lamp* of 1905 (fig. 55), Krzyżanowski uses the device of lamplight as a starting point for creating an uncanny atmosphere. In the painting, we see the lamp of the title as a vaguely described green shape, but the light it sheds is directed toward only one side of the painting. The artist's fiancée rests her head on a table next to the lamp; like the subject of Khnopff's work, she is surrounded by blackness. The glint of her eyes, the reduction of her hands to swathes of paint, and the apparent disembodiment of her head combine in thwarting any naturalistic effect of the composition. Krzyżanowski's manipulations ensure that she becomes an enigmatic female of the type returned to repeatedly in fin-de-siècle art.

Unlike Khnopff's close-up image in *La Cigarette*, in which the absence of a recognizable space or interior reinforces the symbol status of the portrait's subject, Krzyżanowski maintains

the semblance of a domestic interior in *Fiancée by a Lamp*. By retaining these elements, their distortion is all the more palpable. The tension created by the discord between the familiar expectations of a domestic scene – a salon, perhaps, seen by lamplight – and the reality of the presented composition – a disembodied head and unnatural light – creates a sense of unease in the viewer. While Khnopff's work can be viewed as pure fantasy, Krzyżanowski's portrait suggests the unsure and instable reality behind quotidian appearances.

Khnopff also painted urban scenes, usually strangely removed from the realities of industrialized life in cities such as Brussels. Unlike Ensor, whose chaotic city scenes featured absurd and grotesque vignettes against a theatrical background of threatening masses, Khnopff's city scenes are bereft of human presence, quiet and contemplative. They focus on the picturesque architecture of cities such as Bruges and reflect typically nineteenth-century atttraction to a historicized climate.[152] The artist's *Avec Grégoire Roy. Mon Coeur Pleure d'Autrefois* of 1889 (fig. 56) presents Khnopff's hometown as a vision seen by Symbolist poet Grégoire Roy. Like Christina Rossetti, Roy was a source of inspiration for Khnopff. This association between literature and art reflects the Symbolist movement's roots in poetry. The composition of the painting contains at least two planes of reality: Khnopff situates the creator of the vision in the foreground and the vision itself in the background. The division between the two planes of the composition is accomplished by a quasi-mirror made visible by Roy's kiss. The reflection motif in play suggests the Greek myth of Narcissus – Roy leans forward to embrace his own reflection in a mirror, and the human touch of his lips creates a ripple effect,

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[152] As Lynne Pudles points out, Bruges was particularly resonant with Belgian Symbolists – its medieval architecture and romanticism lent themselves particularly well to artistic projects revolving around the so-called 'soulscape' of the city. Lynne Pudles, "Fernand Khnopff, Georges Rodenbach, and Bruges, The Dead City," *Art Bulletin* 74 (1992): 637.

erasing or at least obscuring part of the vision of the city in the picture's background. In a sense, the artist's own self-absorption, or perhaps absorption with the product of his own imagination, has threatened the purity of the vision. Hence, any demarcation between creator and product becomes blurred.

This enigmatic relationship between the individual and the imagined city – is it a figment of the imagination or wholly separate from its creator? – is also present in Julian Fałat's *Self-Portrait* (fig. 24) from 1903. Here too, the artist stands in front of a vision of the city. At first glance, the relation between the artist and the city seems relatively straightforward – the significant medieval landmarks of Krakow hover in a clearly defined background. However, the panoramic framing and the second, inner frame created by the ledge behind the portrait of the artist enforce the viewer' understanding of Krakow as a second subject of the portrait. Fałat's underlining of the work as a self-portrait suggests that his vision of Krakow is a part of his greater self, and that, in a sense, he may be interpreted as the creator of the vision of Krakow to which the viewer is privy.

Khnopff's *Orpheus* of 1913 (fig. 57) makes reference to Greek mythology, and recalls Jacek Malczewski's work, which was also heavily laden with classical references. In *Orpheus*, three hieratic figures – a female nude, a woman with a lyre, and a figure that could be interpreted as a high priestess of an arcane cult -- stand side by side, dominating the foreground of the composition. The background is obscured by mist, revealing hints of alpine mountains and intense, dark verdure in the lower sections. The overall haze created by washes of color, however, creates an uncanny impression across the composition and hints at abstraction. The lack of intense modeling in the figures, their close positioning to the picture plane, and their roughly symmetrical placement highlight the artist's deliberate construction of the painting.

Khnopff's anti-naturalistic treatment of the ways in which the figures relate to the greater environment as well as amongst themselves suggests Puvis de Chavannes' work, which also dealt with elements from antiquity but was concerned with their fragmentary, allegorical nature. While the figures in *Orpheus* are realistically portrayed, this overall schematic treatment suggests Khnopff's concern with the symbolizing function of the figures. As Sura Levine noted in reference to Khnopff's work, "Likenesses are maintained not as ends in themselves, but as the means of suggesting a combination of thought, emotion, an internal state of mind, mystery, and emblematic symbols that do not come wholly from the outside world, but instead from an internal impulsion."[153]

This fragmentation and disjunction between precise illusionism and schematism may also be found in some of Malczewski's paintings, such as the artist's *Polski Hamlet – Portrait of Aleksander Wielopolski* (fig. 58). Aleksander Wielopolski was a nineteenth-century Polish politician who instituted several administrative reforms as a director of the commission on Faith and Public Enlightenment in the Kingdom of Poland under Russian rule. Wielopolski was responsible for the hiring of several Poles to fill positions that had been occupied by czarist administrators. At the same time, he was a committed positivist who often clashed with more revolutionary Polish actors and whose attempts to bring about positive change under the aegis of the partition governments left him straddling an impasse between revolutionaries and Russian authorities. As a result, Wielopolski abandoned Poland and spent the later part of his life politically inactive in Dresden. His casting as Hamlet in Malczewski's portrait is an indication

[153] Sura Levine, "Fernand Khnopff" (exhibition review) *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 4 (2005). Accessed online at http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring_05/reviews/levi.shtml. An example of a more obviously anti-naturalistic treatment of the Orpheus theme may be found in French Symbolist painter Odilon Redon's *Orpheus* (c. 1913-16) in which the title figure's perfunctorily portrayed head is awash in a sea of color and abstract form. The musical reference of the lyre in front of Orpheus' head helps create a synaesthetic effect, suggesting emotionally charged readings of the purple, gold and black washes of color in the composition.

of the popularity of that figure in Young Poland circles, as Jan Cavanaugh has indicated, as well as of his impossible position, forced inaction and seeming apathy to the cause of independence.[154]

In *Polish Hamlet*, Wielopolski, dressed in Polish armor, stands between two female figures intended to represent the two faces of nineteenth-century Poland – on the left, young Revolutionary Poland, and on the right, elderly Captive Poland. As in *Orpheus*, however, the composition is characterized by a schematic placement of figures against the picture plane. However, as in *Orpheus*, the spatial disjunctions of the work resist the placement of the work in the category of traditional allegory. The two female figures are somewhat larger than lifesize, constituting flanking pillars that serve as a frame for Wielopolski. They accompany him but do not stand in logical relation to him – in particular, the figure of Revolutionary Poland appears to be simultaneously in front of and behind Wielopolski, suggesting both figures' possible status as elements of his divided psyche.

Malczewski's particular brand of allegory in his paintings finds affinities in the work of some of the artists associated with the Salon de la Rose + Croix. This cultic group of artists, founded and directed by novelist Joséphin Péladan, was interested in connecting their work to rites and rituals, borrowing from Freemasonry tradition to form a lodge. Péladan organized six salons of the artists' work in Paris between 1892 and 1897, setting stringent limits as to the type of subject matter that was acceptable for painters within the group – in particular, subjects touching upon religion, myth, poetry, and allegory. Many of the artists who exhibited with the salon were inspired by the work of Arnold Böcklin, who also proved influential for Jacek Malczewski.

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[154] Jan Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In,* 209.

One of the artists associated with the Salon was Swiss painter Carlos Schwabe. A fervent Catholic, Schwabe incorporated elements of traditional religious allegory in his paintings, but set them within unusual and frequently unsettling contexts.[155] An example of this may be found in Schwabe's *The Virgin of the Lilies* from 1899 (fig. 59). This painting, set within a frame curved at the top and reminiscent of Romanesque church windows, depicts the Virgin Mary and infant Jesus at the top of a composite, fantastical landscape. The two figures appear to be standing in a snowy field adjacent to a sweeping curve of lily plants. Next to the row of lilies, the snow of the field appears to transform itself into a rolling ocean wave, which in turn becomes a layer of cloud over a distant, verdant landscape in the bottom left corner of the composition. Behind the Virgin and child, more white material could be interpreted as a cloud, wave or extended snowdrift, while the intense golden halos of both figures act as substitutes for the moon, bathing the entire scene in icy light. The schematic nature of the landscape elements of Schwabe's work, such as the carefully spaced rows of artificially cultivated lilies and the purposefully vague orientation of the scene create a pastiche effect for the viewer. As in the work of Khnopff, naturalistic elements are combined in such a way as to create an overall disconcerting impression, which frustrates the attempt of the viewer to project herself into a logically presented scene and simultaneously forces awareness of the artists' presence.

Like *The Virgin of the Lilies*, Malczewski's *In the Dust Cloud* (fig. 7) is composed of almost entirely naturalistic elements set in a disjointed and alienating composition. Both contain a figural group against a landscape background – in the case of *In the Dust Cloud*, a mother and

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[155] Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond places Schwabe within what he terms the "Idealist" group of Symbolist artists who exhibited in Paris. The Idealists rejected traditional allegory and naturalism in favor of supernatural, intensely idiosyncratic and personal compositions. Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond, *Les peintres de l'âme: le Symbolisme idéaliste en France* (Ghent and Antwerp: Uitgeverij Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon and Uitgeverij Pandora, 2000). On Schwabe, see also Jumeau-Lafond, *Carlos Schwabe, Symboliste et Visionnaire* (Courbevoie: ACR Editions, 1994).

children in the midst of a cultivated field with a forest in the distant background. The frenzied circular motion of the group, which is bound together by chains, contrasts with the staid, aggressively rectilinear lines of the background forest and fields. As in *Virgin of the Lilies*, Malczewski's image creates an unsettling effect for the viewer through its deliberately schematic composition. The central placement of the figural group and its unnatural relation to the rest of the scene challenge the traditional function of allegory while simultaneously triggering the expectation of symbolic associations.

The most direct case of a working connection between Western European and Polish Symbolist activity has often been pointed to in the context of the Nabis, Paul Gauguin and Polish painter Władysław Ślewiński. Ślewiński joined the Nabis in Paris at the Café Volpini and later at their colony in Pont-Aven in Brittany. However, Ślewiński's work, such as *Two Breton Girls with a Basket of Apples* (fig. 60) while superficially visually similar in style to that of the synthetist paintings of Gauguin and Paul Sérusier, does not readily lend itself to metaphysical allusions. While Ślewiński tends towards the cloisonnist style – the composition of *Two Breton Girls* features bolder black outlines and fields of color – the overall effect of the work is more decorative than synthetist.

A much more fruitful comparison between French synthetism and Polish Symbolism has been made by Agnieszka Morawińska in her reading of Józef Mehoffer's *Strange Garden* (fig. 36) of 1903 and the work of Gauguin. In *Strange Garden*, Mehoffer's wife and child wander through an overgrown garden in which scale has been deliberately confused. The most striking element of the composition is the large dragonfly that hovers at its upper center. The dragonfly, executed in cloisonné style in tones of gold, green and black, sharply contrasts with the relatively naturalistic rendering of the remainder of the composition. While the intense, almost surreal

appearance of the garden bushes and the tousled hair and flushed cheeks of the child create a specific and intensely naturalistic atmosphere, the pasted-on appearance of the dragonfly belies the illusionism created throughout the rest of the painting. Its cloisonnism recalls the work of French synthetists Émile Bernard and Louis Anquetin, who created works in the late 1880's with flat, broad areas of color separated by heavy outlines. The purposeful anti-naturalism of Bernard and Anquetin's works deliberately recall medieval stylization and Japanese woodcuts and directly influenced the later synthetist work of Gauguin.

Mehoffer's cloisonnist treatment of the dragonfly in *Strange Garden* reinforces its function as a symbol, touching on Symbolist themes of whimsy and regeneration. Its oversized status and prominent placement introduce a note of uneasiness into the otherwise idyllic composition and recalls contemporary anxieties about biology and evolution.[156] The strange garden on display is so because it threatens to overcome the orderly and contained space associated with cultivated gardens. The figure of the child, who holds a magic wand, functions as a conduit for the magical possibilities of the garden and contrasts with the figure of the artist's wife, whose careful appearance and tightly done up dress suggest a veneer of civilization.

Morawińska references a connection between *Strange Garden* and *Ia Orana Maria* through the religiosity of both works, suggesting that they offer a new interpretation of traditional religious themes.[157] While this interpretation is compelling, there is another way of understanding Mehoffer's composition that speaks specifically to Symbolist strategy. The space

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[156] These anxieties are reflected in the post-Darwinian works of Odilon Rédon, in which amalgamated creatures simultaneously question and upset established biological categories. See Douglas Druick et. al., eds., *Odilon Rédon: Prince of Dreams* (exh. cat.) (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1994.)

[157] Agnieszka Morawińska, "Dziwny Ogród," in Morawińska, ed. , *Symbolizm w malarstwie polskim*, 97. Morawińska argues for the space of Mehoffer's garden as a *hortus conclusus*, with the figure of the artist's wife as a stand-in for the Virgin Mary. However, the appearance of the Puck-like figure represented by the child introduces a note of pagan whimsy that would not be fully accounted for in a traditional religious interpretive scheme.

of Mehoffer's garden is particularly charged. Its position behind the figure of the dragonfly and the intensely drawn figures of the foliage and child suggest its mythical, magical status. While a garden is a cultivated space nominally under human control, Mehoffer's scene suggests a space in which the natural or supernatural forces at play control the resident humans. Its otherworldliness and resistance to human control brings to mind the status of Poland as an imagined, alternate territory in nineteenth-century tradition.

As in the pairing of Józef Mehoffer and Gauguin, a comparison of Polish Symbolist Władysław Wańkie with other European Symbolists such as Arnold Böcklin reveals a certain difference in the interaction of figure and space. Wańkie's *Lonely Woman in a Park* (fig. 61) bears a mysterious and romantic otherworldly atmosphere, in which a lone figure in an intensely red cape wanders in a dark and primeval forest. The level of abstraction increases as the viewer's eye progresses towards the top of the painting, in which fall tree branches blend in with a grey sky, enforcing a sense of claustrophobia and spatial ambiguity. The strikingly vivid hue of the woman's cape and its semi-translucent appearance encourages symbolic associations of life and death. By comparison, Arnold Böcklin's *Sacred Wood* (fig. 62), while also intimating the emotional possibilities of human interaction with nature, presents the relationship between these two elements as much less fraught. The scene of *Sacred Wood* is an autumn grove where ecclesiastics, or perhaps members of a secret cult, file forward from the background of the painting in order to pay homage to a flame springing from a pedestal. The white robes of the worshippers, the translucent light of the scene, and the evenly spaced elements of the composition create an impression of mystical harmony and unity with nature. Bocklin's work hints at a deeper reality beyond that of the immediately seen, but the sense of spatial and emotional harmony is in marked contrast with the turmoil of Wankie's work.

Another work by Wańkie, *St. Augustine* (fig. 63), makes use of Christian motifs against a turbulent natural background. Such motifs were common in Symbolist painting, and in fin-de-siecle Poland they carried an extra dimension of significance related to Poland's tradition of messianism dating from the Romantic period in the early nineteenth century. Polish messianism, popularized by romantic poets such as Adam Mickiewicz, was characterized by an understanding of politically partitioned Poland as a martyr among nations, a Christ-like figure.[158] Therefore, any Christian motifs appearing in Symbolist works were *a priori* imbued with national significance for the Polish viewer.

In *St. Augustine*, the title figure stands in profile against a stormy sea. In the near background, a female nude pours water into a shell on the shore in a seemingly pointless task. As in the case of some of Malczewski's works, the two figures in Wańkie's painting are not integrated so much as pasted onto the background of sea and sky, which is painted in such a way as to tend towards abstraction. The complete lack of interaction between the two figures and the almost awkward difference in scale between them lends an unnatural quality to the scene. This hints at a schematized, purposefully artificial intention on the part of Wańkie. In creating an obvious allegory in the manner of Puvis de Chavannes, Wańkie's work rejects both the naturalism of an earlier era and the closed allegory. In Symbolist fashion, it presents a shifting

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[158] See, for example, Mickiewicz's drama *Forefathers' Eve* [Dziady], in which he examines issues of national regeneration and revival in the face of political oppression at the hands of the Russian Empire. In an author's note, Mickiewicz's views on this theme are succinctly summed up: "For half a century [from the beginning of the political partitions] Poland has presented a picture on one side of such sustained, unrelentant and irrevocable cruelty of tyrants, and on the other such unlimited sacrifice of the people and such persistent endurance as has not presented an example since the times of Christian persecution. It appears that kings have Herodic premonitions about the appearance of a new light on Earth and its imminent downfall, and the people believe ever more strongly in their rebirth and resurrection. [Polska od pól wieku przedstawia widok z jedney strony tak ciągłego, niezmordowanego i niezbłaganego okrucieństwa tyranów, z drugiej tak nieograniczonego poświęcenia ludu i tak uporczywej wytrwałości, jakich nie było przykładu od czasów prześladowania chrześcijaństwa. Zdaje się, że królowie mają przeczucie Herodowe o zjawieniu się nowego światła na ziemi i o bliskim swoim upadku, a lud coraz mocniej wierzy w swoje odrodzenie się i zmartwychstanie." Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady*, 88.

and open reality that corresponds particularly well to the fragmentation of politics and identity in contemporary Polish territory. The constant presence of nationalist agitation and the enduring cultural construct of a nation in exile was frustrated with the reality of a politically suppressed nation. The resulting sense of impotence and pointlessness is echoed in the aimless activity of Wańkie's nude woman and the seemingly fruitless meditation of St. Augustine. While this impotence may have been expressed in earlier nineteenth-century works, its Symbolist formal distortion and fragmentation lend new dimensions to longstanding cultural and artistic concerns.

Hans Hoffstätter has described this element of Symbolist work as "naturalistic permutation." His definition applies easily to Wańkie's work: "a picture which does not deform natural objects, that is to say does not change their outer appearance, but removes their interdependency, their organic-natural, locative or temporal causation and sets these anew according to imaginary points of view."[159] As Hoffstatter explains, this allows for the artist to progress beyond the possible and into a realm of fantasy, all while maintaining elements of naturalism. In Wańkie's work, the lack of interaction between St. Augustine and the female figure indicates that they may be in different planes of reality. Their inability to connect in an easily perceivable manner suggests that Wankie is attempting to appeal to an eternal aspect behind or beyond surface appearance. In this sense, the artist makes reference to the Platonic ideals essential to Symbolist theory. The Symbolist belief that transcendent reality can be best represented via the artist's intuition rather than empirical observation references the notion of

[159] Hans Hofstätter, *Symbolizm*, 45-6.

Platonic idea: a concept known *a priori* but only imperfectly reflected in our experienced reality.[160]

Like Wańkie, Belgian Symbolist Léon Spilliaert (1881 - 1946) made use of naturalistic elements in his work, arranging them to unsettling effect. Spilliaert has been interpreted as a direct inheritor of the "pure" Symbolism represented by the developments of the work of Paul Gauguin, who in turn was influenced by his contacts with Émile Bernard in the 1880's. Spilliaert's *Woman on a Dyke* (fig. 64), with its unusual and insistent perspective and simplified composition, creates an anti-naturalistic and unsettling emotional atmosphere. Sea, sky, beach and dyke are converted into abstract elements. This abstraction helps create the sense of a surreal stoppage of time. Only certain details of the work, such as the flock of distant seagulls in the upper left-corner, counteract the dreamlike effect of Spilliaert's painting and pull the viewer back into reality. The amassed dark areas of the composition in the distant sky and sea and the mysterious, hooded woman whose face is permanently inaccessible create a pessimistic emotional mood.

The sharp perspective of the dyke is reminiscent of Edvard Munch's perspectival manipulations in *The Scream*, which help create the sense of vertiginous space and emotional distress of the scene. This plunging, ungrounded perspective is also present in Jacek Malczewski's *Landscape with Tobias* (fig. 9). As in Spilliaert's work, the intersection of vectors at unnatural angles and the presence of mysterious figures transform the surface naturalism of the work into something unearthly.

Urban themes were also touched upon in Polish Symbolism. While rural land and its accompanying concepts of territory and patrimony held special significance for overlapping

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[160] Mark Cheetham discusses Platonism in relation to Gauguin's work in *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991):1-24.

groups of Polish intellectuals and artists, certain urban preoccupations of the fin-de-siècle also bore weighted political implications. In particular, individual alienation and psychological malaise were aspects of urban-oriented Western European Symbolism that also spoke to local Polish realities. As in the case of rural landscapes,[161] certain urban scenes illustrate the indebtedness of Polish artists to other Symbolists on the "margins" of Europe, particularly Scandinavians such as Edvard Munch.

An example of such close looking at Munch can be seen in Gustaw Gwozdecki's painting from 1906 entitled *Evening Longing* (fig. 65). Gwozdecki was a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. Several elements of the work are also found in Munch's *Evening on Karl Johan Street* (1892), particularly the rounded, synthetic silhouettes of the figures, looming, attenuated street perspective, and gloomy palette. In *Evening Longing*, a woman stands in the foreground against a street in Krakow at night. Two rows of streetlamps cast lurid light behind her, and the unnatural blue of the night sky and stark black outlines of the surrounding buildings create a stark, unhealthy atmosphere. The distorted face of the woman and her blank eyes that fixate on the viewer recall the protagonists of *Evening on Karl Johan Street*. Here, psychological anguish is expressed through physical distortion. The blank eyes suggest psychological absence, which is mirrored by the lit, empty windows of the surrounding buildings. In Munch's work, human anxiety and urban elements interplay – making the townscape a psychological extension of the inner mental state of the figures. In Gwozdecki's work, the nondescript, vaguely sketched passersby behind the woman contribute to the sense of anonymity in the crowd.

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[161] For example, Katarzyna Nowakowska-Sito compares Ferdynand Ruszczyc's *Into the World* (analyzed in Chapter Three) with Albert Edelfeldt's *Sarkka* (1894). Both rural scenes create an atmosphere of bleakness and alienation. Katarzyna Nowakowska-Sito, "Expression of the "Naked Soul" and European Art," in Piotr Krakowski and Jacek Purchla, eds., *Sztuka około 1900 w Europie Środkowej: centra i prowincje artystyczne* [Art Around 1900 in Central Europe: Centerns and Artistic Provinces] (Krakow: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 1997): 30.

Gwozdecki's *Moon*, from 1908 (fig. 66) contains many of the same supernatural elements as *Evening Longing*, transposed into a rural setting. The titular object is the glowing center of a concentric pattern of purple and blue striations. Directly underneath the moon, a bank of bulging white clouds hangs over a grouping of three houses silhouetted in black, while to the left, a luminescent sea reminiscent of a glowing plate slides onto a bright beach. The schematic aspects of the composition and its unnatural hues call to mind early expressionism, in which bold or anti-natural colors and undulating compositions create a charged emotional atmosphere. In *Moon*, the areas of sky, land, sea and buildings each occupy a well-defined sector of the compositional space. The glowing greens, purples and blues, like those in *Evening Longing*, are present, but here they are the result, not of contemporary artificial light, but the moon, a mystical presence in the natural scene. Gwozdecki has transformed a natural corner of landscape into a place of magical and unknown mystical possibilities. Drawing on traditional associations with the moon and lunacy or irrationality, Gwozdecki suggests the presence of a deeper reality behind the quotidian and the transformative possibilities of nature.

A comparison with Worpswede painter Fritz Overbeck's *Flowering Buckwheat Fields* (fig. 67) helps illustrate the degree to which Gwozdecki's work demonstrates the formal manipulations of Symbolism. In Overbeck's painting, many of the same elements as in *Moon* are present, and the composition is also schematized -- it is carefully balanced horizontally between sky and land and vertically by means of the gravel road that leads the eye of the viewer into the background of the painting. Unlike Gwozdecki's scene, however, Overbeck's is plausible. The moon in the painting, peeking over the far horizon, is one element of many within the landscape. The individual contours of sky, land, and road do not present themselves as discrete entities but are blended into one cohesive, if varied, whole, and the palette is tamer. In

Gwozdecki's *Moon*, these same elements of the natural landscape are pushed towards abstraction as the viewer takes in the landscape as swelling fields of color, rather than as a reflection of an objective external reality. The bold placement of the moon as the emotional center indicates that Gwozdecki is an active creator of a vision, rather than an observer of an extant scene.

As has been previously mentioned, many themes common to Symbolist artists across Europe – psychological alienation, degeneration and degeneracy related to the urban environment, and the illusory nature of everyday appearances -- are rightly considered by art historians such as Jean Clair to have transcended national or regional particularities. These concerns were shared to some extent by Polish Symbolists, but even in paintings with "classically" Symbolist themes, specifically Polish or regional aspects often find subtle expression. Thus, many Polish Symbolist paintings are not merely copies of themes originating in Western European Symbolism, but successfully combine elements of those themes with aspects of local significance. This is not to suggest, of course, that Western Symbolists themselves were ahistorical or unmindful of their own local context when working in Symbolist mode, but rather that the immediate identification of local aspects in Polish Symbolist painting is sometimes overlooked or eclipsed by the overwhelming recognizability and assumed transparence of known pan-Symbolist content.

It is useful to keep these distinctions in mind when comparing three Symbolist works over the span of a decade or so. Comparing Wojciech Weiss' *Kiss on the Grass* of ca. 1900 (fig. 68) with Paul Gauguin's *The Loss of Virginity* of 1890-91 (fig. 69) and Edvard Munch's *Vampire* of 1894 (fig. 70) swiftly brings to mind classically Symbolist themes – the loss of sexual innocence, the femme fatale, individual alienation, and pathological relations between genders.

In Gauguin's work, a young girl lies supine, disturbingly vulnerable, her body lain out as for medical inspection or autopsy (the persistent pallidness of her flesh, contrasted with the blackness of her hair, reinforces this impression.) The broad, flat areas of color that make up the surrounding landscape reinforce the strangeness of the scene and foster a sense of emotional isolation. The dreamlike dimension of the immediate foreground compels the viewer to react to the thematic suggestion of the title.

Weiss' *Kiss on the Grass* may also suggest the loss of sexual innocence, but in more direct fashion. Against an agrarian background not dissimilar to that in Gauguin's picture, a formally dressed couple occupies the foreground space. The woman being embraced also lies supine on the grass, but with one arm around her embracer. The man in a tuxedo leans over her in a way that simultaneously suggests intimacy and predation. The jarring contrast between the formally dressed figures and setting lends a peculiarly Symbolist air to the scene. The pose of the man in the painting is reversed in Edvard Munch's *Vampire*, in which a female vampire leans over her victim. The mixed appeal and repulsion that is characteristic of vampiric activity is intensified by the very close cropping of the figures and black background. The straightforward intensity of Munch's work epitomizes the fin-de-siècle understanding of gender and sexuality – what is hinted subtly at in Gauguin's and Weiss' works is here stated explicitly.

The representation of sexuality in Weiss' work also suggests a connection to the surrounding earth. The corresponding harmonies of the gently undulating hills and fields and the curves of the woman's dress suggest a compositional harmony at odds with Gauguin's work. This sense of self-identification with the land is intensified by the suggestively vampiric pose of the man, who seemingly draws sustenance from the earthbound woman. In this sense, the organic bond between woman and landscape is another means of classifying the female gender.

While Gauguin's female is alienated from the landscape, Weiss' is sublimated into it; his work becomes a commentary on the rejuvenating powers of landscape and hearkens back to a Polish tradition of self-identification with its terrain. While the figures in such works were traditionally peasants, Weiss' couple – most likely bourgeois, judging from the dress, makes reference to the Young Poland milieu of Krakow and Warsaw. In this way, Weiss' work indicates the continued relevancy of traditional tropes for the Symbolist generation.

In their exposure to Symbolist style through travel and study abroad, and, more importantly, through the media outlets provided by activist-critics such as Zenon Przesmycki and Stanisław Przybyszewski, Polish Symbolists such as Jacek Malczewski, Gustaw Gwozdecki and Wojciech Weiss were able to explore pictorial devices elaborated abroad and incorporate them into their work. As was the case across Europe, certain modes of thinking, stylistic deformations, and themes were readily made use of by Polish modernists. Their choice of these modes suggests a certain relevance of Symbolist mentalities and style to the particular socio-political situation in Poland, and also a modernist means of responding to, and in a certain sense continuing, the nineteenth-century tradition of responding to issues of national and political importance. By contrast to purely interiorized *mise-en-scènes* of European images, Polish Symbolism proved extremely engaged socially.

By examining the ways in which Polish painters made use of Symbolist modes to continue nineteenth-century national traditions in cultural expression, our understanding of the range of expressive possibilities of the style are expanded. The reception and transmission of Symbolist ideas by key cultural actors of Young Poland, such as Stanisław Przybyszewski and Miriam Przesmycki, also worked in tandem with the work of painters to create a Symbolist culture in Poland. The chosen focus and emphasis of these critics in their theories of creation

and expression, and the ways in which their personal interpretations of Symbolist tenets related to national cultural tradition, helped inspire and make precise Polish painters' approach to Symbolism. The Polish interpretation and adaptation of Symbolist ideas was not merely stylistic; it encompassed the movement's particular notions of an estranged reality, eerie space and static time and grafted these onto native tradition. In particular, Polish understandings of cultural expression as a realm which did not necessarily parallel reality lent itself well to the development of Symbolism.

The traditional Polish understanding of artistic content and the artist's role throughout the nineteenth century fit well into the tenets of Symbolism. Here, the privileged role of the artist as enlightened seer, or guide to a higher dimension dovetailed with Polish understandings of the artist's role throughout the nineteenth century. The belief in the unsaid, evocative, shadowy other also related to understandings of Polish reality – a lost paradise that could be conjured up only through suggestion and imagination. The notion of lost paradise across Europe explored in the eponymous Jean Clair exhibition refers to the deleterious effects of rapid urbanization, decline of trust in social institutions and the accompanying rise in the science of psychology as a means of exploring the fragmentation of a cohesive sense of individual and collective reality. These same phenomena were explicitly related to the sociopolitical status of Polish Symbolists working across imposed boundaries of Empire; their political and, by extension, individual reality was destabilized and their relation to tradition was problematized in ways that could best be represented through Symbolist means.

Expressing objects and ideas in concrete, quotidian form would detract from the understanding of loss that is inherent in Polish cultural consciousness of the late nineteenth century. Through stylistic deformation, suggestion, pessimistic themes and mysterious evocation, Polish

Symbolists were able to effectively address traditional issues of national and cultural identity within a modern stylistic and philosophical matrix.

Chapter IV:

Exhibiting Polish Modernism: Symbolism and the *Sztuka* Group

Symbolist painting in Poland came to the fore largely under the aegis of the most prominent modernist artists' association in fin-de-siècle Poland, the *Sztuka* [Art] society, founded in 1897 in Krakow. *Sztuka* was foremost invested in raising the national standards of art produced in Poland. To term the group a "secession" analogous to that of the German cities, for example, would be misleading, as the constituents of *Sztuka* were not breaking away from any well-established mainstream institution that enjoyed a dominant status in shaping the practice of art. In a certain sense, they hoped to establish themselves as the mainstream, normative standard bearers of Polish art, rather than as an alternative to the status quo. Paradoxically, the freedom provided by the stunted political and economic situation of Poland allowed for modernist art to be produced in Krakow without the censure of official organizations so prevalent in other areas of Europe. Of course, local critics were not without their scathing assessments, but the eventual coincidence of modernist practice and "official" practice in Poland happened in much swifter and smoother fashion than in Western Europe.[162]

Over its twenty-one year existence, *Sztuka* mounted sixteen group shows in cities ranging from Krakow to London to St. Louis.[163] Public reception in all Polish partitions was largely

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[162] See Anna Brzyski-Long, *Modern Art and Nationalism*, 6-7.

[163] Sztuka exhibited three times in Vienna (1902, 1906 and 1908), in St. Louis, Leipzig and Düsseldorf (1904), Dresden and Munich (1905), London (1906), Budapest (1910), twice in Venice (1910 and 1914), Antwerp, Rome and Zagreb (1911), and Berlin (1913).

positive by the third year of its existence.[164] *Sztuka*'s international manifestations began five years after its inception with an exhibition under the aegis of the Vienna Secession. Its members saw the exhibiting society as an opportunity to both showcase and shape the public profile of Polish modernist art. In so doing, they intended to separate themselves from the rather indiscriminate collections of works that had heretofore characterized exhibitions in Poland. The majority of *Sztuka* exhibitions were group shows, with a handful devoted to a single artist, such as the posthumous special exhibition dedicated to first *Sztuka* president Jan Stanisławski, or exhibitions devoted in 1909 to "second generation" members Wojciech Weiss, a Symbolist and early Expressionist painter, and the sculptor Xawery Dunikowski. Throughout the first decades of the twentieth century, membership grew slowly and carefully, and the group maintained its status as the "official" face of Polish modernism. As modernists became firmly entrenched in the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts as administrators and teachers, the gap between Polish mainstream and alternative practice narrowed, and art shown in *Sztuka* exhibitions was both critically and popularly lauded. Membership in the organization represented a stamp of critical approval for aspiring Polish modernists.

Sztuka positioned itself as an openly nationalist artistic association in a regional center of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The intersection of *Sztuka*'s nationalist concerns and the Symbolist language of some of its most prominent and active members provided a vital platform with which to address the sociopolitical issues of modernism and nationhood. While *Sztuka*'s impact on the development of modern style has been thoroughly explored, the Symbolist elements in its group shows and their relationship to both regional and Viennese identities invite

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[164] In particular, the society's first show in Warsaw, held half a year after its Krakow debut, garnered critical praise. See Jan K., "Stowarrzyszenie malarzy 'Sztuka' [The Society of Painters 'Art']," *Głos* 9 (1898): 202-04.

further inquiry. The stylistic and philosophical stances of Symbolism had significant implications for the form and organizational practice of *Sztuka*, which in turn affected the evolution of Polish modernism as a whole.

As well as agitating for the development and maintenance of modernist standards, *Sztuka* had the additional task – partially as a legacy from earlier nineteenth century artistic practice in Poland – of establishing nationalist identity within the context of empire and of Europe at large. How the Symbolist practice embraced by *Sztuka* played into these its shaping of modernist identity reveals the ways in which it was able to establish modernist practice in Polish territory. The Symbolist elements within *Sztuka*'s practice helped inform its activities, status and development as a propagating element of Polish modernism.[165]

Scholarly discussion of *Sztuka* within the context of the Austro-Hungarian Empire often invokes the traditional notion of center-periphery.[166] From this perspective, important artistic centers (coinciding with economic and population centers) serve as the fomenting points of artistic activity and innovation. Peripheral areas, in turn, take their cue from the standards and praxis of centers, and work produced in the former can be best understood in the context of the *a priori* examples set by the latter. More recent scholarship in the geography of art has challenged the usefulness and accuracy of this model, pointing out its inability to encompass the

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[165] It is important to note that *Sztuka* was by no means the only modernist group or association operating in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Poland (other groups included the Stowarzyszenie Artystów Polskich "Salon," founded in 1902, as well as splinter groups of disgruntled members of *Sztuka* itself, such as the "Zero" group formed in 1908), and it would be misleading to imply that it had a monolithic hold on modernist activity at that time. The presence of splinter groups, as well as reports that *Sztuka*'s first acting president Jan Stanisławski led efforts to quash the success of non-*Sztuka* affiliated artists and activity, paint a more cronyist and exclusionary picture of the organization. However, its status as the most prominent and artistically significant group from the years 1897-1907, and its active participation in international exhibitions, means that it was the most ideally placed group for demonstrating the mechanisms of Symbolist modernism within an institutional context.

[166] Juszczak, *Malarstwo Polskiego Modernizmu*, 45-50.

contributions of so-called peripheral centers to an ongoing artistic dialogue, as well as the effect of the so-called periphery on art practice in the centers.[167]

The emergence of organized, independent artists' groups across Europe at the turn of the twentieth century was one of the hallmarks of the development of modernism. Often these groups were formed in opposition to an official exhibiting society, governmental cultural policy, Academy-sponsored circle, or world's fair exhibition selections. They rejected existing societies and organizations because of perceived constraints on creative exploration, as well as the inability of established groups to adapt to or accept the prerogatives of modernism, in which artistic philosophies were subject first and foremost to individual impulse and not dependent upon external rules. Among these, Symbolist modernist groups such as Les XX or the Rose + Croix society were bound by a shared set of principles, theories and philosophies that were crucial to their work. They were guided by shared notions of a higher reality attained through esoteric knowledge and believed themselves to be "initiates" working in tandem to express their version of artistic truth.

In a broader context, the discontent of modernist painters with established artistic societies and groups reflected many of the symptoms of cultural modernism itself – a generational sense of alienation from established social norms and an accompanying need to express new realities or artistic truths in opposition to those norms. Modernist artists believed

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[167] See Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicao Press, 2004.) For explorations of geographical models in the Central European context, see Elizabeth Clegg, *Art in Central Europe*, as well as Piotr Krakowski and Jacek Purchla, eds., *Sztuka około 1900 w Europie środkowej. Centra i prowincje artystyczne. Materiały międzynarodowej konferencji zorganizowanej w dniach 20-24 października 1994* [Art Around 1900 in Central Europe: Centers and Artistic Provinces; Materials from an international conference organized from October 20-24, 1994] (Krakow: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury Kraków,1997).

themselves to be at odds with the societies in which they lived and worked; their work addressed the chasm between their concerns and preoccupations and the values of mainstream society.

As Peter Paret has shown in the context of the Berlin Secession, the very act of forming an exhibition society championing "the new art" could also be understood as inherently political.[168] *Sztuka* was marked by the absence of explicit political agitation in written official statements of the group or art that could be termed politically agitative: however, the very act of forming a pan-Polish organization and dealing with Polish themes was an implicit statement of nationhood. *Sztuka*'s Symbolist elements that dealt with themes of nation and identity were statements that carried a certain ideological and critical weight.

Polish modernist artists formed several independent groups. As has been previously mentioned in Chapter One, Polish Symbolists did not aggregate according to shared styles, but incorporated themselves under a general umbrella of renewal and artistic revolution.[169] For *Sztuka*'s founding members, the desire to form an independent group was not so much because of constraints on creative activity (although the perceived stodginess of Krakow's Art School was a source of frustration from a younger generation of artists) but rather, as Jan Cavanaugh and Anna Brzyski have documented, a frustration with the lack of standards.[170] These official venues included the aforementioned Art School (the school did not maintain academy status until

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[168] Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession: Modernism and its Enemies in Imperial Germany*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1980.

[169] A few of the founding members of *Sztuka* worked in additional media; Stanisław Wyspiański was a playwright, poet, set and furniture designer, Józef Mehoffer worked with stained glass design, and Antoni Piotrowski was also a draughtsman. For a succinct summary of *Sztuka's* history in English, see Elizabeth Clegg, "The Polish Exhibiting Society 'Sztuka'. Cracow," *The Burlington Magazine* 137 (1995): 570-71.

[170] Jan Cavanaugh, *Outside Looking In: Early Modern Polish Art 1890-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 60-63. Anna Brzyski-Long, *Modern Art and Nationalism in Fin-de-siècle Poland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999): 128.

1900) and the Society for the Friends of Art, founded in 1854, which held annual art exhibits. Unlike in Western European centers such as Paris and London, Krakow was virtually without a network of galleries, schools and private collectors as factors driving the development of an art market. For this reason, the Society for the Friends of Art was composed largely of those who had the financial means and social status to concern themselves with art. Exhibition organizers tended to accept all paintings and sculptures without reservation, particularly those that satisfied the traditional requirements in regards to subject matter.[171]

By the late nineteenth century, this model appeared parochial to many Polish artists who had studied abroad in cities such as Munich and Paris, and who wished to participate in thoroughly professional shows. In the case of *Sztuka*, one of the most immediate catalysts for the formation of a native society was the participation of Jacek Malczewski and Antoni Piotrowski in the 1891 Berlin exhibition and their accompanying observation of the workings of the *Verein Berliner Künstler*.[172]

Beyond the exhibitions that were the driving force behind the organization's existence, the members of *Sztuka* quickly became synonymous with cultural life in Krakow, participating in salons of influential local intellectuals, meeting in known society cafes which also functioned as impromptu artistic performance venues, and working closely with and contributing to the city's

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[171] The focus on subject matter as a criterion for judging the quality of art in Poland reflects a nineteenth-century national tradition in which art was expected to be didactic, instructive and uplifting. See Stefan Morawski, "Polish Theories of Art Between 1830 and 1850," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 16 (1957): 217-36. This way of thinking about art persisted until the efforts of Naturalist critic Stanisław Witkiewicz began to agitate for a focus on painterly technique as a means of judging the quality of art. See Stanisław Witkiewicz, *Sztuka i krytyka u nas: 1884-1890* [Our Art and Criticism: 1884-1990] (2nd Ed.) (Krakow: Drukarnia Wł. L. Anczycz i Spółki; Teodor Paprocki i S-ka, 1891.)

[172] It was at this exhibition that Malczewski was awarded a gold medal for the painting *Introduction*. This success of the Polish sector at the exhibition doubtless served as encouragement to create a permanent means of establishing national presence at international venues in the future.

modernist periodical *Życie*. As Anna Brzyski states, "The members of the [*Sztuka*] society controlled art education and dominated art exhibitions in Poland. Through international shows organized by Sztuka, they made Polish art synonymous with their own practice abroad." [173] While the organization's existence spanned twenty-one years – sufficient to encompass two generations of artists – most scholars and contemporary critics were in agreement that the society lost momentum and artistic relevance after 1907, a year in which two founding members, Stanisławski and Wyspiański, died. As the twentieth century progressed, the modernist community in Krakow became diversified as the result of the influx of new European styles such as Expressionism and the core group of modernists around *Sztuka* and periodical *Życie* became outmoded.

The activities of *Sztuka* as paradigmatic of the establishment of modernism in Poland have been thoroughly documented and explored in the existing literature.[174] The situation of *Sztuka* was exceptionally complex: it was an organization within an organization, just as Poland was itself a nation within an empire. The history of *Sztuka* offers new ways to analyze the development of the modernist artists' group, and the role played by Symbolists within it. While *Sztuka* was not synonymous with Polish modernism, its history and development mirror that of more general cultural change in fin-de-siecle Poland. The scope and content of *Sztuka*'s

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[173] Anna Brzyski has documented the parallel case to *Sztuka* of the conception and execution of the "Polish Art" album series of the early twentieth century as a means of establishing a culturally potent canon. See Anna Brzyski, "Constructing the Canon: The Album *Polish Art* and the Writing of Modernist Art History of Polish 19th-Century Painting," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 3 (2004), accessed online at http://19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/spring04/284-constructing-the-canon-the-album-polish-art-and-the-writing-of-modernist-art-history-of-polish-19th-century-painting.

[174] See Jan Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, 68-74 Tadeusz Dobrowolski, *Sztuka Młodej Polski* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1963): 34-7.

exhibitions reflected contemporary sociopolitical issues, and Symbolist theory and practice played a key role in those exhibitions.

Organized artistic activity in nineteenth-century Krakow was scant compared with that in other European cities. The highest level of formal artistic training was at the "school" level until the turn of the twentieth century and exhibition opportunities were limited to the annual shows of the local Society of Friends of the Arts. Polish artists who exhibited abroad did so as representatives of a given partitioned area of the country (Russia, Galicia or Prussia); the first international opportunity to exhibit as a nationally identified group came with the 1891 participation of the Warsaw Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in the International Art Exhibition in Berlin. The showing of Polish artists at this exhibition led to an official protest by the Russian government, and it has been suggested that this controversy was a direct factor in the complete suppression of nationally identified Polish works at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1900.[175] Prior to the founding of *Sztuka*, the only other exhibition of note in which Polish artists showed as a group was the Munich International Exhibition of Fine Arts, but what was considered an overt show of nationalism by the Russian authorities cast a shadow of controversy over the show.[176] Many artists who had studied abroad and had been exposed to more cosmopolitan art practice were dismayed by the dearth of opportunities in Krakow, as well as other cities such as Warsaw.

From the perspective of Vienna, the seat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Krakow was a regional center. As Emily Braun has pointed out, the distinct ethnic character of minority groups

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[175] Jan Cavanaugh, "The Society of Polish Artists "*Sztuka*," 1897-1914," in Agnieszka Morawińska, ed., *Symbolism in Poland: Collected Essays* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1988): 57.

[176] The orchestra at the show played a Polish patriotic song at its opening, angering Russian authorities. Cavanaugh speculates that this controversy is most likely responsible for the lack of an explicitly Polish presence at the Paris 1900 exhibition. Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, 69.

within the Hapsburg Empire such as Poles, Czechs and Slovenes was seen as a positive element in Vienna. The assumed inherent difference engendered by ethnic difference resulted in what was perceived as a mosaic cultural pattern that served to enrich the overall artistic output of the Empire. In this sense, "ethnic" expression in art was tolerated and even encouraged as it served to enhance the cultural profile of Vienna.[177]

The multi-layered identity assigned to Polish and other "ethnic" artists allowed them to form discrete groups and still be under the general aegis of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Nationalistic expression, on the other hand, was not encouraged for obvious reasons. Cavanaugh has called the situation of *Sztuka* members in the context of the Vienna secession a "mixed blessing" – any gains in terms of recognition were won at the expense of being seen as Viennese provincials.[178] At the same time, the integral cultural identity of the Empire was inherently diverse. The characteristics of this diversity resulted in an oddly modernist and Symbolist reality described by theater historian Daniel Gerrould in his study of Polish dramatist and artist Witkacy:

> The aesthetics of detritus, positing culture as refuse, offered the artist the entire rubbish heap of civilization – with its accumulated layers of discarded artifacts, styles of dress and manners, ideologies, and modes of imaginative representation – in which to pick and choose. Brought up in a flamboyantly stagy corner of the polyglot, multinational, and multicultural Austro-Hungarian Empire at its operatic finale, Witkacy had an eye for the makeshift and transitory, held together only by imposture.[179]

Given this context of shifting identities in the Empire, the challenge for *Sztuka* was to establish a profile for itself that would somehow manage to express the complicated reality of being a

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[177] Emily Braun, "Klimtomania/Klimtophobia," in Colin B. Bailey, ed., *Gustav Klimt: Modernism in the Making* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001).

[178] Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, 81.

[179] Daniel Gerrould, ed., *The Witkiewicz Reader* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992): 11.

national group without a nation. Artists in *Sztuka* used the methods of Symbolism to articulate issues of identity in a way that acknowledged this peculiar status.

Sztuka was founded in 1897 with statutes based upon a preliminary draft drawn up three years earlier by artists Jacek Malczewski, Antoni Piotrowski, and Włodzimierz Tetmajer.[180] The society's central stated purpose was raising the quality of Polish art exhibition, and by implication Polish art practice in general. The official pronouncements of *Sztuka* were devoid of any declaration in favor of a particular artistic style (one of their early statements expressed approval of "new art," and another of "modern art," while academicism was never explicitly rejected.)[181]

Interestingly, neither strictly dictated modernism nor strident nationalism was found within the statements of *Sztuka*. Unlike the pronouncements of, for example, the Mystic Order of the Rose + Croix group, which were couched in mystical language and dealt with the issue of types of acceptable content in painting,[182] the declaration of *Sztuka* is above all pragmatic and focuses more on the issue of exhibition than a philosophy of art or creation. In the group's founding statutes can be found two stated aims, both of which indicate the seriousness of national issues to its members. The first of these was to initiate the expansion of artistic life in the country, rather than region or city, an indication of *Sztuka*'s understanding of itself as a national group in the absence of nation. In this way, the group would become a cultural stand-in for the nation. The second aim was to achieve this goal through local and international

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[180]Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, 70.

[181] Ibid., 60.

[182] Susan P. Casteras, "Symbolist Debts to Pre-Raphaelitism: A Pan-European Phenomenon," in Thomas J. Tobin, ed., *Worldwide Pre-Raphaelitism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005): 124-126.

exhibitions.[183] Rather than set itself up in opposition to a given academic doctrine propagated by a particular institution, *Sztuka* instead agitated in its declaration for the establishment of a doctrine of quality – a term that was perhaps left purposefully unqualified, given the range of styles embraced by painters in the original group.[184]

At no time in the Symbolist period from 1890-1914 did *Sztuka* present itself explicitly as an Austro-Hungarian organization. Inevitably, Vienna, the political and cultural center of reference for Krakovians, also became a prominent place of exhibition for Polish artists.[185] Given the paltry opportunities available to these artists within their "own" territory, any opportunity to exhibit certainly overrode concerns about being subsumed within a foreign cultural identity in a city with a different language. As Polish artists began to gain a measure of success and international recognition, their aspirations for establishing an independent political identity for themselves also grew.

True, *Sztuka* artists exhibited within the aegis of the Vienna Secession and the Hagebund, but they viewed these exhibitions as autonomous statements. The first independent showing of the *Sztuka* society at the Vienna Secession included several members of the organization who were not subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, such as Ferdynand Ruszczyc and Wacław

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[183] Stefania Krzysztofowicz-Kozakowska, "Krakowski kocioł artystyczny [The Krakovian Artistic Melting Pot]" in Anna Baranowa, ed., *Stulecie Towarzystwa Artystów "Sztuka,"* 37.

[184] Sztuka displayed a conciliatory attitude towards the reigning art organization in Krakow, the Society for the Friends of Art (*Towarzystwo Przyjacioł Sztuk Pieknych*) in its official statements, such as that of its 1898 report (Tygodnik.) This approach stands in sharp contrast to the attacks of other modernist groups such as the Berlin Secession on official Academies, and reveals the peculiar situation of modernist artists in Polish territory, who perhaps felt empowered by the lack of an overbearing formal institution. See Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession: Modernism and its Enemies in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1980.)

[185] Anna Brzyski, "*Unsere Polen…*"" Polish Artists and the Vienna Secession, 1897-1904," in Michelle Facos and Sharon Hirsh, eds., *Art, Culture and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 65.

Szymanowski. The group showing of ethnically Polish artists in the capital of the Empire lent ideological overtones to the exhibition. Sztuka artists varied in their attitudes towards the Austrian establishment and the ironic necessity of engagement with Vienna in order to create a national platform. At the same time, most accepted this necessity in order to promote their work and, by extension, their national identity. Stanisław Wyspiański, who rejected a call to become a docent of the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts in March 1902 because it was formulated as a grant of "His Imperial Highness," continued to be one of the most visible Polish artists in Viennese exhibitions, as well as member of the Vienna Secession and the object of critical admiration of the Emperor.[186]

The range of artworks in *Sztuka*'s first exhibition reflected the group's stylistic diversity – of the ten painters in the show, half can be counted as having Symbolist tendencies (Jacek Malczewski, Stanisław Wyspiański, Józef Mehoffer, Jan Stanisławski, and Julian Fałat) and the other half a mix of realism and genre painting (Józef Chełmoński and Antoni Piotrowski). An early statement from the group, published in Illustrated Weekly, emphasized the importance of stylistic diversity.[187] The members of *Sztuka* were enthusiastic about the creation and reception of the show at the Vienna Secession and its implications for the state of future artistic activity in Poland: in a letter written to a friend at the time of the exhibition, Wyspiański went so far as to call the event a "renaissance" in Polish art.[188] Certain critics, however, were not as favorably

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[186] Roman Taborski, "Wyspiański-Wiedeń-Secesja [Wyspiański-Vienna-Secession]," in Anna Baranowa, ed., *Stulecie Towarzystwa "Sztuka"*, 94.

[187] Jan Stanisławski, Teodor Axentowicz, and Józef Mehoffer, "Sprawozdanie Wydziału Towarzystwa Artystów Polskich "Sztuka" za rok 1898 [Departmental Summary of the Association of Polish Artists "Sztuka" for 1898]," *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 19 (1899): 379.

[188] Stanisław Wyspiański*, Listy zebrane (tom II: Listy Stanisława Wyspiańskiego do Lucjana Rydla)* [Collected Letters (Vol. II: The Letters of Stanisław Wyspiański to Lucjan Rydel)], eds. L. Ploszewski and M. Rydlowa (Krakow,Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1979): 482.

disposed, accusing the participants of being "isolationist" and divisive.[189] Presumably, the overwhelmingly modernist tendencies of the show's exhibited works were seen as misrepresentative of the entire body of Polish art, and *Sztuka* as an exclusive, elitist society.

Given this emphasis on the pragmatic at the expense of the theoretical, how did *Sztuka*'s Symbolist artists successfully create a contemporary image of Poland and simultaneously dovetail with Western European aesthetic concerns? Did Symbolist ways of thinking about representation influence the workings of *Sztuka* at home and abroad? Did the Symbolist-oriented members of *Sztuka* influence exhibition policy and how were they themselves affected by that policy? Did the group formation and Secession mentality facilitate or hinder the propagation of Symbolism in Poland?

The close associations of *Sztuka* with the Vienna Secession proved particularly fruitful for Jacek Malczewski, Stanisław Wyspiański and Józef Mehoffer, who benefited from the like-minded aesthetics of artists such as Gustav Klimt and Otto Wagner. Beyond stylistic affinities, however, the modernist ideological aims of the Vienna Secession proved influential to *Sztuka*'s perception of itself as a parallel modernist organization. Although Vienna was the cosmopolitan center of an empire, its critics, like those in Krakow, were also concerned with its perceived provincial status in comparison to other European cities. In response to this shortcoming, the Secession wished to promote what it perceived as a higher standard of art practice, including its own version of international trends. By incorporating these styles in its shows and practice, the Secession could come to claim them as being authentically Viennese and a reflection of the cultural sophistication of their native milieu. Similarly, *Sztuka*'s showcasing of modernist styles

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[189] Stefania Krzysztofowicz-Kozakowska, "Krakowski Kocioł Artystyczny," 37.

including Symbolism in its exhibitions would encourage their critical and public acceptance as examples of art that was not only modern but also unmistakably native.

While *Sztuka* unquestionably benefitted from the stylistic and ideological example set by the Vienna Secession, the latter's acceptance and showcasing of an explicitly nationalist organization was not without its own form of compensation. From the perspective of Vienna, the encouragement of "national" groups such as *Sztuka* allowed access to a vital source of creativity – the art of regional centers within the Empire. In this way, Vienna's modernist agenda to establish itself as a multifaceted, cultural hub could only be helped by ambitious modernist activity in Krakow – provided that those ambitions did not seek to camouflage or subvert the former's superior status.[190]

Sztuka's first official sitting occurred six months after the success of the 1897 inaugural show. Statutes were drawn up relating to practical matters such as the means of selecting members and leadership within the group, the responsibilities of the latter, and the management and disposition of organizational funds.[191] The society's immediate nationalist commitment was revealed in its choice of Józef Chełmoński as president. Because of Chełmoński's residence in the Russian sector of partitioned Poland, he was forbidden by local authorities from participating in an organization based in the Empire. Chełmoński resigned immediately, and was later elected honorary president. The presidency was transferred to landscape Symbolist Jan Stanisławski, one of the most prominent members of the Krakovian artworld. In the same year, Stanisławski took up a teaching position in landscape painting at the Krakow School of Fine Arts, and he maintained close ties with the editorship of modernist journal *Życie*. Both of these associations

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[190] Elizabeth Clegg, *Art in Central Europe 1890-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006): 10.

[191] Stefania Krzysztofowicz-Kozakowska, "Krakowski kocioł artystyczny," 37.

ensured that Stanisławski would influence and remain abreast of modernist activity in the city. The members of *Sztuka* were based not only in Krakow, but also in other Polish cities and abroad, serving to broaden the scope of the society and lending it a less insular, more cosmopolitan tone. Subsequent to its initial declaration in the Weekly Illustrated, *Sztuka* went on to expand its range of exhibition activity while remaining committed to a strict membership policy: between 1897 and 1914, the group expanded to a total of only forty members.

All of these efforts served to form an image in the eyes of the art-viewing public of a particular silhouette of Polish art, one that happened to encompass the country's most prominent modernist artists. By extension, Poland itself was established in the minds of viewers and critics as a separate identity within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Scanning critics' reactions to *Sztuka* reveals an awareness of the organization's role in shaping a multifaceted and broadly inclusive image of Polish modern art.

An analysis of *Sztuka*'s interactions with the Vienna Secession and, from 1907, the Vienna-based *Künstlerbund Hagen*, demonstrates the ways in which the praxis of both groups was informed and influenced by modernist and, more specifically, current Symbolist ideas. As has been mentioned above, the relationship between the two groups was both beneficial and problematic for the members of *Sztuka*. They were chronologically concordant, being founded in the same year, and also similar in their rather open-ended approach to programmatic declarations.

Several members of *Sztuka* were also members of the Vienna Secession, so it is probable to assume that decisions about the formation and style, and methods of operation of *Sztuka* were at least partially indebted to its example. Of all the minority artists within the Secession, Polish artists represented the largest block and were therefore in a privileged position to establish a

separate cultural identity within the organization: by the end of its founding year, the Secession had forty-nine total members, of whom ten were Poles. Nine *Sztuka* members had joined shortly after the Secession's inception in 1897, among them Symbolists Malczewski, Stanisławski, and Wyspiański. In addition, Julian Fałat, who was the director of the Krakow School of Fine Arts (the Academy of Fine Arts from 1900) was among the Secession's founding members. Fałat's pivotal position in Krakow modernist circles and his ability to influence pedagogy at the Academy meant that his experiences in Vienna influenced institutional decisions in Krakow. Although the popular image of the Secession was dominated by the work of Klimt and those in his immediate circle, *Sztuka* artists were a notable presence, particularly its twenty-sixth exhibition in 1906. Władysław Ślewiński and Wojciech Weiss had also joined by 1907, and works by other *Sztuka* Symbolists such as Jacek Malczewski, Józef Mehoffer, Leon Wyczółkowski and Stanisław Wyspiański appeared in the Secession's official mouthpiece, *Ver Sacrum*.

In Krakow itself, parallels between *Sztuka* and the Vienna Secession were rapidly perceived by the local artistic community. *Sztuka*'s second show, at the beginning of 1898, was reviewed in *Życie* by critic Rudolf Starzewski, who noted the basic conceptual similarities between the founding principles of the two organizations. As Starzewski explained, the desire to be creatively independent without adhering to a particular social agenda was foremost in *Sztuka*'s concerns.[192]

At the same time, the critic hinted at a particularly Polish brand of modernism -- one that was related to subject matter. According to Starzewski, Polish artists would naturally be drawn to the native landscape and its specific allure, going so far as to say that modern Polish art, if

[192] Rudolf Starzewski, "Secesja [Secession], (Part I)" *Życie* 2, no. 24 (1898): 279-82; "Secesja [Secession], (Part II) *Życie* 2, no. 25 (1898): 304-05.

created in authentic spirit, would have its own "distinct physiognomy."[193] This declaration is, in a sense, a carryover from similar concerns of Polish art critics earlier in the century; it also manages to echo *Życie* editor Stanisław Przybyszewski's concept of national modernism.[194] It suggests a middle ground for modernism in Poland, in which innovative form is paired with specifically nationalist sentiment and yearning. In this sense, Starzewski's concerns touch upon the dilemma faced by *Sztuka*: how to combine content that was locally relevant with form that was internationally current. Malczewski and Wyspiański struggled with these issues, creating in the process a unique brand of Symbolism that encompassed local and international idioms.

For some Polish critics, the forging of a national brand of modernism was seemingly futile in the face of practical difficulties inherent in being subservient to Vienna. Prior to the first *Sztuka* group show there, in 1902, individual members showed works in the general Vienna secession exhibitions. Rather than forming a separate entity within the show, Polish artists were grouped as members of the Austrian Empire, along with other minorities such as Czechs and Germans. This led to some bitterness on the part of Polish commentators, who believed that "foreigners" exhibiting in the show were given greater status than the Empire's own subjects.[195] Polish critic Roman Lewandowski voiced these concerns in a review of the inaugural Secession show in March 1898, when he criticized the (presumably intentional) unfavorable placement of the Polish works in the show. Likewise, critic Kazimierz Tetmajer framed the exhibition in terms of identity – his most immediate concern was the collective showing of Polish artists

[193] Ibid., 282.

[194] See Chapter One for an overview of Przybyszewski's understanding of national art in the context of modernism.

[195] See, for example, the review of the 1898 Vienna Secession show in *Życie*, in which critic Roman Lewandowski complained about the inferior placement of Polish works in the exhibition. Roman Lewandowski, "Wiedeńska Secesja (część IV) [The Vienna Secession (Part IV)]," *Życie* 2, no. 17 (1898): 198.

against the backdrop of the entire show. Tetmajer reassured his readers that the Polish contributors to the exhibition were able to maintain a respectable position and were not overshadowed by "any other nationality."[196] Partisanship colored most fin-de-siècle European art criticism but it can be argued that the Polish critics were particularly sensitive to these issues in the context of Empire and East versus West. Being part of an overarching political entity was a two-edged sword: it allowed international exposure for Polish artists, but rather than elevate their status it provided the Viennese free reign in defining the placement and promotion of a specifically Polish style.

While the physical arrangement of exhibitions allowed for the manipulation of the audience's critical reception, the representation of *Sztuka* members in the Secession's official journal, *Ver Sacrum*, arguably elevated Polish artists and their work to a more egalitarian status in the context of all Secession artwork. In fact, this representation was generous; in particular, Symbolists Stanisław Wyspiański and Jacek Malczewski were frequently featured in the journal. The question naturally arises, however, as to the efficacy of these isolated and independent reproductions at communicating a sense of Polish identity to *Ver Sacrum*'s readership. Works by Polish Symbolist painters that were not necessarily nationalist in content, such as Józef Mehoffer's *Singer* (fig. 71) or Leon Wyczółkowski's *Self-Portrait* (fig. 72) were featured in later issues. If anything, such reproductions served simply to confirm the status of Polish painters as followers of an international modernist style.

Given these past concerns, the organization and realization of the first *Sztuka* show in the Vienna Secession in 1902 was a crucial opportunity to establish a legitimate national identity in an imperial setting. The society's first show beyond Polish territory fittingly took place in the

[196] Kazimierz Tetmajer, "Secesya Wiedeńska [The Viennese Secession]," *Czas* 4 (1898): I.

Secession building, given its Symbolist identity in both form and content. The exhibition designer, Karol Tichy, took advantage of the large space, white walls, and high ceilings of Salon Three of Otto Wagner's showpiece building, in keeping with a newly emerging modernist aesthetic, in order to showcase a smaller number of works.[197] This was in sharp contrast with *Sztuka*'s inaugural Krakow show of 1898, in which paintings were lined up around the walls and on draped tables and easels, creating a rather claustrophobic environment and suggesting commerce and exchange rather than contemplation.

Polish critics, who had been intensely conscious of the status of Polish art as a body within the context of international shows, were particularly eager about the prospect of a showing of Polish art "*in corpore*," as one writer phrased it.[198] While the earlier Krakow *Sztuka* manifestation stood as important manifestations of modernism in opposition to reigning traditionalism in Polish art, the focus of critical concern necessarily shifted in the Empire's capital. *Sztuka*'s inaugural Secession show tested the cultural and political viability of a national organization in a larger international context, where both art and nationhood had the potential to be recognized and acclaimed.

Further, Krakovian modernists were dependent on this show to set the model for *Sztuka*'s programmatic endeavor. The Symbolist aspects of the exhibition's design and content determined the aesthetic profile and ability to compete with wider European currents. While the Secession leaders may have viewed it as a regional manifestation, Polish artists and critics vaunted the *Sztuka* room as an emphatic statement of national modernism. The curious dissonance between Imperial and Polish perceptions of the role of *Sztuka* allowed the show

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[197] Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981): 13-35.

[198] Tadeusz Rittner, "*Sztuka* w Wiedniu [*Sztuka* in Vienna]," *Czas* 11(1902): 1.

organizers to engage with sensitive issues of political subjugation and autonomy, albeit in subtle form.

While Anna Brzyski has pointed out that the careful, overarching hierarchy of design within the *Sztuka* show indicates an effort on the part of its organizers to present a unified face of Polishness for the viewer,[199] the impression of harmony should be understood in the light of the Symbolist influence on *Sztuka*, specifically, significant elements of the *gesamtkunstwerk*. The Symbolist philosophy of the *gesamtkunstwerk* relied upon a total appeal to the viewer's senses in order to physically, emotionally and mentally transport her to a higher plane of consciousness. Stanisław Wyspiański's plan for the King Kazimierz stained-glass window, part of an unrealized project for Wawel Cathedral in Krakow,[200] was propped against an extensive side wall of the main exhibition room, flanked by two small trees. In front of each tree were sculpted heads by Wacław Szymanowski, called *Tritons*. This five-part display extended the two-dimensional plan into the three-dimensional space of the gallery, creating a more sensorially holistic experience for the viewer. The contrast and interplay between the organic elements of the display and the drawn and sculpted personages recalls the Symbolist understanding of art's ability to evoke living, mystical elements through line, color and form.[201]

Through differences in space, texture, and medium, the Symbolist *gesamtkunstwerk* sought to transport its viewer to another plane of awareness in acting simultaneously on multiple senses such as hearing and touch in addition to vision. One of the most prominent earlier

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[199] Anna Brzyski, "Unsere Polen...", 79-80.

[200] Jan Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, 185.

[201] Aurier's declaration about the characteristics of Symbolist painting include the assertion that it makes reference to a higher ideal or reality through the formal means of painting. G.-Albert Aurier, "Symbolism in Painting: Paul Gauguin," reprinted in Henri Dorra, ed. *Symbolist Art Theories* (Berkeley, University of California Press): 192-204. Debora Silverman addressed the Symbolist approach to elements of painting in her book *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989): 76-79.

examples of such a work at the Vienna Secession was Max Klinger's *Beethoven* monument (fig. 73). In the monument, a nude life-size figure of the composer sits pensively on a throne with sweeping armrests, supported by a massive square pedestal. At the base of the throne, an eagle emerges from stone, emphasizing the multidimensionality of the work and leading the viewer's eye back to the head of Beethoven, the seat and source of the composer's creative fantasy. The striking contrast between texture and color of the multiple materials used – ivory, alabaster, marble and amber—as well as the overt reference to music encouraged a synaesthetic reception of the work.

Judging by both the overall design and individual works of their first show at the Secession, the members of *Sztuka* were doubtless inspired by the Beethoven exhibition, in which the monument was shown with Gustav Klimt's Beethoven Frieze and the entire exhibition space was conceived as one synthesized work of art. For Carl Schorske, the Beethoven show was a "*gesamtkunstwerk* of aestheticized inwardness" characterized by "purposive development of inner space," in which a select group of artists paid homage to a particular cultural hero.[202] The notion of "inner space" here refers not only to the four walls of the gallery room in which the sculpture and frieze stood, but also the "inner space" of the viewer's consciousness affected by the *gesamtkunstwerk* elements, as well as the elite "inner space" shared by those initiates into the cult of Beethoven. As in the case of this Secession exhibit, *Sztuka* artists also sought to create physical and metaphorical inner spaces in their works and especially in their group exhibitions. They intended the sanctuary of the installation to evoke the lost nation of centuries earlier – an inner space located in the recesses of time.

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[202] Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981): 254.

The unambiguously nationalist attitudes of *Sztuka*'s Secession exhibition is evidenced by Stanisław Wyspiański's incarnation of Poland's medieval King Kazimierz the Great (1310-1370.) Kazimierz, who governed at a time of unification and the formation of national identity, was often invoked in the context of nationalist movements for autonomy throughout the nineteenth century. His reign was marked by, and popularly recognized for, its territorial expansion, construction, and consolidation.[203] Wyspiański's drawing shows the King in a state of ghostly resurrection – or, alternatively, decay. Polish critics invoked these popular understandings of the ruler in their analysis of Wyspiański's work. Antoni Gawiński referred to the drawings as "ghostly" "visions" in his review of the show.[204] The drawing was inspired by the fairly recent exhumation of the King's tomb in Wawel Cathedral, but Wyspiański's rendering clearly lends additional weight to the significance of the physical deterioration of Kazimierz. The contrast between the official accoutrements of authority – crown, robe and scepter – and the otherworldly, tortured flesh of the king can be viewed as a surrealistic, pessimistic statement on Poland's contemporary political status. As one contemporary critic described the image of the king, "the terrible poltergeist and yet king and benevolent father still alive in our hearts, looks towards us threateningly, painfully, as if with terror that the soul will be stolen from his people…"[205]

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[203] Norman Davies, *God's Playground*, 52-86.

[204] Antoni Gawiński, "T-wo "Sztuka" w Wiedniu [The "Sztuka" Society in Vienna]," *Wędrowiec* 52 (1902): 12.

[205] "…straszny "Widtruchlo" a jednak zywy wciaz jeszcze w sercach krol i ojciec dobrotliwy, spoglada ku nam groznie, bolesnie, jakby z trwoga, by jego ludowi tu "ducha nie rozkradli"…" Adam Łada-Cybulski, "Z "Aten polskich" (Witraże Wyspiańskiego i nowe witraże katedralne) [From the "Polish Athens" (Wyspiański's Windows and his New Cathedral Windows)," *Tydzień* 7 (1902): 18.

Another critic summed up with bitterness the atmosphere of *Kazimierz Wielki*: "This is the world, in which the poet [Wyspiański] grew up. The memory of great acts, great will – rendered asleep in a burial mound."[206] For Polish viewers, the decorative aspects of the *jugendstil* line took on a coded emotional significance, suggesting, as prominent critic Cezary Jellenta stated, "in Wyspiański, the contour of the whole, the drawing of folds…is some kind of vibration of eternity, strangely symbolizing the endurance of seeming corpses and the deceased."[207]

A 1898 issue of *Ver Sacrum* produced a copy of another of the artist's stained glass window designs, *Caritas* (fig. 74), also from 1898. The design had been exhibited at the Secession's inaugural exhibition; in *Ver Sacrum*, it is reproduced without a frame in the center of a page, framed on either side by botanical motifs drawn by Joseph Maria Olbrich. In *Caritas*, a young mother dressed in an elaborate robe holds an unclothed infant to her in the midst of semi-fantastical plants and botanical motifs. The overall flatness of the design – appropriate for the medium of stained glass – as well as the concurrence between the typically art nouveau designs on the mother's robe and the surrounding plants contribute to the heavily stylized appearance of the entire design. The striking contrast between the flat, decorative elements of the composition and the smooth, naturalistic surfaces of the figures suggest a strange tension between two types of "living" elements in Wyspiański's composition. By contrasting the human, organic elements with the decorative ones, the artist may be suggesting the endurance of the natural as opposed to

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[206] "To jest swiat, w ktorym wyrosl poeta. Pamiec wielkich czynow, wielka wola – uspione w mogile." Stanisław Brzozowski, "Życie i śmierć w twórczości Stanisława Wyspiańskiego [Life and Death in the Work of Stanisław Wyspiański]," *Przegląd Społeczny* 25-27 (1907): 36.

[207] "U Wyspiańskiego kontur calosci, rysunek fald…jest jakas wibracja wiekuistosci, przedziwnie symbolizujaca wiecznotrwanie pozornych trupow i nieboszczykow." Cezary Jellenta, "Sztuka [Art]," *Ateneum* 3 (1903): 42-5.

the artificial. While Klimt's works also combine these natural and decorative elements, they are generally composed in such a way as to meld seamlessly.

Other Symbolist works in the *Sztuka* show also reinforced notions of lost nationhood using subtle means. Among these was Józef Chełmoński's *Pheasants in the Snow* (fig. 75), which marked a significant stylistic departure from his earlier, naturalistic landscapes and genre paintings. In this winter landscape, Chełmoński eliminated the usual motifs of vegetation or agricultural outbuildings, leaving only the animals of the title against a backdrop of a snowstorm. The spare, minimalist composition, punctuated only by the identical bodies of the birds, suggests a musical motif of rhythm and counterpoint, while the absence of identifiable place results in a sense of purposeful ambiguity – both classical Symbolist devices. The strong contrast between the detailed bodies of the birds and the blank, open spaces of the snowy background also call to mind the contemporary interest in Japanese art, an interest which was propagated in Krakow by influential critic and collector of Japanese art Feliks Jasieński. The representation of nation embodied in Chełmoński's earlier narratives, such as *Payday (Saturday on the Estate)* (fig. 76) which contain strong elements of ethnography, has been replaced by the suggestion of migration, endlessness and wandering. The Symbolist elements of *Pheasants in the Snow* represented a means to assess Polish sociopolitical reality without drawing facile stereotypes of ethnic identity or folk culture. Stylistic ambiguity and deformation or, in this case, formlessness, could function as visual metaphor for a nation that existed conceptually and in art, but not in concrete reality. In contrast to the appeals made to a historical past that characterized the earlier naturalist and to a lesser degree Romantic art, Symbolist meditations on nationhood functioned on an emotional level to draw the viewer into an intuitive understanding of, and even empathy with the current fate of Poland.

The sense of an ambiguous or not-of-the-present transcendent territory was also to be found in two other exhibited canvases, Józef Mehoffer's *Strange Garden* (fig. 36) and Ferdynand Ruszczyc' *Earth* (fig. 37). As noted in Chapter One, Mehoffer represents a domain apart from rationally understood space, one in which natural and supernatural elements collide. Likewise, Ruszczyc' *Earth*, ostensibly a statement on the inescapable materiality of earth and the traditional agricultural labor tied with the land, becomes, when viewed in Symbolist terms of ambiguity of perspective and form, an inquiry into the possibility of transcendence of the material in favor of the spiritual. In all three cases, the fraught and elusive history of Polish territory and autonomy found its finest expression in a Symbolist idiom that provokes meditation, perception of irresolution and feelings of melancholic loss.

Sztuka's next international manifestation occurred at the St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exhibition of 1904, two years after the Vienna debut. Here, *Sztuka* represented Polish art under the aegis of the Austrian pavilion, where a considerable amount of controversy erupted over the politics of selection and representation. The Vienna Secession had proposed a tightly conceived showing dominated by the works of a handful of members, Gustav Klimt foremost among them. When their scheme was rejected as being too constricted by governmental authorities, the Secession members withdrew in protest.[208]

The resulting vacancy provided an opportunity for *Sztuka* members to showcase their work as a fully independent, autonomous collective. The overlap of authority in the form of the staff of the Academy of Fine Arts and the members of *Sztuka* facilitated the swift creation of an expanded Polish contribution to the Austrian pavilion. Julian Fałat, the director of the Krakow Academy, chose the thirty-seven works. With the Vienna Secession of 1902, *Sztuka* made the

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[208] Stefania Krzysztofowicz-Kozakowska, "”Sztuka”-“Wiener Secession”-”Mánes”—The Central European Art Triangle, *Artibus et historiae* 53 (2006): 217-259.

decision to follow the principles of the Symbolist *gesamtkunstwerk* or overall coordinated impression: a grey, olive and blue color-scheme on the wall drapery and carpet created a sense of continuity, and Stanisław Wyspiański and Fałat coordinated on a painted botanical frieze around the ceiling. In a controlled environment, the aesthetic effects would be inescapable, and in the context of the St. Louis show, its effects were redoubled – by emphasizing the unity and harmony, the viewer concurrently perceived *Sztuka* as the reigning and exclusive representative of modernist Polish art. For the *Sztuka* gallery in St. Louis, Teodor Axentowicz designed another total aesthetic environment, including embroidered curtains, frieze with organic motifs, and fronton.[209] Both *Sztuka*'s presence and its self-presentation established its role as the official organization through which Polish art was to be received in the international arena.

By the time of *Sztuka*'s international showing in Dusseldorf the same year, its commitment to the Symbolist style had been well established. One of the most noted *Sztuka* artists at the Düsseldorf show was Wojciech Weiss, whose *Portrait of My Father* (fig. 77) attracted critical attention. Compared with Weiss' earlier portrait, *Melancholic* (fig. 22), which had been celebrated at an earlier Krakow *Sztuka* exhibition, here the image at first glance appears far less assertive in its fin-de-siècle mood and style. Its relatively straightforward composition is uncomplicated by the kind of enigmatic symbols (suggestive shadows and wallpaper patterns) that marked *Melancholic*. Yet, the portrait's framing, palette and subject matter are all highly suggestive of the complex relationship between the artist and his father and reveal Weiss' proto-expressionist tendencies. The slight feeling of claustrophobia caused by the extremely close position of the subject to the surface of the picture plane – the figure's right shoulder almost threatens to emerge into real space – as well as the ambiguity of the dark background and the

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[209] Ibid., 232-33.

viewer's inability to position the figure in a larger three-dimensional space create a feeling of unreality. The feverish glow of the sitter's complexion and his apparent unawareness of being observed and recorded lend the work a certain voyeuristic quality, while the dandy-esque touches created by the man's use of a cigarette in a long holder suggest the type of urban environment Weiss recorded in more extreme form in later works such as *Demon* (1904) (fig. 78). While the overall impression may be one of filial affection, the slight distortions marked throughout the composition cast doubt on the father-son relationship. Moreover, the overt distortions symbolize the growing distance between Weiss and his older peers as a second-genereration Polish modernist.

While the issue of *Sztuka*'s nationalist leanings had not been overtly threatening in either Vienna or St. Louis, the first open controversy surrounding an international showing occurred at the Munich exhibition of 1905. It was not the Symbolist orientation but rather a group of genre paintings depicting a specific Polish ethnic group, the Huculs, which were met with consternation and dismay on the part of Austrian authorities.[210] It is telling that the ethnographic, documentary aspects of these paintings caused an uproar because of the immediately legible content of the paintings by comparison with a work such as Wyspiański's *King Kazimierz the Great* (fig. 79), whose stylized elements indicate a more subtle and nuanced reading. Ironically, the issues raised by the latter – of resurrection, national spirit and political repression – were far more incendiary than the relatively straightforward depictions of the Huculs, but from the perspective of certain critics and viewers, the ethnographic focus glorified a local identity that threw the issue of loyalty to empire into question.

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[210] Tadeusz Rittner, "Sztuka w Monachium [Sztuka in Munich]," *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 28 (1905): 41-3.

Similarly, the political sensitivity of the Hucul paintings foregrounds the ideological efficacy of Symbolist language within *Sztuka* exhibitions. Its success at communicating certain issues while not appearing stridently nationalist suggests that modernism could transcend traditional means of political statement, avoid censorship and serve as a platform for the dissemination of collective pride and longing. As sociologist Howard Becker has stated on the issue of political censorship, "Even very repressive governments can be quite indifferent to the art a small cultured elite consumes…the state is primarily interested in the way art affects mass mobilization – it supports art so that the population can be mobilized for the right things, and bans art because it fears people will be mobilized for the wrong things."[211]

While *Sztuka* exhibitions in Krakow were, by default, the consumption of a "small cultured elite," the larger international audience presented the opportunity for mobilizing international pressure in favor of establishing sentiment Poland as an independent state and represented a significant risk to Austrian authorities. The Hucul paintings, in their clear-cut and highly legible depictions of ethnic otherness, were in a sense reminiscent of the larger trend towards the glorification of folk culture as the receptacle of authentic national identity. Although Vienna made efforts to showcase the variety of empire as a source of its strength, there was a fine line of balance between celebrating difference and allowing the authority of empire to become subject to question. As Becker states, "The potential for government intervention, as suggested earlier, gives every work of art a political dimension."[212]

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[211] Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984): 187.

[212] Ibid., 188.

In 1906, the twenty-sixth exhibition of the Vienna Secession again granted a separate space to *Sztuka*; unlike the show in 1902, *Sztuka* artists were given three independent rooms, organized by Karol Frycz, Ferdynand Ruszczyc and Jan Stanisławski. In contrast to the premier *Sztuka* exhibition in Vienna, which had the opportunity to set a uniform tone, this exhibition occurred after a local controversy that eventually led to the formation of a splinter organization, the *Zero* group. Allegedly, *Sztuka* member and Symbolist painter Józef Mehoffer reported at the Viennese Ministry of Education that artists from Lwów, beyond the boundaries of *Sztuka*'s sphere of operations, amounted to "zero."[213] In response to this, Jacek Malczewski and Włodzimierz Tetmajer resigned from *Sztuka*, forming the ironically named "Zero" group in 1908. The group went on to have two exhibitions in Krakow, but was never recognized on an international scale. *Zero*'s rallying cry was the stranglehold of *Sztuka* on the production, and more, importantly, promotion of Polish art. They publicly bemoaned the ways in which artists who attempted to develop careers independently of the approval of the organization, and especially its president, Jan Stanisławski, were actively discouraged in their efforts.[214] In fact, the artists of what would eventually become the *Zero* group exhibited separately in the 1906 Secession show. For critics, however, concerns about issues of national presentation had not changed – as with four years earlier, the reviewer Tadeusz Rittner was most concerned with the comparing of Polish art to other international groups in the exhibition.[215] Any internal struggles between the first generation of *Sztuka* members and the younger members of the *Zero* group

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[213] Krzysztofowicz-Kozakowska, "Krakowski Kocioł Artystyczny," 43.

[214] Andrzej Jakimowicz, *Jacek Malczewski i jego epoka* [Jacek Malczewski and His Epoch] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970):124-5.

[215] Tadeusz Rittner, "Sztuka polska w Wiedniu [Polish Art in Vienna]," *Świat* 20 (1906): 9.

were glossed over in the press, which emphasized instead concerns about Polish showing as a whole.

The next major international showing of *Sztuka* artists took place at the Vienna Hagenbund in 1907-08. The switch to the Hagenbund venue was due to the inability of the Secession to provide the space deemed suitable to the needs of the Polish organization: *Sztuka* members sought out more favorable conditions and were received at a rival organization.[216] The ability of *Sztuka* to negotiate the terms of its showing in Vienna reveals the relative laxity of the Austrian authorities towards the group. The Hagenbund show served to confirm its independent existence from the Secession and reinforced the independent status of the organization. In the same year as the Hagenbund exhibit, six members of *Sztuka* who were also members of the Secession withdrew from the latter organization in protest of its obstructionist tactics, and four of the six joined the Hagenbund. The consequences of this decision were not without repercussions, however, as friction occurred between *Sztuka* and the Secession in later years. However, a certain degree of pragmatism prevailed in later years, as Polish artists continued to exhibit with the Secession. Symbolist Jacek Malczewski, for example, was featured prominently in a group exhibition in 1911.

The Hagenbund show of 1907-08 was given over in large part to the works of Stanisław Wyspiański, whose art nouveau-influenced pieces dominated one of the exhibition rooms in the well-appointed, spacious galleries. One side of the "Wyspiański room" was dedicated to elements from the artist's work in theater, both as playwright and as set designer and furniture maker. A shallow proscenium was set up along the wall, with hanging curtains embroidered

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[216] Roman Taborski, *O wspólpracy Sztuki z Wiedeńska Secesja* [On the Collaboration of *Sztuka* with the Viennese Secession'], in *Polacy w wiedniu* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1992): 157.

with flower motifs. The blocky, stylized edges of the proscenium and curtain motifs combine late nineteenth-century interest in folk pattern with elements of art nouveau. On the shallow "stage" created by the proscenium are three identical empty thrones done in the same style, pieces used in the artist's "Bolesław Śmiały" play about a medieval Polish king who was responsible for the martyrdom of the nation's patron saint, Saint Stanisław.

The implications of these empty thrones would have been unmistakable to a politically sensitive viewer. The repetition and multiplication of the piece into three recalls both the mystical associations of the holy trinity, and by extension, the nineteenth-century tradition of Polish messianism, as well as Poland's then-current administrative subjugation to three occupying states.[217] The unoccupied thrones conjure notions of void and emptiness, creating a poignant statement on the loss of national autonomy. The remaining works in the room, seen in the context of this dominating wall, would have reinforced the expressions of Polishness. The three-dimensional elements provided by the theater wall echo the *gesamtkunstwerk* aspects of Wyspiański's earlier shows for the Vienna Secession and reinforce a sense of holistic statement underpinned by questions of nation. As Tadeusz Rittner wrote, it created a "poetic" atmosphere of total absorption into an atmosphere of spiritual language, a "language of the soul" rather than a "translation into German language."[218] In this sense, Rittner viewed the symbolic aspects of Wyspiański's work as aspects of an international, and by extension, Symbolist language.

Another wall in the same room displayed a series of Wyspiański's portraits of mothers and children (a particular preoccupation of the artist's work in the first years of the twentieth

[217] Wiesław Juszczak discusses cultural messianism in *Malarstwo Polskiego Modernizmu* [The Painting of Polish Modernism] (Gdansk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2004): 10-12.

[218] Tadeusz Rittner, ""Sztuka" Krakowska w Wiedniu [Krakovian "Sztuka" in Vienna]," *Świat* 10 (1908): 12-14.

century, perhaps inspired by his own domestic situation) while above them, a work with an organic motif dominates the upper wall space. At first glance, these works may seem to follow a rather generalized theme of maternity, organicism, and inspiration through nature. Viewed in a national context, they assume more significance and contain subtle commentary on Poland's unnatural displacement.

In an era in which national metaphors were often made organic and ideas about material territory and ideological territory often overlapped,[219] Wyspiański's portrayals of motherhood ensured its ideological resonance. *Motherhood* (fig. 80), pointedly located in the center of the frieze arrangement, depicts a young mother with her infant at her breast, while two younger girls, perhaps the mother's younger sisters, look on, absorbed in the act. The gazes of all three women direct the viewer's eye to the focal point of the composition, which is the point of nourishment, highlighted by the white expanse of the mother's chest against a flat, patterned background of the womens' clothing. The black background focuses the viewer's attention onto the scene of human contact, while decorative white flowers underscore the biological metaphor of a nation's children rooted to the land.

In addition to the typically late-nineteenth-century themes of maternity and organicism portrayed in *Motherhood*, an additional element places it within a specifically Polish and more specifically, *Młoda Polska* context. The blunt features, unstudied hairstyle, simple patterned dress and, most importantly, the act of breastfeeding itself would have identified these women as peasants. One of the enduring aspects of *Młoda Polska*, as of many late movements of the period, was a mania for peasants and the belief in the authenticity engendered by their

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[219]Michelle Facos and Sharon Hirsh, *Art, Culture and National Identity*, 11. Within Poland, the most pertinent contributor to this way of understanding national "essence" was Stanisław Przybyszewski, the editor of *Życie* and author of essays addressing this topic such as "Confiteor," discussed in the previous chapter.

"unspoiled" lifestyle. Western European Symbolist artists such as Paul Gauguin and Emile Bernard's fascination with peasants in Brittany stemmed from their belief in the special access to the mystical embodied in the peasant lifestyle.[220] In the Krakovian context, this peasant-mania (a Polish term was even coined for it, *chłopomania*) was centered around Bronowice, a satellite village which served as the setting of Wyspiański's most famous play treating issues of nationalism, *The Wedding*. Bronowice was also the home of the painter's future peasant wife, Teodora Pytko. As will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Three, Polish peasants were the unadulterated carriers of national culture, and, more crucially, national identity. For educated viewers of *Motherhood*, its particular iconography and composition formed a symbolically laden message: a specifically Polish identity was being celebrated and perpetuated.

Overall, *Sztuka* enjoyed favorable reviews at both the Secession and Hagenbund exhibitions. Viennese critics Bertha Zuckerkandl (who had displayed an attitude of sympathy towards art produced by different ethnic groups, believing that it enriched the artistic atmosphere of fin-de-siècle Vienna) and Ludwig Hevesi wrote positive reviews on a number of works by *Sztuka* artists.[221] Hevesi's review of *Sztuka*'s first show at the Secession in 1902 concentrated on what he considered the unique qualities of Polish modern art: patriotic historicism, melancholy, and Symbolism. Without going into stylistic specifics, Hevesi made note of the sense of poetic atmosphere infusing the works.[222] His impressions, however, did not extend to an inquiry into Poland's present political situation and how it was addressed by the artists in the show. In the final analysis, Hevesi's description consigned *Sztuka*'s art to a pleasingly melancholic category,

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[220] Debora Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art* (New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004): 91-119.

[221] Hans Bisanz, "Polish Artists at the Vienna "Secession" and the "Hagenbund," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 21 [The Modernist Aesthetic in Polish Art: 1890-1914] (1987).

[222] Ludwig Hevesi, *Acht Jahre Sezesion (März 1897- Juni 1905): Kritik-Polemik-Chronik* (Vienna: 1906): 402-03.

suggesting a kind of essentialism to the Polish soul without probing into the possible origins and consequences of this particular stylistic language.

If Hevesi failed to explore the deeper and more currently pressing sociopolitical implications of *Sztuka* art on display in Vienna, prominent Viennese critic Bertha Zuckerkandl made more explicit connections between her readings of Polish art and the current situation of Poles in the Empire. Zuckerkandl had a personal connection to Poland through her father, who was originally from Galicia (the region encompassing Krakow under the jurisdiction of the Hapsburgs), and Polish was most likely one of the languages spoken in her childhood home.[223] Her biographical background and identity as a Jew doubtlessly rendered the critic more sensitive to the ethnic divisions and minorities within the Empire. Further, her position as a salon doyenne of the Viennese fin-de-siècle, including her role in the creation of the Secession, helped propagate her particular views on the political consequences of art.[224]

This essentializing of the Polish art represented by *Sztuka* had contradictory and complex consequences for its international recognition and validation. While Polish artists and critics clamored in publications for recognition of their art in an international forum, they also presumably desired freedom from the constraints of categorization. In a local context, the freedom from didactic content in artistic expression had been hard-won by modernist artists. By expanding the acceptable boundaries of stylistic expression to include, among other styles, Symbolist strategies, Polish artists could continue to negotiate issues of politics and identity, both metaphysical and national.

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[223] Roman Taborski, *Polacy w Wiedniu* [Poles in Vienna] (Krakow: Universitas, 2001): 161.

[224] Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun, eds., *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (exh. cat.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005): 85-99. For examples of Zuckerkandl's work on Polish art, see her article "Von neuer Polnischen Kunst," *Die Kunst für alle* 28 (1903): 275-80, and *Polens Malkunst* (Vienna, 1915).

However, to be chained to those issues and to be perceived as the constant melancholics in a pre-assigned niche in the context of the Austrian Empire was, in a sense, no less of a constraint than that represented by local traditional imperatives. The paradox of being assigned any role within an overarching hierarchy meant that Polish artists could only claim a discrete cultural identity at the expense of being an inextricable segment of a particular Viennese cultural mosaicism. While critics such as Hevesi and Bahr believed in the value of Viennese art as, in some measure, a patriotic statement, they did not take into account the particular dilemma such an approach presented to minority artists within the empire. Official representatives of the state, however, would have been duly charged with enforcing the cultural "melting-pot" policy of Vienna. This policy was seen as a means of reinforcing the supremacy of Austrian identity, and the government encouraged the contributions of minority artists as infusions of fresh talent and new perspectives. For example, Anna Brzyski has noted a speech by Viennese minister of Education Count Arthur Bylandt-Rheydt in 1899 in which he praised the possibilities of cultural expression as an arena for forging imperial unity. [225]

At the same time, it must be noted that Polish art as a separate entity within Vienna made little popular impact as an acknowledged sector of Viennese *Jugendstil*. In some ways, this worked to the benefit of *Sztuka*, as it could be argued that work more stylistically similar to that of Gustav Klimt could have lost its particular national cachet.[226]

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[225] Anna Brzyski, "*Unsere Polen…*", 69.

[226] As Jan Cavanaugh has pointed out, Art Nouveau and Jugendstil did have significant influence on Polish modernist art in the early years of the twentieth century. However, Polish Symbolists, in particular Malczewski and Wyspiański, were not particularly sympathetic towards Jugendstil – both artists dismissed the work as meaningless, a stylistic copy without substance. Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, 91, 97. Dorota Kudelska also notes Malczewski's resistance to "secession style" and what he considered its excessive expression, flatness and decorativeness. The difference between Malczewski's particular brand of Symbolism and that represented in the work of, for example, Paul Gauguin, is discussed in Chapter Four. Dorota Kudelska, *Dukt pisma i pędzla: Biografia intelektualna Jacka*

As long as Polish artists continued to follow general modernist trends while maintaining a specific stylistic separateness through generalized motifs from a mythic past, they were able to maintain a delicate balance between international acceptance and national relevance. For Polish Symbolists in particular, the natural complexities, ambiguities and expressive possibilities of the style allowed for a combination of indigenous and pan-European elements.

Recent scholarly reworkings of traditional center-periphery models are particularly apt in the context of fin-de-siècle Vienna and its art scene, in particular the framework in which the Secession was conceived: as a federal entity.[227] *Sztuka* exhibitions within the Austro-Hungarian Empire were necessarily implicated within the complicated constituencies of the Empire and Viennese viewers would have been aware of the show in the context of local political realities. Instead, the opportunities provided for viewers outside the boundaries of empire provided a more neutral context for understanding Polish art. In particular, the Royal Austrian exhibition at Earls Court in London in 1906 was an opportunity for artists across the Empire to showcase and present their work to a foreign and non-imperial audience. Here regional exhibiting societies claimed their own sectors of the exhibition – alongside *Sztuka*, the Lwów Society for the Friends of the Fine Arts, the Vienna Secession, the Hagenbund, the Czech group *Mánes*, and others presented works.[228] *Sztuka* had twenty-seven objects in the show, among them the works of

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Malczewskiego [A Passage for Pen and Brush: An Intellectual Biography of Jacek Malczewski (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2008): 442.

[227] Anna Baranowa, "Krytycy wiedeńscy o "Sztuce" – Ludwig Hevesi, Hermann Bahr, Berta Zuckerkandl [Viennese Critics on Sztuka – Ludwig Hevesi, Hermann Bahr, Berta Zuckerkandl]," in Anna Baranowa, ed., *Stulecie Towarzystwa Artystów Polskich "Sztuka"* [The Centenary of the "Sztuka "Society of Polish Artists"] (Krakow, Universitas, 2001): 65-78.

[228] The Lwów society represented another Polish group of artists (after Krakow, Lwów was the second most important city in Galicia in a cultural context and the Galician capital of economics, politics and commerce – the regional senate was in Lwów.) However, unlike in the case of *Sztuka*, the Lwów Society of the Friends of Fine Arts rarely exhibited beyond the borders of its home city. See Aleksander Wojciechowski, *Polskie życie Artystyczne w latach 1890-1914* [Polish Artistic Life from 1890-1914] (Wrocław: 1967). In the case of the 1906 London

Symbolist artists Józef Mehoffer, Julian Fałat, Jan Stanisławski, Wojciech Weiss, and Ferdynand Ruszczyc. Jacek Malczewski chose to exhibit with the Lwów Society.[229]

The Viennese analysis of *Sztuka*'s contribution was limited to the comments of Hevesi, who made note of the stylistic changes represented by Polish Symbolism and modernism in general. Yet in the context of a foreign exhibition Hevesi went so far this time as to term *Sztuka*'s art "ethnographic." This terminology was particularly interesting in light of the tenor of the Royal Austrian show in its entirety, which included a model of a Tyrolean village, as well as demonstrations of regional song and dance. In this context, the "ethnographic" aspects of the exhibition threatened to influence interpretations of the modern art being shown at the same exhibition.

The most thorough analysis of the Polish fine arts on view came from the London-based *Studio* contributor Amelia Levetus, a regular correspondent on Vienna and Krakow, who was well-versed in Central European contemporary art.[230] Levetus, like Hevesi, placed a certain emphasis on national origin as a factor in viewing and understanding Polish art. Unlike Hevesi's review, Levetus shied away from the "ethnographic" essentialism of Polish modernism in favor

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exhibition, the Lwów society, put off by what they viewed as *Sztuka*'s elitarian and exclusionary attitudes, welcomed Polish artists from outside the boundaries of their city in the spirit of patriotism, indicating the ideological cleft between the two societies. For the former, native production was still more important than a commitment to modernist values and artistic quality. See Stanisław Rejchan, "Sztuka polska w Londynie [Polish Art in London]," *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 27 (1906): 520-21.

[229] The relations between Malczewski and *Sztuka* were marked by frequent friction over issues of inclusion of members and particular works of art in the latter's exhibitions. Malczewski's dissatisfaction with the operating policies of the society led him to be instrumental in the activity of other artistic groups, such as the "Zero" group, established as a splinter group in 1905. These frictions give nuance to the generalized image of *Sztuka* as a monolithic and continually united face of modernism in the Polish context and are worthy of further study. See Dorota Kudelska, *Dukt Pisma i pędzla*, 451-4.

[230] Andrzej Szczerski, ""Sztuka" na Królewskiej Wystawie Austriackiej w Londynie w 1906 roku – uwagi o recepcji sztuki środkowoeuropejskiej w Wielkiej Brytanii ["Sztuka" at the Royal Austrian Exhibition in London in 1906 – Remarks on the Reception of Central European Art in Great Britain]," in Baranowa, ed., *Stulecie Towarzystwa "Sztuka,"* 79-88. See also A.S.L. [Amelia Levetus], "Notes on some Polish Artists of Today" *The Studio* 41 (1907): 115-126, and Amelia Levetus, "Cracow" in "Studio-Talk," *The Studio* 48 (1909): 67.

of historical and political perspectives. In her discussions of the Symbolist works in the exhibit such as those of Jacek Malczewski, Levetus described a combination of patriotism and mysticism, while she singled out Ferdynand Ruszczyc for his mood painting, or "*Stimmung*." According to Levetus, the borrowed academicism of earlier Polish works had been replaced by a "vigorous" national art, comparable to that of other countries.[231] Acknowledging the Polish modernist's struggle with national identity, she stated, "The Poles have suffered much as a nation, and the sorrow they endured has not failed to leave its mark on their art. I speak of them as a nation, because the spirit of nationality is very strong in the Pole, whether he owes political allegiance to Russia, Germany or Austria."[232]

Her perspective acknowledges that *Sztuka* Symbolists remained faithful to patriotic imperatives while engaging in modern style. Levetus' reference to the political situation of Poland, including her ability to discern the *Sztuka* and Lwów groups as concrete and separate entities are, in part, a testament to the success of *Sztuka* modernists in establishing a core identity that could carry messages to an international audience.

By contrast, some Polish critics such as Kazimierz Tetmajer had been concerned about a certain label of exoticism that would permanently separate Polish modernists from their counterparts in the West. Tetmajer believed that Polish Symbolists and other modernists could only gain a measure of validity through their mastering of an international language of modernist

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[231] A.S.L. [Amelia Levetus], "Notes on some Polish Artists of Today," 125.

[232] Ibid., 115.

technique in their works. In this way, the critic saw a way for Polish artists to "finally equal the rest of Europe in the level of civilization."[233]

It is important to keep in mind the particular goals of the Vienna Secession within the context of *Sztuka*'s activities and aims. While the Secession wanted to create a loftier standard for art production in Austria, it did so with an explicitly nationalistic slant. In particular, the desires of the Secession were to compete with other European countries. In this sense, Viennese critics such as Hermann Bahr applied similar criteria to the artists of *Sztuka* and enlisted them in the cause of a larger glory for Vienna. By contrast to groups such as the *Salon des refusés*, who were concerned primarily with their relationship to the standards of modernism in general, both *Sztuka* and the Vienna Secession also pursued a nationally identified art. Inevitably, the content of the art of both groups was necessarily implicated by its viewers, critics, and producers in larger political and national issues. Paradoxically, Bahr's nationalistic bent in his analysis of the Secession works was buttressed by his own international experience. Having traveled to Berlin to experience the art scene in the Prussian capital, Bahr moved on to Paris for a wider exposure to modern trends, where he fell under the influence of French Symbolism. It is against this standard of international modernism that Bahr would measure Austrian art at the turn of the century and agitate for its improved status within Europe.

As an example of this nationalist attitude and its implications for the reception and development of modern art, one can look to Bahr's promotion of first Vienna Secession president Gustav Klimt. Bahr made very clear in his writings that, in addition to, or perhaps more importantly than, his value as a member of an international modernist movement, Klimt

[233] Kazimierz Tetmajer, "Secesya Wiedeńska [The Viennese Secession]," *Czas* 4 (1898): I.

was the inheritor of *Austrian* art, in particular a successor to Hans Makart.[234] Bahr's assertion had less to do with stylistic continuity (although Klimt was certainly influenced by Makart's compositions and approach to sensuality in his works) and more to do with each artist's position as a national painter *par excellence*. A similar generational pairing can be found in comparisons between the work of Jan Matejko and his student Jacek Malczewski. Despite the stormy relationship between both artists and the latter's decision to forego further training with the master in favor of studies in Paris, Polish critics were quick to point out Malczewski's position in Polish art as inheritor of the national tradition formed and upheld by the senior artist.[235] By the turn of the twentieth century, Malczewski's exposure to international trends was no longer viewed, except by a few retrograde critics, as a dangerous drift away from national imperatives. The standards set within an international context were seen as a means of elevating and validating the concerns expressed in Symbolist and other modernist art promoted within *Sztuka*. The existence of the organization itself provided an objective means for viewers within and beyond Polish territory to form a fixed image of Polish modernism.

Bahr's writing on Klimt makes continual reference to the inherent quality of his works as Austrian.[236] If, as Michelle Facos and Sharon Hirsh have argued, the emergence of modernism on the "margins" of Europe was accompanied by a particular focus on nationalist issues, then Bahr's contextual framework makes sense.[237] The critic viewed the Vienna Secession as a

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[234] Donald J. Daviau, "Hermann Bahr and Gustav Klimt: A Chapter in the Breakthough in Modernity in Turn-of-the-Century Vienna," *German Studies Review* 3 (1980): 29.

[235] See, for example, Feliks Jasieński and Adam Łada-Cybulski, eds., *Sztuka Polska. Malarstwo* [Polish Art – Painting] (Lwów: Nakład Księgarni H. Alternberga, 1903-04): 4. For a chronicle of the relationship between Matejko and Malczewski, see Dorota Kudelska, *Dukt Pióra i Pisma*, 97-99.

[236] Hermann Bahr, "Malerei," in *Secession* (Vienna: Weiner Verlag, 1900): 20, quoted in Daviau, 34-35.

[237] Michelle Facos and Sharon Hirsh, eds., *Art, Culture and National Identity in Fin-de-siècle Europe,* 11.

forum for the forging of an imperial standard of quality, one that would be recognized as uniquely Austrian. It was this particular attitude that was shared by the artists and critics within the circle of *Sztuka* – a desire that modern art be nationally identified, yet free to pursue its own creative impulses without being compelled to adhere to earlier convention. In a strange reversal of the Polish situation, Bahr's reaction to the Austrian art of the post- World War I period was to see it as a carrier of the "soul" of the nation in the context of the loss of Austria as a political entity.[238]

Connections between national and political identity and the production of art are put to the test in the case of both the Vienna Secession and *Sztuka*, indicating another parallel between the two organizations. Carl Schorske has argued that the revolutionary claims of the Secession were perhaps overstated in relation to its actual practice. Schorske interprets the popularity of the Secession partially as a result of a practical shift in bourgeoisie tastes occasioned by its loss of public political clout. For Heller, this shift meant that an inner, aestheticized art was simply more in touch with the current sociological desires of a patron class.[239] In this sense, the Secession catered to an elite group of consumers, and its role as an organization representative of the entire Empire may have been exaggerated in context of international exhibitions.

Similarly, the patron class that supported the work of *Sztuka* was virtually synonymous with the political and social elite. While Polish conservatives disowned the status of *Sztuka* as nationally representative, many modernist critics wholeheartedly supported it. The only existing commercial venue for art in Krakow, the Society for the Friends of the Fine Arts, had an

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[238] Donald J. Daviau, "Hermann Bahr and Gustav Klimt," 41.

[239] Carl E. Schorske, "The Transformation of the Garden: Ideal and Society in Austrian Literature," *American Historical Review* 72 (1976-77): 1283-1320.

amicable relationship with *Sztuka* and the reforms of the Krakow School of Fine Arts were in line with and often echoed the modernist aspirations of the latter. Taking these factors into account, the ground change in the Polish art world represented by the advent of *Sztuka* was perhaps more all-encompassing than that of the Secession, and its modernist and nationalist aspirations were more generalized.

The inner aestheticism that appealed to the Viennese bourgeoisie was less politicized than that of *Sztuka*; it represented an escape from the outer world of commerce, politics and urban anxiety.[240] For the *Sztuka* Symbolists, inwardness was a metaphor for displacement and delegitimization, as well as the only means – an abstracting and evasive one – to represent the national soul. While *Sztuka* certainly took its cues from the Secession's declarations of rebellion against academicism and adherence to an autonomous aestheticism, it nonetheless colored the latter with ideological expression as well.

Paradoxically, the cultlike status of Symbolist circles that had been denigrated by critics since its inception worked in favor of *Sztuka* artists. Rather than separate themselves from the greater world through misguided elitism and esoterism, the very inwardness and elusiveness of their work was, in their view, a means of ensuring the survival of a nationalist ethos. If as Schorske maintains, the Secession retreated into aestheticism to deny the realities of the burgeoning democratic Viennese state, *Sztuka* did the opposite: it served not to deny but to preserve and promote the core of hope for a future Polish state. Even its most "inward" exhibited works often contained references to overarching national issues.

To be sure, this is not to downplay the cultural struggles of those Viennese artists associated with the Secession. Carl Schorske has made a case that many of them saw themselves

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[240] Ibid.

as a generation apart, one that was ushering in a modernism that represented a complete break with the past. However, this modernism was largely characterized by disillusionment, impotence, and a belief in the utter fruitlessness of rational effort in the public or political sphere.[241] As he describes the atmosphere in one of fin-de-siècle Viennese author Arthur Schnitzler's works: "Where the fathers had lived by naïve faith as the underpinning of social action, the sons, suffering from loss of control over life and destiny, can approach public life only as private option; hence they often withdraw to the life of art and instinct."[242] The distinct character of Symbolist *Sztuka* managed to combine this sense of disillusionment while making it clear that the cause of their alienation was specifically the unrealized Polish nation. In short their stylistic strategies served political sentiments. Rather than turning its back upon an earlier generation that had called for open and didactic patriotism and nationalism, Symbolists maintained a concern with these issues, couching them in a formal language identified as European modernism.

Concerns about the profile of Polish modernism in an international context were at the core of *Sztuka*'s internal policy struggles. So too, Polish critics were invested in the creation of a national school. *Sztuka*'s understandable reluctance to relinquish the role of arbiter of the accepted body of national art in the case of the "Zero" controversy was, in its own way, a continuation of the attitude of Jan Matejko a generation earlier when he protested the desire of the younger generation of artists to undergo their artistic formation abroad. In both instances, the

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[241] Carl E. Schorske, "Generational Tension and Cultural Change: Reflections on the Case of Vienna," *Daedalus* 7 (1978): 111-122.

[242] Ibid., 116.

perceived stakes were of paramount importance. In the absence of political autonomy, cultural expression was the arena in which national identity was formed and perpetuated. The members of *Sztuka* deliberately made use of Symbolist and other modern motifs in order to shape this collective identity. By engaging a recognizable language of modernity in their works, *Sztuka* artists were claiming a place in an international arena of discourse while simultaneously addressing local issues that went beyond the "ethnographic" bent common to earlier Polish art.

The activities of *Sztuka* as a promoter of modernism in general and Symbolism in particular suggest ways in which the Symbolist style was officially endorsed as a means of "state" artistic expression. In his essay "Art and the State," sociologist Howard Becker discusses the ways in which official state policies and interventions shape and control artistic expression within a given political entity. "Art bureaucrats have, in addition to their political constituency, a constituency in the art worlds they work with. In a totally authoritarian state, the art world constituency is ineffectual, but in other situations it constitutes an autonomous source of power."[243] In the case of Galician Poland, which was under political and administrative subjugation but hardly "totally authoritarian," the absence of officially named art bureaucrats representing Vienna meant that the authorities of *Sztuka* were acting on the "autonomous source of power" that came from their domination of the art scene.

As has been already mentioned, the vacuum created by the absence of dominating institutions was eagerly filled by modernist artists in a way that differed from the structure of the art world in Western European cities such as Berlin or Paris. Even the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts, an institution officially under the aegis of the Imperial Kaiser in Vienna, was largely un-

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[243] Howard S. Becker, "Art and the State," 183.

interfered with and local rectors and professors, largely synonymous with the members of *Sztuka*, were able to act on their own authority.

Besides having a significant degree of autonomy in the context of being a region within an empire (although, as we have seen, key situations when *Sztuka* sought to represent the nation abroad were subject to more strenuous political control), *Sztuka* artists were in a unique situation in Europe in that Poland's situation and cultural traditions granted them an additional sphere of autonomy. In the absence of an actualized state, *Sztuka* modernists, Symbolists among them, were charged and charged themselves with the task of maintaining a cultural, if fictional, nationhood through their art. These artists felt perfectly comfortable assuming the role of spokespeople for a denied nation; the privileged status of the artist in nineteenth-century Poland and the older generation that trained them could hardly have them thinking otherwise.

While more conservative critics argued against modernism as the means of achieving this goal, they never questioned the appropriateness of the role of artists as carriers and preservers of national identity. Ironically, the threat to this role, as well as the possible break between national identity and modernism, was most embodied by modernist critics such as Kazimierz Tetmajer and Zenon Przesmycki, who preferred to interpret Polish modernism as part and parcel of an international language of modernism. In this understanding, strategic similarities between Polish and western works were the natural result of similar conditions in Polish territory, and issues of Polish nationalism were set aside in favor of an exaltation of modernism. If the cost of international recognition was the loss of national identity, many Polish modernists believed that the price was worth it.

The uniqueness of Polish Symbolism within this framework of opposition meant that it represented a resolution to the dilemma of nationalism versus modernism. By maintaining

reference to Polish themes, it never abandoned traditional concerns about nation and identity. At the same time, it allowed for a merger of those concerns with modern style. In fact, it can be argued that Symbolism represented the only modern style in which form and content could bridge the gap between traditional thematic concerns and innovative formal technique. As well, the international recognizability of Symbolism as a style allowed for ease of communication between Polish artists and an international audience. As Ivan Karp noted in his study of museums and the definition of culture, "Difference can only be communicated in terms that are familiar."[244] While maintaining a framework of the familiar in the form of Symbolist distortion, otherworldliness and ambiguity of mood, Polish modernists were able to introduce crucial elements of difference that expressed key commentaries on politics, nationalism and identity.

This modernist approach to well-known themes was all the more important given the perceived tiredness of the latter. Because they had been enforced upon the generation of modernists by an earlier naturalist school, it was inevitable that the political and patriotic themes would, to some extent, become naturally identified with a naturalist style. Additionally, some of the very qualities believed crucial to communication of these concerns – legibility and straightforwardness – were seen as inherently incompatible with any modern style, but especially with Symbolism. While critics bemoaned the loss of message in modern works of art, it was dependent upon Symbolists to maintain or resurrect them in a way that proved their continuing relevance. To a viewing public, they proved surprisingly compatible with the theme of an elusive state and ambiguity that characterized the Symbolist style.

Thus, *Sztuka* became doubly important both within national and international arenas as the de facto arbiter of Polish identity expressed through art. Its forceful Symbolist component

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[244] Ivan Karp, "How Museums Define Other Cultures," in Susan L. Feagin and Patrick Maynard, eds., *Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 149.

helped underwrite *Sztuka*'s image of itself both at home and abroad. Symbolist modes of understanding art – as elusive, ambiguous and separate from, yet relevant to, everyday life - allowed the group to function not just as a collective storehouse for Polish art, but as a proactive force for preserving national identity in the demesnes of Empire.

CHAPTER V

Overcoming The Symbolist Divide: Allegory and Synthetism in the Paintings of Jacek Malczewski and Jan Stanisławski

This chapter will examine the work of two Polish Symbolists, Jacek Malczewski and Jan Stanisławski, against the background of general scholarship on European Symbolism. In particular, it will reexamine traditionally drawn categories of European Symbolist painting – categories that have been largely unchallenged. These categories, synthetism and allegory, have functioned as the lens through which Symbolist paintings have been formally analyzed since the late nineteenth century. While Polish Symbolist paintings have generally been included in the latter category, further examination of the work of two artists in particular, Jacek Malczewski and Jan Stanisławski, reveals that their paintings do not fit neatly into this categorization. Instead, elements of these artists' work borrows strategies and styles from both sides of this formal divide.

While Malczewski's work has been overwhelmingly analyzed in terms of content instead of form, his deliberate manipulations of academic form invite new understandings of the ways in which Symbolist motifs can function within a traditional framework. Likewise, Stanisławski's inclusion into the Symbolist camp in Poland is generally justified through the association of his paintings with fin-de-siècle notions of landscape and mysticism. The very specific formal tools in Stanisławski's oeuvre have been glossed over in scholarship. By focusing on these formal tools in an examination of both painters' works, the divide between allegory and synthetism in Symbolist scholarship can be bridged through the specific contribution of Polish Symbolism.

Traditionally, scholarship on Symbolism in Western Europe as well as Poland has been characterized by a fundamental distinction between allegorical Symbolism (or *gedankenmalerei*) and synthetism.[245] According to this scheme, allegorical Symbolism is formally allied with descriptive art styles such as Naturalism and Realism, but may be classified as Symbolist thanks to its content. Precise narrative allusions are the determinative elements of an allegorical Symbolist work of art, as in the painting of Arnold Böcklin.[246] By contrast, synthetism uses allusion through formal devices of deformation and schema, pointing towards increased abstraction, as in the work of Paul Gauguin. In traditional understandings of allegorical Symbolism, certain deliberately chosen subjects embody fin-de-siècle preoccupations and concerns, allowing these works to be classed as Symbolist (but not modernist in the traditional sense of formalist abstraction.)[247] In contrast, synthetist paintings are marked by a preoccupation with the communicative properties of form, line and color.

Robert Goldwater set the discursive stage for this understanding of what he termed *gedankenmalerei* in his characterization of the work of Böcklin, Franz von Stuck and other Northern European artists. According to Goldwater, *gedankenmalerei* is Symbolism in a less

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[245] For the most influential example of this categorization, see Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979.) For a succinct historiography of attempts to define Symbolism and to create the parameters of Symbolist art based on thematic or ideological as opposed to formal grounds see Reinhold Heller, "Concerning Symbolism and the Structure of Surface," *Art Journal* 45 (1985): 146-153.

[246] For a discussion of allegory, see Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), in which the author discusses the allegorical transformation of abstract ideas into what he terms active "agents," which in turn contain the elements of images (such as personified virtues.)

[247] A prominent example of this focus on subject matter as the shared ground of Symbolist artists can be found in Robert Délevoy, *Le Symbolisme* (Geneva: Skira, 1982), as well as in Jean Clair, ed., *Lost Paradise. Symbolist Europe* (exh. cat.) (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1995.) In Polish art historiography, grouping by subject matter and/or trope continues to be popular in discussions of Symbolist art. The recent monograph on Symbolist artist Edward Okoń is divided into chapters determined by theme ("Mystery, Longing, Chimera, Moon," "Knights/Princesses," and "Amore-Nightmare, Vampire/Ideal"), simultaneously reinforcing Symbolism's literary origins and downplaying the significance of formal analysis in studying Symbolist visual art. Małgorzata Biernacka, *Literatura-symbol-natura: twórczość Edwarda Okuna wobec Młodej Polski i symbolizmu europejskiego* [Literature-Symbol-Nature: The Work of Edward Okuń in the Context of Young Poland and European Symbolism] (Warsaw: ISPAN, 2004.)

progressive or rather intransitive form because it relies upon a battery of mimetic formal strategies inherited from earlier styles and separates form from content. Above all, allegorical Symbolism is primarily characterized by a one-to-one correspondence of a symbolic motif and its underlying meaning. It relies on narrative content at the expense of formal innovation – and since the investigation of form is one of the criteria of modernism, allegorical Symbolism is seen as indifferent or impervious to the imperatives of modern formal progression. Its works contain a type of seamless reality – a reality in which strange and otherworldly elements may appear. The works of allegorical Symbolism continue to employ the "window on reality" embraced since the Renaissance and their viewer is a passive beholder of a mythic world represented and recreated illusionistically by the artist.[248]

In addition to specific content, the other criterion associated with allegorical Symbolism is that of "mood." By using particular colors and color combinations, as well as key motifs laden with cultural meaning (cypresses, crosses, dark pines, clouded skies) artists may achieve an otherworldly atmosphere that creates a secondary layer of emotional or spiritual resonance. The development of mood in Northern European allegorical Symbolism is for the most part indebted to earlier German romantic painting by Caspar David Friedrich, Philip Otto Runge and others. The work of these artists relies on symbolic motifs in order to illustrate archetypes of good and evil as well as themes such as the spiritual quest of the individual. In this understanding of "mood painting," subgenres such as nocturnes are characterized by otherworldly mood and are therefore often included in the range of allegorical Symbolist work.

In contrast to allegorical Symbolism, synthetic Symbolism is primarily characterized through deliberate distortions of space, color, and form. This is seen most clearly in the work of

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[248] Goldwater, *Symbolism*, 85-87.

the Nabis, as well as artists such as Edvard Munch. Rather than relying on narrative motifs that represent a one-to-one correspondence with a given concept, synthetist painting utilizes symbols understood in a broader sense. By creating an open-ended, enigmatic arena within the space of a given painting, synthetist paintings themselves become functioning symbols evoking a transcendent reality. Their forms, color and space contain inherent symbolic meaning outside the space of traditional narrative. In synthetic Symbolism, it is argued, the deliberate distortion of form and color provide stimuli for later abstraction and the unique synthesis of form and content represent a victory over the content-based approach of *gedankenmalerei*. Scholars have diametrically opposed allegorical Symbolism to synthetic Symbolism, seeing it as a direct precursor to expressionism and to other early twentieth-century styles of modern painting.[249] Artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian are understood to have pursued a progression in the course of their careers – from early representative work, which was synthetic or evocatively deformed, to later abstraction.

This notion of progression assumes an easily traceable evolution from recognizable form to distorted shape and color, to abstract compositions.[250] The final achievement, abstract works represent the culmination of a process that began with the privileging of what Clive Bell termed "significant form" over representation.[251] By imparting a visual sense or structure of subjective

[249] As an example of the privileging of synthetism over *gedankenmalerei* in traditional scholarship, one can look to Alfred Barr Jr.'s diagram of the development of modern art, in which synthetism is provided a place with the input of Paul Cezanne and Paul Gauguin, but the work of allegorical Symbolists such as Böcklin is not mentioned. Alfred Barr Jr., *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: MoMA, 1936): dust jacket.

[250] See Rose-Carol Washton Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.)

[251] As Bell remarked, "…to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life." This attitude reinforces the notion of the separation of art and life, in which art is "a world with an intense and peculiar significance of its own; that significance is unrelated to the significance of life." Clive Bell, "The Aesthetic Hypothesis," in Patrick Maynard and Susan L. Feagin, eds., *Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 19. In Poland, an analogous concept was that of "Pure Form," put forth by the critic, artist and writer Witkacy

interiority, the synthetist rejects *gedankenmalerei's* object-oriented description and actively questions and disturbs the boundaries between the world contained within the work and the outside world of the viewer. The viewer must actively participate in the reception of the work and, in a sense, "complete" the meaning through intuition and apprehension of significant form. Seen in this light, Böcklin's Symbolism appears to have little in common with the work of Paul Gauguin.

Polish Symbolist painting has been traditionally associated with allegorical Symbolism or *gedankenmalerei*. The ruling art historical assumption has been that the influence of the detailed, descriptive and object-oriented painting styles encouraged in the Munich Academy in the 1870's, where many Polish Symbolists were students, as well as the overbearing conservatism of the Polish environment prevented synthetism and later abstraction from flowering in Polish territory as it did in Western Europe.[252] In fact, Polish Symbolism is represented by a wide range of representational strategies. The theories and implications of

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(Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz,) who began formulating artistic ideas in the Symbolist fin-de-siècle environment. See Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, *The Witkiewicz Reader*, ed. Daniel Gerould (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), 3.

[252] For a succinct description of this process, see Tomasz Gryglewicz, "'Sztuka" a secesje ["Art" and the Secession]," in Anna Baranowa, ed., *Stulecie Towarzystwa Artystów Polskich "Sztuka"* [The Centennial of the Society of Polish Artists "Art"] (Krakow: Universitas, 2001), 9-21, especially p. 19. In similar spirit, Stanisław Krzysztof Stopczyk classified Polish Symbolism as having a "philosophico-literary orientation entering into symbiosis with current stylistic conventions [orientacja filozoficzno-literackiej wchodzącej w symbiozę z aktualnymi konwencjami stylistycznymi]." In this understanding, Symbolist visual artists, inspired by the themes of French poetry of the later 19th century, adapted them non-problematically to painting, indiscriminately making use of whatever visual styles were most current. Stanisław Krzysztof Stopczyk, *Malarstwo polskie od realizmu do abstrakcjonizmu* [Polish Painting from Realism to Abstractionism] (Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988): 40. For Anna Gradowska, Symbolism in the visual arts was a tendency trapped between earlier Impressionism and later Expressionism and what she terms „Intuitionism." Arguing that the task of Symbolism was to express the "metaphysical contents" of the external world and the "inner existence" of man, Gradowska states that "this ambitious program was not fully realized in Polish art." Gradowska's assertion is typical of a widespread understanding of Polish Symbolism as a less formally and creatively advanced version of French synthetist painting, which became "the most authentic, most complete method of expression" of the programmatic aims mentioned above. Anna Gradowska, *Sztuka Młodej Polski*[The Art of Young Poland] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1984), 17-18.

Symbolist thought have not been significantly referenced in the scholarly literature on Polish Symbolist painters.[253] While the work of Jacek Malczewski is understood to be the most representative of allegorical Symbolism, with all of the limitations implied by that term applied to the artist, the work of Jan Stanisławski, which more closely formally resembles the paintings of the Pont-Aven group, has been little discussed in relation to the philosophies of Symbolism, with the exception of the criticism of art historian Wiesław Juszczak, who brought a new focus to Polish Symbolism in his writings of the 1970's and 1980's. However, Juszczak's fundamental understanding of Symbolism allies it with earlier styles and denies Symbolism any ideological affinity to later modernism.[254]

This chapter will argue that previous discussions of Symbolism in Poland have failed to acknowledge its implications for the development of abstract modernism. This chapter will also make problematic the oft-cited cleft between allegorical Symbolism and synthetism in Poland. In examining the work of Jacek Malczewski and Jan Stanisławski, the chapter will explore the ways in which this perceived opposition fails to perceive nuances in the work of both artists, discouraging critics and art historians from developing a full interpretation suggested by their formal strategies. Just as Gustave Moreau, an adamantly figurative painter, argued that the arabesque and line would be the way forward to a new modern art, so too did Malczewski and Stanisławski find ways of presaging modernism in their representational Symbolist painting. By

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[253] Important works on Polish Symbolism such as Gradowska, *Sztuka Młodej Polski*, Agnieszka Morawińska, ed., *Symbolizm w Polskim Malarstwie* [Symbolism in Polish Painting] (Warsaw: Auriga, 1996), and Tadeusz Dobrowolski, *Sztuka Młodej Polski* [The Art. Of Young Poland] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1963) fail to engage Symbolist ideas about interiority, space, deformation and transcendence in their analysis of Polish Symbolist painting. Instead, they tend to focus on the content of a given work and its connection to traditional Polish themes.

[254] Wiesław Juszczak, *Jan Stanisławski* (Warszawa: Ruch, 1972). For Juszczak, Stanisławski's Symbolism, and Polish Symbolism in general, are realist in approach because they attempt to objectively describe reality. In this sense, Stanisławski's formal manipulations are descriptive rather than creative.

introducing modernist strategies of deformation and ambiguity into their formal explorations, Stanisławski and Malczewski managed to combine elements of both traditional allegory and intuitive abstraction, thereby questioning the basic assumptions of both artistic modes. Katalin Keserű's provocative general description of Central European Symbolism offers a lens through which to more closely examine the work of Malczewski and Stanisławski: "It reinforced the subjective picture type and complemented it with the mythical, the realistic with the abstract and spiritual, the mimetic with the expressive and evocative. The complex presence of genres and art types within a work of art could be a Central European speciality."[255]

Significantly, criticism of Malczewski has been continually and distinctively marked by a sense of dissatisfaction about the seeming structural and stylistic dissonances in his painting. In 1901, prominent Polish critic and committed modernist Zenon "Miriam" Przesmycki praised Malczewski for not contenting himself with craftsmanlike imitation of the outward appearance and for seeking deeper expression. At the same time, Przesmycki complained of the artist's "somehow odd conglomeration of creative elements," in his paintings, praising the more realistic elements in his composition but regretting the presence of "dry, rebus-like allegories occasionally full of trivialness rather than threat. Malczewski is an odd sort of landscape painter; unfortunately, his staffage almost always spoils the impression. Here and there are unjustified and colorless fauns, and again here and elsewhere oddly naturalistic vacationers or recruits."[256] It is clear that what disturbs Przesmycki is neither the fantasist elements of Malczewski's work

[255] Katalin Keserű, "Changing Values in Central European Art at the Turn of the Century," in Anna Baranowa, ed., *Stulecie Towarzystwa*, 33.

[256] "dziwaczny jednak konglomerat elementów twórczości…suchych, rebusowych i niekiedy trywialności zamiast grozy pełnych alegoryj. Malczewski jest przedziwnym pejzażystą; niestety, stafaż prawie zawsze psuje wrażenie. Gdzieniegdzie są to nieusprawiedliwione i bezbarwne fauny, gdzieindziej znowu dziwnie naturalistyczni urlopnicy czy rekruci." Zenon „Miriam" Przesmycki, „Salon Krywulta [Krywult's Salon]" *Chimera* 1, no. 1 (1901): 165.

nor his banalities, but their combination within the same sphere. In this sense, Malczewski's work defies the inner logic of allegorical Symbolism but maintains those elements of naturalism that would seemingly preclude his membership in synthetic Symbolist categories.

Przesmycki's designation of allegory as "dry" brings to mind Maurice Denis' distinction between Symbolist content and Symbolist form, or the difference between "mystical and *allegorical* tendencies, i.e., the search for expression by means of precise narrative, and *Symbolist* tendencies, i.e. the search for expression through the work of art."[257] While the first category indicates significant dependence on mimesis of the outside, observable world, the second proclaims the autonomy of art and artist and makes the case for Symbolism as a forerunner of the modernist tradition. Later critical discussion of Malczewski places the artist in the former camp, with a few notable exceptions.[258] Elizabeth Clegg's succinct characterization of Malczewski as "problematic" acknowledges the difficulty in smoothing over contradictions in the artist's work and the ways in which these contradictions could provide an illuminating example of Symbolism in painting.[259]

Jacek Malczewski's Symbolist work dates to the decade of the 1880's, continuing to his death in 1929. The artist began his career in a realist vein, and continued to produce representative historical scenes and portraits alongside his Symbolist work throughout the 1890's and after 1900. This dual path is interesting in the light of certain assumptions about his

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[257] Maurice Denis, *Nouvelles Théories 1890-1912* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Occident, 1912).

[258] See, for instance, Robert Rosenblum's brief analysis of Malczewski's "Melancholia" in Robert Rosenblum, Maryanne Stevens and Ann Dumas, eds., *1900: Art at the Crossroads* (New York: H.N. Abrams , 2002): 36. A recent and exceptional Polish contribution which begins a reevaluation of Malczewski can be found in Piotr Juszkiewicz, ed., *Melancholia Jacka Malczewskiego: materiały seminarium Instytutu Historii Sztuki UAM I Muzeum Narodowego* [Jacek Malczewski's *Melancholia*: Materials from the Seminarium of UAM and the National Museum] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo PTPN, 2002.) As will be discussed later in this chapter, *Melancholia* stands out as the only work by Malczewski to have been subject to analysis against a background of Symbolist theory.

[259] Elizabeth Clegg, "Paris: Jacek Malczewski," *Burlington Magazine* 142, no. 1165 (2000): 252.

Symbolism. Clearly, Malczewski felt that a Symbolist mode was appropriate for certain of his works, and not for others. For instance, his depictions of nationhood, martyrdom, and childhood tend to be characterized by Symbolist deformation and ambiguity. Other historical themes, such as the recounting of the waves of exile of Poles to Siberia during the nineteenth century, have been addressed in a fashion reminiscent of reportage. Yet even in these seemingly straightforward works, Malczewski has employed certain formal devices that distance them from the didactic painting of his teacher, history painter Jan Matejko, and suggest the artist's subterranean Symbolist tendencies.

Malczewski's entire oeuvre is characterized by formal distortion to greater or lesser degree. Very few of his paintings feature a seamless reality embraced by the allegorical Symbolism of Böcklin, Franz Von Stuck, and Polish painters such as Józef Pankiewicz. Malczewski's paintings prior to the early 1890's span a range of naturalism and fantasy and avoid extreme formal distortion. However, even those works that are fantasist in nature contain elements of formal experimentation that separate them from *gedankenmalerei*. Those examples of his earlier work that are understood to create an "integral unity of the 'fantastic' and 'realism'," such as *Water Nymphs: Nymphs in Mulleins* of 1888 (fig. 81) contain a kind of fairytale quality that heightens artifice rather than suppressing it. Hovering figures in the painting, unclear perspective, and the foggy background all serve to create an otherworldly atmosphere. Art Historian Maria Janion suggests that this mode of painterly vision, in which fantasy and reality are intertwined, represents the painter's reaction to "folk imagination" in the rural Poland of Malczewski's youth.[260]

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[260] Maria Janion, "Staw w Wielgiem czyli pomiędzy śmiechem a śmiercią [The Pond in Wielgie; or, Between Laughter and Death]," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 51 (1989): 16.

As Elizabeth Clegg has revealed in her insightful study of Malczewski's early paintings, the insertion of what may be termed proto-Symbolist devices into even the most naturalistic of Malczewski's works serves as a precursor to Malczewski's later full-blown Symbolist work. Clegg cites the artist's deliberate manipulation of perspective and space in paintings such as *After the Harvest* (1892) (fig. 82) as a means of finding formal analogies between the political fate of Polish exiles and uprisers and the formal distortions within the painting. She uses the term "discontinuous space" to describe these phenomena in the work of Malczewski, since it does not conform to traditional nineteenth century rules of representation, spatial continuity and narrative inherited from the Renaissance. [261] Instead of utilizing the accepted devices of illusionism, Malczewski makes clear reference to these devices by foregrounding their artificiality his work. The discontinuity jars the viewer and confounds initial expectations that the represented space will conform to the generally accepted logic of perspective. This subjective response brings the artificiality of painting into sharp relief, thereby reminding the viewer that perceiving and understanding the work is a process requiring active reception and participation. In this sense, Malczewski's strategies are modernist in intent: as described by Dorota Suchocka -- "His combination of realistic form with symbolic contents may sometimes appear to be a kind of dissonance; but perhaps they are more of an invitation to the observer to participate in this game, a hint pointing to the elusive meaning."[262] While the bulk of Malczewski's paintings have been interpreted as faithful continuations of the naturalist tradition,

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[261] Elizabeth Clegg, "Faux Terrain: Discontinuous Space in the Early Work of Jacek Malczewski," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschicthe* 53 (1990): 198-208. Eastern Poland was under the jurisdiction of the Russian Empire throughout the 19th century; various unsuccessful military uprisings against the Russians (1831, 1863) were followed by deportation of Polish citizens to Siberia.

[262] Dorota Suchocka, *Jacek Malczewski: From the Lviv Gallery Art Collection* (Olszanica, Poland: Wydawnictwo Bosz, 2004): 8. While this characterization of Malczewski's strategies tends to assume that the artist assigned a specific, if elusive, ultimate "meaning" to his work, it is the argument of this chapter that the issue of meaning in Malczewski's painting is closely allied to Symbolist notions of the ungraspable and inherently indefinable.

the artist's manipulation of scale, temporal continuum and sequencing are in fact anti-naturalistic. The self-conscious insertion of obviously manipulated form in this work argues for a more modern understanding of Malczewski's effort to engage the viewer in the process of deciphering meaning within the work.

After the Harvest provides an early example of how Malczewski's jarring shaping of space functions as an analogy for the political discontinuity of 19th century Poland. The painting reveals a scene in the aftermath of the 1863 January Uprising, in which Polish intelligentsia and gentry unsuccessfully attempted to reject Russian hegemony in the Eastern areas of the country. Set on a country estate, the major element of the foreground – a swivel gate – becomes the gathering point for the title's metaphorical harvest of bodies. Grouped along the diagonal of the gate are the bodies of Polish insurgents. As Elizabeth Clegg points out, the insistent diagonal formed by the swivel gate separates foreground from background, with the foreground complying to traditional 19th-century perspective and the background appearing flat and two-dimensional. By refusing the viewer visual entrance into deep space, the flat background continually refocuses attention on the violent aftermath portrayed in the painting's foreground. For Malczewski, who retained potent childhood memories of Russian occupation of his family estate, the significance of the literal inaccessibility of historically Polish land was especially powerful.[263] Additionally, late 19th century Poland had inherited an understanding of its territory as a sacred body from the writings of Polish romantic writers.[264] If Poland was to be understood in the Romantic tradition as a martyr or second Christ, then the body of Poland – its physical

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[263] Kazimierz Wyka, *Thanatos i Polska, czyli o Jacku Malczewskim* [Thanatos and Poland; or, on Jacek Malczewski] (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1971.)

[264] Stefan Morawski, "Polish Theories of Art between 1830 and 1850," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 16 (1957): 217-36.

territory – assumed a mystical significance. Malczewski's play with space in *After the Harvest* reinforces this earlier Romantic spirituality by inviting the viewer to subjectively identify with the land portrayed.

The background of *After the Harvest*, to which the viewer's eye is inevitably drawn and subsequently redirected, impresses the viewer with its insistently monolithic presence. In its horizontality, flatness and indistinct detail, it recalls the background of a painted panorama, particularly popular at this time -- the Raclawickie panorama in Wrocław was a celebrated example of the genre, celebrating the victory of Polish peasants over Russian forces.[265] Malczewski would certainly have been aware of this panorama, as its unveiling assumed the scale of a national event. The illusionistic devices employed by panorama painters had as their purpose the softening of the abrupt transition between the flat canvas and the three-dimensional space immediately before it. For these painters, the phrase "faux terrain" was employed to describe this three-dimensional space, which was effectively absorbed into the greater illusion of the panorama itself. Andrzej Jakimowicz has described the end of history painting in late 19th century painting as a doomed effort to "aspire to the spectacular." In support of his argument, Jakimowicz points to the increasing popularity of panoramas, dioramas, living tableaus, illusionistic painting on theater curtains, and the beginnings of film. The underlying motive of these efforts could be identified as "the erasing of boundaries between art and nature."[266]

Malczewski, in perverse fashion, makes use of the conventions of the panorama -- overwhelming horizontality and abrupt, intense contrast between detailed foreground in three-

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[265] Interestingly, Jan Stanisławski was one of the artists who worked on this panorama, in a style markedly opposite his usual style in his paintings.

[266] "…zacierania granicy między sztuką i naturą." Andrzej Jakimowicz, *Jacek Malczewski i jego epoka* [Jacek Malczewski and His Epoch] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970): 85-87. Jakimowicz also argues that the origins of this tendency can already be seen in the works of Matejko.

dimensional perspective and a flat, indistinct background – in order to highlight the artificial conventions of painting landscape in a naturalistic tradition. The background of *After the Harvest* points up the flatness of the painted surface in a style reminiscent of Manet.[267] By revealing all too clearly the diagonal opposing lines of force in the work in both the swivel gate and the raked lines in the field beyond the gate, as well as by pointing up the foreshortening of the left barn wall by the insertion of a bushy growth at its corner, Malczewski reveals the schema of perspective at work.

The manipulation of painted space in *After the Harvest* is analogous to the political manipulation of actual space in formerly Polish territory. What should also be stressed in the analysis of *After the Harvest* is the particularly Symbolist emphasis on artificially created space. In this understanding, the notion of "faux terrain" is literally manifested in the contrast between the foreground and background of the painting. Malczewski might have found the phrase "faux terrain" particularly poignant as it applied to Polish territory and his representations of it on the painted canvas: "The [Polish] Republic is quite safe, because it's dead –it's no longer of this world…it returns…from time to time, as a welcome apparition, yet with each generation this apparition fades a little more…[becoming] increasingly ethereal and elusive…"[268] In Malczewski's art, the increasing efforts of illusionism provide fodder for ironic, modernist commentary on the political futility of partitioned Poland.

The inability of Poles to assert sovereignty on their native territory called into question the reality of their national and, by extension, their individual identity. In the theory of historian

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[267] T.J. Clark describes this strategy in Manet's *Olympia* (1863) and the inability of contemporary critics to absorb Manet's formal strategies in *The Painting of Modern Life*, rev.ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 79-146.

[268] Clegg, „Faux Terrain: Discontinuous Space," 206.

Benedict Anderson, external spheres of symbols are what build and maintain national cohesion.[269] In 19th century Poland, these symbols had to be masked or otherwise disguised to avoid censorship or even as a function of an unrealizable dream. The flexibility and ambiguity of the sign in Symbolist theory corresponds with the careful use of politically loaded symbols and allegations in Malczewski's paintings.

Additionally, Malczewski's tendency to explore notions of space and time in his paintings can be related to contemporary philosophical activity. Late 19th century philosophers engaged in subjective experiences of space and time such as Henri Bergson, posited a distinction between analytical, measured time and intuitive, unbroken reality.[270] Malczewski's work demonstrates that images may occupy more than one dimension simultaneously, allowing intuition and irrationality into play. This multivalency of images recalls the Neo-Platonic belief in a higher, transcendent reality beyond that which is grasped with the senses. For Malczewski, the deliberate ambiguity of Symbolist understandings of the world also proved crucial to his efforts to escape the bombastic history painting of Matejko's school and acknowledge the states of defeat and longing in which Poland currently resided.

Malczewski's paintings are characterized by an ambiguous approach to time and space. Irena Kossowska traces the development of this phenomenon in Malczewski's work, arguing for a general trend in the artist's oeuvre from the "fabular" towards what she terms "loosened

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[269] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, new ed. (London: Verso, 1991): 1-9.

[270] Bergson's theories on time and artistic creativity proved influential among Young Poland thinkers, who applied them to the works of Polish Romantic poets such as Juliusz Słowacki. In a polemic entitled "Monsalwat," Artur Górski, the editor of key modernist journal *Życie*, stated "Only dead nature is logical. One cannot grasp living nature with categorical thought." For a summary of the influence of Bergson on Young Poland, see Stanisław Borzym, *Bergson a przemiany światopoglądowe* [Bergson and Worldview Transformations] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1982), esp. Chapter 5, "W Kręgu literatury i sztuki [In the Circle of Literature and Art], pp.157-184.

networks" of meaning.[271] Kossowska notes the simplifications of detail and schematization of nature that appears in the landscape backgrounds of Malczewski's work. This simplification means that objects in his paintings assume universal symbolic significance and are conducive to a range of interpretation. She relates Malczewski's simplification to the notion of the decorative often appealed to in early modern painting, quoting here Wiesław Juszczak's understanding of the term "decorativeness" as it relates to early modernism: "If at times we would be inclined to give these pictures the term 'decorative,' we should take this word in the sense in which it functioned at the turn of the century: according to contemporary definitions every art aspiring to timelessness was decorative…turned towards mystery, mystifying or rather thoroughly mystic."[272]

This understanding of the decorative recalls the Nabis' definition of the term and could place Malczewski in the same philosophical camp as Western synthetists. While Malczewski's seamless insertion of otherworldly figures into naturalistic settings in other works such as *Art in the Village* from 1896 may reinforce his identification with *gedankenmalerei* (fig. 83), his ambiguous approach to space, time and detail in other paintings have little in common with traditional understandings of the category. [273]

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[271] Irena Kossowska, "Cykl Obrazowy Jacka Malczewskiego [The Picture Cycle of Jacek Malczewski]," *Rocznik Historii Sztuki* XVIII (1990): 291. For a cross-cultural comparison of Symbolist painting cycles, see Kossowska's comparison of Edvard Munch and Malczewski in her "Serial Imagery in Symbolist Painting: Klinger, Munch, Malczewski" in Piotr Paszkiewicz, ed., *Totenmesse: Modernism in the Culture of Northern and Central Europe* (Warsaw: Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences, 1996): 111-128.

[272] "Jeżeli czasem bylibyśmy skłonni nadać tym obrazom miano "dekoracyjnych," powinniśmy brać to słowo w takim sensie, w jakim funkcjonowało ono na przełomie stuleci: dekoracyjna była wedle ówczesnych mniemań każda sztuka dążąca ku ponadczasowi. [...]obrócona ku tajemnicy, mistycyzująca czy wręcz mistyczna." Wiesław Juszczak*, Post-Impresjonisci* [The Post-Impressionists] (Warsaw:Arkady, 2005) 62, quoted in Kossowska, "Cykl Obrazowy Jacka Malczewskiego," 298.

[273] Polish art historians have agreed that these types of scenes in the work of Malczewski are heavily indebted to the painting of Witold Pruszkowski, who created allegorical or fantastical scenes using realistic means and methods. Pruszkowski himself, however, occasionally strayed from realist parameters in works such as Poznan Muzeum Narodowe. The work of Pruszkowski is another example of how Symbolism in fin-de-siecle Polish territory was a

The tendencies of formal manipulation and distortion in Malczewski's earlier work were developed more fully in his later Symbolist paintings. In the entrenched scholarly understanding of *gedankenmalerei* or allegorical Symbolism, archetypal symbols in a given work correspond directly to a given idea. However, the work of Polish modernist critics active in Young Poland, such as Zenon Przesmycki, explored the notion of the symbol as a more complex and open-ended device. Przesmycki summed this up when he termed the symbol a "living analogy," implying that symbols have a mystic organic life of their own.[274] For Przesmycki, the use of allegory in art was outdated and failed to achieve the goal of modern art: the evocation of a transcendent reality. In contrast to allegory, Przesmycki believed that the modern symbol was not a dead tool but a mystical object with its own inner life. Because the symbol was "organic," it was subject to possible change, decay, and transformation, and was therefore closer to the mysteries of the essence of existence.

It is worth looking in-depth at Przesmycki's views on the symbol because they provide a rich source of ideas for examining the painting of Malczewski, Jan Stanisławski and other Symbolists. As Katarzyna Rosner has shown, Przesmycki's Symbolist theory borrowed from the work of Arthur Schopenhauer, and was filtered through the lens of French, Belgian and Scandinavian modernist manifestos.[275] Przesmycki's tasks as translator, writer and editor meant

strategy that could be adopted or abandoned at will by painters, to a much higher degree than in the case of authors. See Tadeusz Dobrowolski, *Malarstwo Polskie* [Polish Painting] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1989): 145-46.

[274] Zenon Przesmycki, ""Wstęp [Introduction]," in Maurycy Maeterlinck, *Wybór pism dramatycznych* [Selected Dramatic Writings]. Warsaw: 1894, XLII-LXVII.

[275] Katarzyna Rosner, „Sztuka a rzeczywistość w programach polskich modernistów [Art And Reality in the Programs of Polish Modernists]" in Sława Krzemienia-Ojaka and Katarzyna Rosner, eds., *Studia z dziejów estetyki polskiej 1890-1918* [Studies from the History of Polish Esthetics 1890-1918] (Warsaw: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1972): 123.

that he was one of the most internationally aware thinkers on art in late 19th-century Poland. Beginning with the Schopenhauerian conviction that the world is a dream, Przesmycki argued that the artist's function consists of revealing the essence of the "primitive being" through mystic experience.[276] Przesmycki based his exposition of the symbol on a conviction that primitive man thought, not in abstract terms, but in images, and that the fresh, direct nature of thought has since been lost through the dry mediation of abstract ideas. As a result, Western European and Polish Symbolist art, writes Przesmycki, although in reality more authentic than its naturalistic forerunners, in fact appears false and mannered, for "…transformation of thought into image and the retainment of the image alone with the discarding of abstract bonds appears to be something unnatural, unusual, artificial, posterior, while in fact it is a return to a primitive means of receiving and expressing one's impressions, to – formerly interrupted – concrete, imagistic thought."[277]

In this sense, the symbol is not a compromising condensation of reality into dry allegory, but rather a return to an earlier, more real unity of being and experience.[278] For Przesmycki, great art is always Symbolist by definition; the symbol within the work "uncovers the elements of infinity with sensual analogies, reveals the limitless horizons beyond thought."[279] Thus, the

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[276] This Symbolist view of the artist as mystic was also applied to Malczewski by British art critic Amelia Levetus, who described Malczewski's mixing of the "visible" and "invisible" worlds in a review of contemporary Polish art. A.S.L. [A.S. Levetus], "Notes on Some Polish Artists of Today," *The Studio* XLI (1907): 115-126.

[277] "przetworzenie myśli w obraz i zachowanie samego obrazu z odrzuceniem abstrakcyjnych wiązadełek wydaje się czymś nienaturalnym, niezwykłym, sztucznym, późniejszym, gdy tymczasem jest ono właściwie nawrotem do pierwotnego sposobu odbierania i wyrażania swoich wrażeń, do – poprzedającego oderwane – konkretnego, obrazowego myślenia." Przesmycki, "Wstęp," XLII.

[278] This understanding of intuition as a means of experiencing a higher reality has overtones of the theory of Henri Bergson. See Boryzm, *Bergson a przemiany światopoglądowe*, 157-184.

[279] „...ukrywa za zmsyłowymi analogiami pierwiastki nieskończoności, odsłania bezgraniczne pozamysłowe horyzonty." Przesmycki, „Wstęp," LXV.

symbol is immanent – its physical form and appearance will have certain meaning for the casual observer, but its "roots" are "grounded in shadow" – the shadow indicating ultimate reality beyond the grasp of sensual experience. Przesmycki concludes his description of the symbol with a rejection of positivistic thought, arguing that current research into the unconscious and the "spirit world" indicates the validity of the Symbolist approach in art.

Przesmycki's Symbolist theory is more appropriately applied to Malczewski's painting than the tenets of either *gendankenmalerei* or synthetism. It represents a more effective lens through which to study Malczewski's Symbolist style, particularly in his most famous work, *Melancholia* (1890-94) (fig. 84). While *Melancholia* is not radically exceptional in Malczewski's oeuvre in terms of formal composition, its abundance of nationalist symbols has inspired extensive analysis. *Melancholia* has been the subject of a lively scholarly debate in Poland as to the host of allegorical meanings summoned up by the combination of objects on the canvas – the two artist figures, one at the easel and the other in the foreground; the soldierly figures and aristocrats and armed children; and, finally, the hooded figure in front of the windows at right. Variously, these elements have been understood to be embodiments of the artist's views about his profession, patriotism, the inevitability of death, the historicist mentality of the nineteenth century, and the nature of modernism.[280] Yet this form of analysis springs from the same assumptions about the one-to-one correspondence of allegorical Symbolism. The distortions of space and perspective in the painting have been often pointed out and discussed, but not in relation to Symbolist notions of space and time, and how these syntactical and narrative devices also contribute to the meaning of the work.

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[280] For a summation of scholarly interpretations of the allegorical figures in the painting, see Piotr Juszkiewicz' contribution to *Melancholia Jacka Malczewskiego*, "Wstęp: Między fizyką a metafizyką obrazu [Introduction: Between the Physics and Metaphysics of the Picture,]" pp. 8-13.

In this vein, it is instructive to compare *Melancholia* with an oft-cited exemplar of synthetism, Paul Gauguin's *Vision After the Sermon* (1888) (fig. 85). While analysis of *Melancholia* has generally focused on deciphering the repercussions of the shown figures in the painting as outlined above, analysis of Gauguin's work has focused intently on the formal innovations it represents, with content being a secondary concern.[281] While *Melancholia* is, at first glance, much more naturalistic in style than *Vision After the Sermon*, its formal distortions are similar in aim to those of Gauguin. Malczewski's denial of the linear progression of time and the rational nature of space recalls Gauguin's division of space between the "real" (the figures of the Breton worshippers) and the "ideal" or "imagined" (the wrestling figures of Jacob and the Angel.)[282] So too, Malczewski's space could be argued to consist of the "real"(the artist at his easel) and the "ideal" (the figures swirling from the easel.) In both cases, there is no clear visual barrier between these two worlds. And in both cases, there are certain elements that do not clearly belong to either the real or the ideal (the tree branches in Gauguin's painting, the old woman in Malczewski's work.) Both images manage to contain the quotidian world of the senses and the ideal world beyond or behind our everyday reality. Both works occupy a space between abstraction and representation. Neither is a window onto a complete and separate reality. In exploring the composition of both works, their viewer is compelled to shuttle back and forth between competing realities.

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[281] An important exception to this tendency is the work of Debora Silverman, in which the religiosity of the theme is related to Gauguin's personal religious identity and its repercussions for the formal decisions throughout his artistic career. Debora Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000.)

[282] Describing his painting, Gauguin stated "Pour moi, dans ce tableau, le paysage et la lutte n'existent que dans l'imagination des gens en prière, par suite du sermon. C'est pourquoi il y a contraste entre les gens nature et la lutte dans son paysage, non nature et disproportionné." Quoted in Robert Délevoy, *Symbolisme*, 83.

In one of the key founding articulations of Symbolism, the critic Georges-Albert Aurier described Gauguin's painting as an exemplar of the tenets of the Symbolist style of art. Aurier's approach to Symbolist painting is characterized by a deep conviction of the Platonic notion of dualism and the Kantian stress on idea over perception.[283] This understanding of form as envelope for idea led to the understanding of French synthetism as essentially "decorative." Because decorative art reduces incidental detail to a minimum and stresses the flatness of the picture plane, it has a natural and immediately perceived affinity with early modernist abstraction. By eliminating the appearance of shadow between forms and applying broad areas of color without gradation, Gauguin's *Vision* encourages the viewer to immediately perceive the whole as one flat surface. The schematized representation of the foreground figures and the elements of the vision transform the composition into an immanent symbol evoking a different plane of reality.

Aurier's formulation of Symbolism in which decorativeness is the crucial characteristic of "true" Symbolist painting appears to function prohibitively, shutting out all painting with stronger ties to naturalism. In fact, Aurier's argument that decorativeness is the natural result of the first four elements of Symbolist art (ideism, Symbolism, synthetism and subjectivism) should be viewed as arbitrary. While Aurier's four preliminary Symbolist criteria could easily apply to Malczewski's work, which expresses an idea in subjective fashion by means of forms reduced to signs, *Melancholia* is decidedly not decorative in the sense of Aurier's formulation.

Aurier's theory fails to illuminate the Symbolist commonality between *Melancholia* and *Vision After the Sermon,* which lies not in their affinity to decorativeness but in their use of symbolic language. Art historian Robert Délevoy has touched upon this phenomenon in his

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[283] G.-Albert Aurier, "Symbolism in Painting: Paul Gauguin (1891)," reprinted in Henri Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 43-47.

analysis of Gauguin's work. Describing the process of Gauguin's visual strategy in *Vision After the Sermon*, Robert Délevoy argues for its introduction of a new and separate discourse in painting: "Therefore [Gauguin] inaugurates a new type of discourse, a new type of plastic structure: in which the painting defines itself as a semiotic practice envisaged as a process of *transformation*: transformation of signs and of the relation between signs."[284] Malczewski's purposeful chaos, in which commonly understood elements of nineteenth-century historical painting are placed in a setting that defies rational logic, also suggests a process by which signs are transformed by the artist, placed in an ambiguous framework and left open to subjective interpretation by the viewer.

Malczewski's works in the 1890's tend to continue the formal distortion of *Melancholia*. In *Thanatos* (1898) (fig. 11), the Greek mythological figure indicating mortality, stands in the foreground of a characteristic Polish manor. A figure in front of the manor, presumably its owner, hastens towards the foreground and its imminent threat, simultaneously abandoning domestic security and territorial control. Although the background of the composition is naturalistically described, the sharp outlines and lack of modeling of the foreground Thanatos highlight its artificial quality. It is plastered onto the scene before our eyes, positioned frontally for our benefit, and we as viewers are encouraged to acknowledge the artificial aspects of its existence. At the same time, we are forcefully reminded of the flatness of the picture plane, denying the patent illusionism.[285] Here, we see similarities with the work of Edouard Manet. In *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia* (both 1863), the female protagonists are outlined sharply. While contemporary critics commonly interpreted the use of outline as technical incompetence,

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[284] "Alors il inaugure un nouveau type de discours, un nouveau type de structure plastique: où la peinture se définit comme pratique sémiotique envisagée comme processus de *transformation*: transformation des signes et de la relation entre les signes." Robert Délevoy, *Symbolisme*, 80.

such devices have been later understood as evidence of Manet's challenge to convention in painting.[286] Malczewski's resistance toward consistent modeling continues in works such as *Self-Portrait* from 1901 (fig. 86), in which the artist's body is rendered in semi-transparent strokes.

Childhood – Jacek at the Pond in Wielgie (1919) (fig. 87) is an example of Malczewski's manipulation of perspective in an otherwise naturalistic scene. The relative perspective of foreground and background elements and palette are inconsistent and frustrate the viewer's swift appraisal of the scene. The figure of the artist as a young boy, in the center left foreground of the composition, seems absurdly small in comparison to the bulk of the house and outbuildings in the background. To the right, the area of forest set on a rocky outcropping is separated from the rest of the composition by an artificial curving line. Taken as an individual composition, the building within the forest appears to be the size of a small house, but in comparison with the house to the left, it becomes doll-size. Art historian Kazimierz Wyka, writing in the 1970's, compares the formal conventions of the painting to contemporary Japanese art.[287] Wyka's suggestion indicates the difference between the strategy of allegory and that of formal distortion and abstraction. In *Childhood*, it is Malczewski's approach to issues of perspective that suggest another reality, not the insertion of particular motifs. The manipulation of perspective places emphasis on non-objectivity, interiority, the inner life and subjectivity. The small boy in the midst of the composition and the title of the work suggest the enormous role of interiority and subjective experience in our perception of reality, while changes of perspective mythologize the Polish territory that is the background, foundation and subject of most of Malczewski's work.

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[286] Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 79-146.

[287] Kazimierz Wyka, *Thanatos i Polska*, 25.

In paintings with the most extreme distortions of time, space and reality, such as *In the Dust Cloud* (1893-94) (fig. 7) or *Landcsape with Tobias* (1904) (fig. 9), Malczewski abandons any effort to create a seamlessly naturalistic scene.[288] The insistent geometric quality of *In the Dust Cloud* and its centrally placed figural grouping lend an artificial, theatrical air to the work. The sense of permanence engendered by the composition's static hierarchy suggests the stoppage of the flow of time. This manipulation of the sense of time evokes the history of partitioned Poland – a nation suspended in time. Nineteenth-century formulations of the nation as an entity transcending time are reflected in Malczewski's composition, in which historical representation is affected by the representation of time itself.

Along with time, space has also been manipulated in the work and its formal qualities impart its meaning. The more distantly spaced trees of the far right background give the viewer a sense of naturalistic perspective, but the solid mass of trees at the center background becomes an abstract banded backdrop for the woman and children in chains. The landscape of the painting has been rendered unreal and impenetrable, insistently rejecting the viewer's attempts at penetrating the scene and returning the viewer's gaze to the foreground drama. Given Malczewski's nationalist concerns and the role of landscape in nineteenth-century painting, the inaccessibility of the landscape in *In the Dust Cloud* can be viewed as commentary on Poland's political status and a metaphor of Polish history. The colors of the children are taken from the same limited palette as the fallow, burned field, implying their generation from the surrounding earth. At the same time, the enclosing envelope of dust around the figures creates a barrier between the group and the surrounding space, enforcing a sense of separation between the

[288] Agnieszka Ławniczakowska has pointed out that *In the Dust Cloud* is similar in tone to the work of Italian Symbolist Giovanni Segantini, who, like Malczewski was interested in the expression of national themes through Symbolism. Agnieszka Ławniczakowska, *Jacek Malczewski* (Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1976): 40.

opposing elements of landscape and figures in the work. The halo around the figures is reminiscent of renderings of the Madonna in early Renaissance painting and involves the same insertion of otherworldly, Christian elements into a naturalistic landscape. The formal tension across Malczewski's composition calls to mind Young Poland critic Jerzy Zulawski's (1874-1915) description of Symbolist inconsistencies:

> "An excess of external perfection, overly finalized and detailed finish is a flaw of a work of art taken from a spiritual standpoint…which covers its internal, somehow transcendental essence. On the other hand, if we encounter something in a work of art …that breaks this surface harmony, in spite of ourselves we are forced to search for this "something" and so we penetrate into the depths of its essence. This is why there are so many apparent imperfections in the works of the Symbolists; this explains the insinuations, dissonances, bold metaphors and contradictions violently linked to each other…"[289]

The inconsistencies of space and the purposeful disruption of 'surface harmony' function symbolically in Malczewski's work, emphasizing the artist's conception of Polish territory as both factually and ideologically suspended in ambiguous status.

Landscape with Tobias (fig. 9) sets the biblical tale of Tobias and the Angel in the midst of a rural landscape. Malczewski's choice of the figures of Tobias and the Angel has particular significance for its connections to the Polish political situation. The quest of Tobias to reclaim a sum of money deposited in a distant region by his father, Tobit, involves the patronage of the angel Raphael and eventually ends in the curing of Tobit's blindness. The literal and figurative enlightenment that is a result of Tobias' journey might have particular resonance in the context of Malczewski's view of partitioned Poland as a country suspended in captivity, partially as a

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[289] "Zbyt wielką zewnętrzną doskonałość, zbyt ostateczne a szczegółowe wykończenie jest wadą dzieła sztuki z duchowego stanowiska pojętej...która nam zakrywa jego wewnętrzną, niejako transcendentalną istotę. Na odwrót, jeżeli w dziele...spotykamy coś, co tę harmonię zewnętrzną przełamuje, mimo woli zmuszeni jesteśmy szukać tego „czegoś" i tak w głąb jego istotną wnikamy. Stąd w dziełach Symbolistów tyle pozornych niedoskonałości; stąd niedomówienia, dysonanse, zuchwałe przenośnie i przemocą powiązane z sobą sprzeczności..." Jerzy Żuławski, *Prolegomena. Uwagi i szkice* [Prolegomena. Remarks and Sketches] (Lviv: H. Altenberga, 1902); 81-82.

result of its own shortsightedness, and his hopes for eventual political change. The backdrop of the composition is characterized by an oddly geometrical configuration, confusing the viewer with its opposing angles and sudden drops. Although individual elements of the composition are naturalistically portrayed, their peculiar combination results in a scene of overwhelming alienation. The irrigation ditch at the center of the composition appears to lead to nowhere and have no logical purpose, while the straight roofline of the distant barn is reduced to an abstract figure. The flying stork, an emblem of Polish folk culture, hangs seemingly motionless and suspended, calling to mind a toy figure, an ironic nod to representations of the Holy Spirit in Renaissance painting. The angel and Tobias are of the scene but not in it: they perch awkwardly on the lip of the ditch and appear to have been temporarily inserted into the composition. This jarring combination of elements and lack of compositional cohesion suggests Malczewski's pessimistic approach to the possibility of enlightenment offered in the figures of Tobias and the angel.

Partial illegibility, lack of immediate clarity and either excessive or absent stress on various elements characterize Malczewski's scene and recall French writer Jean Moréas' prescription for Symbolist poetry: "To achieve an exact implementation of its synthesis, Symbolism requires an archetypal and complex style: pure sounds, densely convoluted sentences alternating with gentler rhythms, significant redundancies, mysterious ellipses, suspended anacolutha, any bold and multiform trope…"[290] Moréas' "mysterious ellipses" could apply to the disjointed landscapes featured in *St. Tobias* and *Childhood*, while the figural composition in *In the Dust Cloud* could be understood as a "bold and multiform trope." By rejecting an illusionistic approach and imbuing his works with formal inconsistencies, Malczewski allows for

[290] Jean Moréas, "A Literary Manifesto – Symbolism (1886)," in Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories*, 152.

a variety of subjective interpretations of his scenes while appealing to a world of interiority. These formal manipulations approximate contemporary themes of allusive synthetism, rather than *gedankenmalerei*.

Some of these formal manipulations are evident in paintings with musical references, in which Malczewski has eliminated musical instruments from scenes where they clearly play a role. In the 1903 triptych *Fatherland* (fig. 88), a bearded man plays on an invisible flute. Earlier criticism of this tryptych addressed it as traditional allegory, failing to address the artist's intentional omission of the flute. While the tryptych does function as an allegory, the visible absence of the flute adds an element of irony to the work, suggesting the painting's "muteness" as a visual object. Similarly, in 1919's *Prophecy* (fig. 89), an Old Testament prophet with the artist's features plays an unseen bass.[291] The allusions to musicality in Malczewski's work initially encourage associations with the exalted notion of the *gesamtkunstwerk*, only to frustrate the viewer by their "invisibility:" Malczewski has highlighted the absence of actual music in the viewer's reception of the presented scene, making the musical instrument not only inaudible, but also invisible. While both *Fatherland* and *Prophecy* appear to be statements about the possible fate of the mysticized Polish nation, the enforced muteness of the prophet and flute-player in these works suggests that the proclamation of the future of the Polish "fatherland" is prevented from full expression.

Malczewski occasionally extended this strategy of invisibility to create commentary on the task of the artist. In *Self-Portrait against a Well and Two Nudes* from 1917 (fig. 90), the

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[291] Lukasz Krzywka, „'Widzialne" i „Niewidzialne" w Obrazach Jacka Malczewskiego [„"Seen" and „Unseen" in the Pictures of Jacek Malczewski]," in Teresa Grzybkowska, ed., *Muzyka w obrazach Jacka Malczewskiego: materiały z konferencji zorganizowanej przez Akademię Muzyczną im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie* [Music in the Pictures of Jacek Malczewski: Materials from a Conference organized by the Frederic Chopin Music Academy in Warsaw] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo "DiG," 2005): 97-98.

artist's hands are poised as if holding an invisible palette. In the background, two female nudes perch upon a stone bench, framing the artist's torso and giving an antique air to the scene. By highlighting the lack of painterly tools, our initial assumptions about the nudes – that they function as models for a scene created by the artist's imagination – are thrown into doubt as we ponder the relationship between painter and painted. This absence of anticipated items frustrates the viewer's initial expectations, creates gaps in the surface of the painting and disrupts the completeness of painterly illusion. This manipulation of space and use of contradiction calls Moréas' description of Symbolist tactics to mind – the "mysterious ellipses" of musical instruments or painting tools creates a play of space, leading to numerous interpretive possibilities. Malczewski's alter ego artist, unable to create in the pictured composition, is in keeping with the actual artist's pessimistic views on the ability of art to fulfill its social mission.

Krzywka also points out the common usage of the terms "vision" "dream" and "mirror" in Malczewski's titles, suggesting that by employing these terms the artist provided hints to his conception of the role of art in society and separating that which is real from that which is imagined.[292] However, the constant blurring of the lines between fantasy and reality, as well as the artist's modernist references to these boundaries indicate the influence of Symbolist modes of thought in Malczewski's oeuvre. Although Malczewski's Symbolist works are very different in style and employ separate formal solutions, they share a coexistence of competing realities and a refusal to create a logically complete entity with the work of Paul Gauguin and Paul Sérusier. These similarities, arrived at through separate processes, encourage the conceptual broadening of the category of synthetism in Symbolist painting.

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[292] Krzywka, "'Widzialne' i 'Niewidzialne'," 103.

Malczewski's *Before a Model* (1900) (fig. 91) is another example of the artist's play with space and contradiction within a single composition. In *Before a Model*, the artist uses the device of a picture frame in order to comment on both the nature of making art and the relationship of the real to the represented. In this work, the artist's head appears caught between the physical picture frame, a plain wooden enclosure for the canvas being worked upon, and the final, elaborately carved frame for formal presentation of the finished piece. The oblique angles created by the wooden frame insistently intersect the frontal scene and create a dynamic scene, calling to attention the artificiality of the actual canvas and the artist's uneasy position in limbo between real and ideal. While the frame to the left of the artist asserts his creative authority over the model, who is physically and conceptually set apart from the authorial space of the foreground, the assertive diagonal of the second frame in front of the artist's body undermines this authority, as does the physical frame of the entire composition.

The frequency of self-portraits as well as the identification of the artist with mythological or biblical figures in Malczewski's entire oeuvre can be related to Friedrich Schlegel's notion of artistic irony. According to Schlegel, the artist participates in an ironic game in which his distance from the object of his creation and his awareness of his own genius disturbs esthetic illusion and breaks open form. This creates, according to Schlegel, a dialectics of auto-creation and self-destruction. Malczewski's process of self-quotation in his works results in inevitable ironic distance, constantly reminding the viewer of their inherent artificiality. For art historian Maria Janion, Malczewski's paintings "could be treated as an indication of high esthetic self-awareness, and the placement of fauns, chimeras and nymphs – as an ironic sign of embodiment

of self or model."[293] This hyper self-awareness characterizes all of Malczewski's work, rejecting pure illusionism in favor of a Symbolist appeal to shifting and ungraspable realities.

Commentary on the act of artistic creation and embedded self-awareness within painting is another way in which Malczewski's work transcends the boundaries of allegorical Symbolism. Just as the artist's formal distortions of color, space and perspective threaten to destroy the close system of meaning inherent to allegory, so too does commentary on the artist's task reflect the Symbolist obsession with the mission of the artist as one uniquely privileged with otherworldly insight. Painting of the self can be viewed as a stand-in for subjective viewing; in his works with a self-portrait, Malczewski expands a traditional artistic mode, heightening the sense of contingency and immediacy, thereby emphasizing subjectivity and the inner life. Waldemar Okoń, in discussing the artist-figure at the easel in *Melancholia*, notes that the presence of a self-portrait in Malczewski's painting, which creates an "auto-themed work – painting, whose theme is the process of painting." Thanks to this self-reflexivity, the painting operates on two levels of meaning – a "creative level," which functions thanks to the artist and the artistic tools depicted in the scene, and a "created world," made up of the mass of figures swirling at the center of the composition. In this sense, the entire scene comes to serve as the "pretext for reflections on the nature of creative processes."[294] Perspectival distortions in *Melancholia* might be attributed to the struggle between opposing viewpoints of the alter-ego artist figure and the neutral outside viewer. The windowsill, figure in black hood, and open window correspond to the world of the

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[293] „...mogłoby być traktowane jako przejaw wysokiej samowiedzy estetycznej, a umieszczanie faunów, chimer i boginek – jako znak ironicznej cielesności własnej lub modela." Janion, „Staw w Wielgiem," 17.

[294] "...pretekst dla refleksji nad naturą procesów twórczych." Waldemar Okoń, "Artysta o sobie. Autotematyzm w malarstwie polskim 2 połowy XIX w. na przykładzie 'Wojny' A. Grottgera i 'Malnacholii' J. Malczewskiego" (The Artist on Himself: Autothemes in Polish Painting in the Second half of the 19th Century on the Examples of A. Grottger's 'War" and J. Malczewski's "Melancholia'), *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 47 (1985): 271.

viewer, while the swirling figures in the interior of the studio belong to the imagined world of the artist figure.[295]

Malczewski's manipulations of space and commentary on the creative process find echoes in the literary criticism of Young Poland. Although direct allusions to contemporary Symbolist painting on the part of literary critics were rare, writers of the period such as Zenon Przesmycki, Stanisław Przybyszewski and Jerzy Żuławski drew specific distinctions between allegory and symbol and privileged the latter. Examination of their theories helps illuminate Malczewski's Symbolist work. The intimate nature of Young Poland activity in Krakow means that Malczewski would certainly have been aware of contemporary and parallel literary activity; artists and writers occupied the same social sphere and often came in contact through association with the same journals, public concerts and cabarets, and cafes. Frequently critics served as subjects for artists; in 1899 Stanisław Wyspiański created a pastel portrait of critic Jerzy Żuławski. In his discussion of Symbolism in 1902, Jerzy Żuławski explains his differing conceptions of the allegory and the symbol:

> I can clarify or present some type of complex synthesis of emotion or thought with the help of a synthesis extracted from the field of the senses, as something better known and evident. In such case I will make use of the allegory, the image. When, however, I am able to capture the very essence of the synthesis, some kind of system of mutual relations of its ingredients – and through the image, when I cannot present it differently, then I create a symbol.[296]

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[295] Ibid.

[296] "...to mogę jakąś zawiła syntezę uczuć czy myśli objaśnić lub przedstawić za pomocą syntezy z dziedziny zmysłów wziętej, jako czegoś lepiej znanego i naoczniejszego. Będę się wtedy posługiwał alegoria, obrazem. Gdy zaś zdołam uchwycić sama istotę syntezy, niejako ów wykładnik wzajemnego stosunku jej składników – i obrazowo, gdy już inaczej nie można, go przedstawić, to stworze symbol." Jerzy Żuławski, *Prolegomena. Uwagi i szkice*, 78-79.

For Żuławski, the allegory represents an intermediate stage of meaning, whereas the symbol is an end and a reality to be understood *a priori*.[297] This understanding of the symbol suggests that the value of a work of art is inherent to the work itself and not its peripheral relation to social or external phenomena.

In fact, to trace the history of art historical work on Malczewski, from critics contemporary with the artist to the most recent projects of the early 21st century, is to see the constant struggle between form and content that relates to the Symbolist project. The term "Symbolism," for critics of Malczewski's generation, was primarily understood as a reference to the various symbols employed by painters throughout the nineteenth century and only later connected to the painting of Young Poland artists.[298]

The first generation of Malczewski's critics, working within a Naturalist framework and contemporary with the artist himself, focused upon content, theme and subject matter. Their comments on formal execution in Malczewski's painting were limited to criticism where they perceived technical fault. Stanisław Witkiewicz (1851-1915), the most prominent naturalist critic in later 19th-century Poland, agitated for a new emphasis on painterly technique while simultaneously acknowledging the inherent artificiality of these techniques. His criticism of the

[297] Walter Benjamin's favoring of the baroque allegory over the symbol privileges the unfinished nature of the allegory and criticizes the romantic symbol for its false aura of completeness. In this sense, the conflicted nature of much of Malczewski's painting is ontologically more similar to Benjamin's allegory than the romantically inherited symbol. See Emily Braun, "Melancholy and the Modern Allegory," in *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism: Art and Politics Under Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 68-89. As Braun explains, modern allegory is characterized by unhinging the meaning from the referent. For a summary of Benjamin's work on allegory see Bainard Cowen, "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," *New German Critique*, no. 22 (1981): 109-122.

[298] For a discussion of the evolution of the use of Symbolism as a term in Polish art criticism, see Zofia Kruczkowska, *Główne tendencje w polskie krytyce sztuki: na podstawie wybranych czasopism literackich i artystycznych od połowy XIX wieku do współczesności*[Main Tendencies in Polish Art. Criticism: On the Basis of Selected Literary and Artistic Periodicals from the Second Half of the 19th Century to the Contemporary Era] (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Naukowe AP, 2002): 48.

tendency to focus on content as the only measure of value in painting encouraged a refocus on formal skills and helped broaden the range of critically acceptable content in art. Although the evolution of Witkiewicz's theories were responsible for preparing the ground for modernism in Polish painting, his criticism of Malczewski failed to take into account the artist's deliberate play with form and its impact on content. Witkiewicz bemoaned the gap between form and content in Malczewski's work and expressed regret that the dual talents, as he saw them, of painter and poet were at odds in the artist's work.[299] For Witkiewicz, the exacting nature and skillfully executed forms in Malczewski's work perhaps fail to fully express the fecund poetic ideas of the artist: "Occasionally one comes to regret, that from this deep poetry, from this richness of thought and emotion, one cannot know more than that which his pictures, with great talent but with narrow means of painting, show."[300] Contemporary critic Kazimierz Daniłowicz-Stralbicki also regretted that Malczewski was "too ideistic for our times and level of artistic education," focusing on the rebuslike nature of the artist's works shown at an exhibit at the Aleksander Krywult Gallery.[301] This tendency to ignore or berate Malczewski's purposeful formal distortions reveals the degree to which his particular brand of Symbolism was misunderstood by contemporary critics. One critic, Antoni Sygietyński, often compared the figures in Malczewski's paintings with the paper cutouts of peasant tradition in Poland.

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[299] For Witkiewicz, perfected artistic technique lay not in slavish imitation of external detail but in successful formal interpretation and manipulation of outside elements to reflect the individual vision of the artist. In this sense, Witkiewicz represented a significant break with naturalism. For a succinct summation of Witkiewicz, see Maria Olszaniecka, "At the Sources of Polish Modernism," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 21 (1987): 101. Anna Brzyski provides a careful chronology of Witkiewicz's growing influence in Polish art circles in her "Nationalism and Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Poland" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1999.)

[300] "Niekiedy przychodzi żałować, ze z tej głębokiej poezji, z tego bogactwa myśli i uczuć nie można znać więcej nad to, co z wielkim talentem, lecz z zacieśnionymi środkami malarstwa, ukazują jego obrazy." Stanisław Witkiewicz, „Jacek Malczewski (Fragment)," *Krytyka* no.2, 1903, reprinted in Juszczak, *Malarstwo Polskiego Modernizmu* [The Painting of Polish Modernism] (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2004): 482.

[301] "…zbyt może ideowym jak na nasze czasy i poziom wykształcenia artystycznego." Kazimierz Daniłowicz-Strzelbicki, „Z salonu Aleksandra Krywulta", Part I, *Wędrowiec* no. 47 (1900): 939.

Although Sygietyński clearly meant this comparison to be detrimental towards the artist, it is interesting to compare some of the possible motives at work behind both peasant tradition and Malczewski's style. In both cases, the cutout figure is not so much a re-representation of existing reality as it is a symbolic substitute for individual and abstract values.

As in the case of the cutout figure of *Thanatos*, Malczewski is not insisting on the real existence of the character within his created world, but rather on the importance of the "living analogy" cited by Przesmycki as the symbol in art. Ideational ties with peasant art would find later, intense flowering in the work of western synthetists such as Gauguin and Emile Bernard. Flatness, decorative quality, and a lack of clear focal points are all qualities criticized by Sygietyński and later valued by modernist painters. Along with formal values, Malczewski's interest in the content of Polish folklore has been documented and commented on by critics such as Kazimierz Wyka and the fairytale-like atmosphere in works such as *Little Goddess in the Mallows* recall contemporary Symbolist painting in other areas of Europe, such as Axel Gallen-Kallela's 1891 *Aino Myth* tryptych or Giovanni Segantini's *A Mermaid Being Robbed by Seagulls*.[302]

For Polish late-19th century art critics, formal experimentation such as that performed by Malczewski is a distracting and damaging means of expressing meaning. According to the artist's first-generation critics, the fundamental task of painting was to illustrate an idea to perfection. Despite an emerging emphasis on technical and formal skill encouraged by Stanisław Witkiewicz, the fundamental primacy of content over form remained strong in the first-generation criticism of Malczewski's work. In fact, the artist is referred to in contemporary

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[302] Kazimierz Wyka argues that Malczewski's "folklorism" forms one of the crucial axes of his work and that it is inherently linked with his literariness as a painter. Wyka, *Thanatos i Polska*, 9.

writings as a "painter-poet," thereby implying that his technical skills are supplanted by an unusually high power of ideation.[303] As contemporary critic Władysław Prokesch summed up, Malczewski is "an idealist in content, and a realist in form."[304] This intense focus on content continued in writings on the artist after World War II and helped create the reflexive perception of Malczewski as a "literary" painter.[305]

This enduring understanding of Malczewski as a literary painter ignores the implications of the artist's particular brand of Symbolism. Stanisław Witkiewicz's assumption that the painting can only show or reveal what is painted physically on the canvas ignores one of the fundamental tenets of Symbolist philosophy – that of the transitive nature of the work. For most of Malczewski's critics, the artist's formal distortions hinder the viewer's understanding of a painting's content. In their view, if form is the quiet and unobtrusive carrier of meaning, then Malczewski's defiant distortions and stylistic changes can only distract from the effectiveness of his artistic message. The role that these distortions may play in encouraging the viewer to an understanding hinted at, but not fully contained in, the painting means that the Symbolist work of art is transitive in nature.

Although misunderstood in Malczewski's painting by contemporary critics, formal dissonance was more readily accepted in the poetry of Young Poland. A telling example of this is the reception of Stanisław Wyspiański's play "The Wedding [Wesele]," possibly the landmark work of Mloda Polska drama. The play is set at the wedding of a real-life modernist poet,

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[303] See, for example, Wladyslaw Prokesch, "Obrazy Jacka Malczewskiego," *Kurier Warszawski*, 1903, nr. 191, reprinted in Juszcak, *Malarstwo polskiego modernizmu*, 484-88. Prokesch refers to such paintings as Anhelli as "illustrations," indicating their indebtedness to a primary source outside of themselves. With this assertion, Prokesch associates Malczewski's art with a 19th century conception of didactic art and denies its modernist potential.

[304] Ibid., 487.

[305] Kazimierz Wyka, *Thanatos i Polska*, 9.

Lucjan Rydel, to a peasant, Jadwiga Mikołajczykowna, in a village on the outskirts of Krakow. Throughout the course of the wedding festivities, entities from the past enter and leave the action. Wyspiański is purposefully vague as to how we are to understand and interpret these figures – among them Stańczyk, the court jester of the Jagiellonian rulers made famous by Jan Matejko's painting, Hetman Franciszek Ksawery Branicki, a historical traitor to the Polish nation and opponent of the Constitution of the 3rd of May and Jakub Szela, the leader of a peasant revolt in Galicia in 1846. They may be ghosts, apparitions, or figments of the imagination of those more "real" characters at the wedding. Because each apparition is imprinted with specific historical importance, the values and implications of their presence within the drama would have been clear to an educated contemporary audience. This contrast between "real" characters – the guests at the wedding and the family members of the bride and groom – and the apparitions from the past and from legend throws the cycle of action into question, and arrests the flow of time in the drama. The characters' presence hints at a sphere beyond that we see represented in the action. In this sense, Wyspiański's conflation of multiple worlds within his drama is analogous to Malczewski's conflation of multiple dimensions and realities in his paintings. As a fellow student of Jan Matejko, members of the artist's group *Sztuka*, and professor at the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts, Malczewski would certainly have been aware of Wyspiański's work. As 19th-century critic Stanisław Lack stated in 1911 in one of the first art history books devoted to Young Poland:

> Malczewski gives the picture and its interpretation simultaneously. As a result of this, in portraits the character of the pictured person is for Malczewski an indifferent matter; it is similar to the person, that's obvious, but it does not express itself alone. The painter interprets it with the help of symbols…Malczewski's art is characterized by decorativeness, but in this earlier sense, that his pictures, large or small, intended for a particular place or not, are the fulfillment of a different impulse, one not in the picture.

> The painter chooses a type overwhelmingly known from the compositions of others; not the text but the relation of the painter to the text not the text will be expressed.[306]

In more recent scholarship, this divide between form and content in the work of Malczewski and the difficulties it has presented for interpretation have been more thoroughly addressed.[307] The adoption of *Melancholia* immediately after its debut by the general and critical public as a national statement led to an almost exclusive focus on iconography at the expense of artistic analysis, whereas it is now recognized that the key issue of *Melancholia* is its contradictory combination of flatness and volume and its contribution to the interpretation and the iconography of the work. *Melancholia*'s intense disturbance of the reign of illusion typical of nineteenth-century art calls to mind Rosenblum's description of *Melancholia* as "stretching the foundations of a nineteenth-century art education to the breaking point."[308] The compelling content of Malczewski's painting, charged with association for the contemporary educated Polish viewer, encouraged critics to put aside or summarily dismiss Malczewski's peculiar formal manipulations, manipulations that embody the strategies of Symbolism. By making use of these formal distortions, Malczewski's paintings offered an innovative interpretation of their well-

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[306] „Malczewski daje bowiem obraz i zarazem interpretację. Skutkiem tego w portretach np. charakter osoby wyobrażonej jest dla Malczewskiego rzeczą obojętną; osoba podobna jest zupełnie, to widoczne, lecz się sama nie wyraża. Malarz ją interpretuje za pomocą znaków...Sztukę Malczewskiego cechuje dekoratywność, lecz w tym, dawnym znaczeniu, że jego obrazy, wielkie czy małe, przeznaczone lub nie dla jakiegoś miejsca, są uzupełnieniem czynnika innego, którego w obrazie nie ma...Malarz wybiera typ przeważnie znani z kompozycji innych, tekst wyrażony nie będzie, lecz wyrażony będzie stosunek wyobraźni malarza do tekstu." Stanisław Lack, *Sztuka Polska. Malarstwo* [Polish Art. – Painting], Feliks Jasieński and Adam Lada-Cybulski, eds. (Kraków : Drukarnia W. L. Anczyca i Spółki: 1903):39. In an interview, Malczewski claimed that Wyspiański was inspired by *Melancholia* and *Vicious Circle* in his creation of *Wesele*. This comparison reinforces Malczewski's understanding of the strategic parallels between Wyspiański's literary Symbolism and his own Symbolism in painting. J. Brzękowski, "Jacek Malczewski o sobie [Jacek Malczewski on Himself]," *Wiadomość Literackie* 30, no. 82 (1925): 1. In criticism of Malczewski's entire oeuvre, the „poetic" nature of his Symbolist paintings is often opposed to the „prose" of his earlier, more naturalistic works. See, for instance, Andrzej Jakimowicz, *Malczewski i jego epoka*, 98.

[307] "W rozmowach o Malczewskim ambicjonowano się tym, aby rozszyfrować złożoną strukturę symbolu w sztuce, przerzucano na malarstwo metodę badania literatury i funkcje symbolu w niej. Nie rozszyfrowano obrazów, jako tworów pędzla i farby. Ta strona twórczości Malczewskiego pozostała w cieniu." Jacek Sempoliński, „Skłócona spoistość [Troubled Coexistence]" *Miesięcznik Literacki* 1969 (4): 56.

[308] Rosenblum, *1900*, 36.

known content and break the chain of inevitable associations in earlier work with similar themes by Jan Matejko or Artur Grottger. Contemporary critics failed to recognize this intentional break with Malczewski's predecessors, and while the artist was often praised for either his technical skill or choice of content, criticism that recognized the ways in which he synthesized both remained rare until the late twentieth century. Malczewski's Symbolism does not rely exclusively on the allegorical fantasies of *gedankenmalerei*, nor does it dismiss the artistic foundations of naturalism and the didactic focus on content of earlier nineteenth-century painting. In combining elements of spatial disjunction and evocative ambiguities, Malczewski's work should be examined in the context of the "in-between" so familiar to Symbolist theory and embodied in its chief European practitioners.

Landscape painter Jan Stanisławski presents another case of an oeuvre that does not conform to traditional categories of Symbolism. The examination of his paintings and prints reveals formal manipulations that, like those of Malczewski, elude classification and have particular resonance in the context of early modernism in Poland. Stanisławski's work was traditionally grouped with Impressionist painters. In spite of this, it is closer in style to that of Western synthetic Symbolism. Unlike Malczewski, Stanisławski painted almost exclusively landscape throughout his career. The artist's early work is highly realistic; as his career progressed Stanisławski's landscapes became more synthetic, verging upon the abstract and markedly diverging from the aims and appearance of Impressionism.[309]

[309] Despite this fact, the only significant study of Stanisławski and Symbolism dates to Wiesław Juszczak's 1974 study of the artist Wiesław Juszczak, *Jan Stanisławski* (Warszawa: Ruch, 1972.)

Looking at Stanisławski's work confounds the distinction between "pure" abstraction and representational Symbolism. The use of the term "pure" in modernist context calls to mind the phrase "pure abstraction" so often used to refer to early abstract art by Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian and others, and implies that this art contains more value than that assigned to allegorical painting. Stanisławski's adherence to recognizable form belies the traditional understanding of abstraction as a liberating phenomenon in early modernism – as W.J.T. Mitchell described it, the "quest-romance in which heroic artists search for the holy grail of pure abstraction, smashing the false, illusionistic images of mere "nature" to find a spiritual essence…"[310]

Art historian Wiesław Juszczak traces the emergence of pure Symbolism in Stanisławski's work through the analysis of three paintings: *Abandoned Windmill* of 1883 (fig. 92), *Village-Mullein* of 1890 (fig. 93) and *Barns in Pustowarnia* of 1905 (fig. 94). The pastoral scene in *Abandoned Windmill* is allegorical – here the figure of the windmill functions as a trigger for the viewer in order to evoke a familiar mood of rural simplicity and contemplation. By contrast, the mullein plant in the right foreground of *Village-Mullein* is a subject as well as an object, a "soloist against the orchestra of the background." Juszczak argues that the plant is

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[310] W.J.T. Mitchell, "*Ut Pictura Theoria*: Abstract Painting and the Repression of Language," *Critical Inquiry* 15 (Winter 1989): 348-371 discusses the problematic aspects of accepting the notion of "pure abstraction" as a complete break with a language of signification. It is important to note that this notion of pure abstraction was also used by artists themselves; as Piet Mondrian stated in his essay "Neoplasticism in Painting," "The truly modern artist understands the abstract factor in the experience of beauty; he is aware that this experience is cosmic, universal. And because man is an adherent only of that which is universal, abstract plasticism appears to be a necessary conclusion, resulting from that state of awareness." Piet Mondrian, "Neoplasticism in Painting," in Elżbieta Grabska, ed., *Artyści o sztuce* [Artists on Art] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1977): 394-397. Juszczak makes the case that the closest painter to Stanisławski is Jacek Malczewski, arguing that both share a common "Symbolistic relation to the object" in their work. Juszczak's apparent willingness to overlook the obvious formal differences in the work of these two painters points up the shortcomings in his strict distinction between naturalist painting, with which he groups Symbolism, and modernism as demonstrated in Expressionism.

imbued with "personality," transforming the scene of the painting into high psychological drama.[311]

Indeed, the plant's prominent placement in the composition and its flamboyant curve encourage the viewer's attention. The visual dynamism created by the curve renders the plant slightly anthropomorphic and invites comparisons to Wyspiański's cavorting *Capsheaves,* as well as foreshadowing the organic emphasis of secession style. Standing against the rectilinear background of village architecture and low, long horizon line, the plant is highlighted as a living presence and its intensity of existence is rendered forcefully through its isolated position. This foregrounding of an individual element in Stanisławski's painting echoes the theory of Young Poland writer and modernist critic Zenon Przesmycki, who also states that infinite reality was contained within the inner being of every being and phenomenon, no matter how insignificant, and that it is the task of the Symbolist artist to open a temporary window on this infinite reality.[312]

Another example of an inanimate protagonist is in Stanisławski's *Barns in Pustowarnia*. The composition of *Barns* is characterized by an odd tension between the upper two-thirds of the picture, made up of a cloudy sky, and the lower third, composed of two barns situated in the midst of a vast meadow. The visual domination of the sky is accomplished not only through an imbalance of size, but also through the thick, bravura brushstrokes Stanisławski employs in creating separate clouds. In contrast to the insistent presence of two looming clouds in the composition's foreground, the more delicately rendered barns and fields in the foreground could be easily relegated to earlier Naturalist landscape painting. Additionally, the tension between

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[311] Juszczak, *Jan Stanisławski*, 73.

[312] Przesmycki, "Wstęp," X.

opposing models of painting in the lower and upper sections of the composition purposely calls attention to the artificiality of the created image, resulting in an additional dynamic inherent to the Symbolist motif of the cleft between observed and transcendent realities.

Contemporary critics of the artist, most prominently Przesmycki, made the case for the scientific objectivity of Stanisławski's work; Przesmycki praised the painter for his powers of synthesis and his ability to perform that, "which can only be called symbolization; that is, to enclose in single details the emotions of nature in its entirety."[313] At the same time, purity is generally attached to notions of abstraction in the modernist tradition and a rejection of the positivist belief in the ability of scientific inquiry to determine the ultimate nature of reality.[314] Stanisławski's work invites a reevaluation of the notion of purity as exclusive to abstraction.[315]

In the later years of his career, Stanisławski's painting loses all passing resemblance to Impressionism in terms of both style and theory. It does not seek to recreate a passing visual impression, nor are forms completely disintegrated. Instead, they are at once simplified, flattened and made more monolithic. One of the most distinctive examples of this tendency occurs in the artist's rendering of Tyniec monastery in *Moon-Tyniec* from 1902 (fig. 95). The painting shows a Benedictine monastery located in the Krakovian suburb of Tyniec, situated on top of a cliff at the Vistula River. By creating extremely simplified form and using a limited palette, Stanisławski calls attention, at once, to the disintegration of form and its stubborn

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[313] „do tego, co jedynie należałoby nazywać symbolizowaniem, to jest, do zamykania w pojedynczym szczególe przeczucia całej natury." Zenon Przesmycki, "Salon Krywulta," 167.

[314] For a discussion of this worldview among early abstract artists such as Kandinsky, see Donald Kuspit, "Utopian Protest in Early Abstract Art," *Art Journal* 29 (1970): 430-437.

[315] The notion of "pure form" was also famously articulated in the Polish context by Expressionist writer, critic and artist Witkacy (Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz) in the interwar period. The case of Stanisławski illustrates that it might be useful to extend these notions across established chronological boundaries. See Christine Kiebuzinska, "Witkacy's Theory of Pure Form: Change, Dissolution and Uncertainty," *South Atlantic Review* 58 (1993): 59-83.

coherence. Allowing individual brushstrokes to remain visible in the monastery's reflection, the artist reveals the constructed nature of the composition. While the viewer can follow and recreate the horizontal actions of Stanisławski's brush below the cliff, the overlapping dabs of white, black and gray paint that make up the cliff itself indicate the built-up process of creating form within the composition. Just as Malczewski calls attention to the conventions of perspective by distorting them in his Symbolist work, Stanisławski calls attention to the limits of form by emphasizing and recontouring its boundaries in his painting.

It might be argued that this attention to the limits of form is a type of naturalism; as the transcendent reality perceived by the Symbolist exists above and beyond the form. But the crucial difference between Stanisławski's departure from reality and that of the impressionists exists in the artist's deliberate abstraction of form. In this sense, Stanisławski is a precursor of Mondrian, who began from perceived form and continued, in traceable fashion, to his entirely abstract compositions of the 1910's.[316] In her description of Central European Symbolism in the 1890's, Katalin Keserű relates efforts such as Stanisławski's to early modernism:

> …the duality of real and reflected (unreal, artistic) worlds, of the external and the internal declare the ability of the picture to open and represent totality. These pictures also reflect upon the widely entertained neo-Platonist views and problems of the 1890's which included: the visualization of the invisible world or the "mirroring" of the invisible, anticipating two different lines of abstraction and exposing in the mirror image the autonomous world of art.[317]

In this understanding, Stanisławski's work represents a significant break with the underlying philosophy of Naturalism, as the "autonomous world of art" ultimately rejects the mimesis of outward appearance.

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[316]Compare, for example, Mondrian's paintings *Avond (Evening) Red Tree* from 1908, *Gray Tree* from 1911, and *Composition No. 11 [Composition in Line and Color]* from 1913.

[317] Keserű, "Changing Values," 31.

Another work in this vein is the artist's *Poplars* from 1900 (fig. 96). The composition is divided into two sections by the horizontal line of the riverbank. The lower half of the composition is indebted to Impressionist technique – by breaking up sections of the water's surface and recreating fragments of the poplar's reflection on the river, Stanisławski recreates the visual appearance of water ruffled by wind and manages to convey a sense of depth from the foreground to the river bank. As in *Barns in Pustowarnia*, the upper half of the composition has already abandoned impressionistic technique and relies upon a lightening of color in order to evoke a slight sense of perspective. However, the poplars and sky are strikingly flat in appearance, encouraging the viewer to perceive the upper half of the composition as a flat surface filled in with various shapes, bringing to mind the style of the Nabis.

What separates Stanisławski's picture from such Nabi compositions as Paul Ranson's *Nabis Landscape* (1890) and Paul Sérusier's *Talisman* (1888) is his simultaneous use of differing models of perspective and purposeful artifice within a single composition. Another version of *Poplars* (fig. 97), painted the same year, maintains this peculiar division of three-dimensional perspective and flatness. *Cloud* (1903) (fig. 98), at first glance a naturalistic, if roughly modelled, pastoral scene, quickly resolves into an abstract composition of areas of blue, white, and green, only to regain perspective upon further examination thanks to the modeling of the underside of the uppermost cloud, the protagonist of the composition. While the scene in its entirety is more effectively stylistically integrated than earlier works such as *Barns in Pustowarnia*, its continuing perspectival tension engages the viewer's active participation and

encourages what Teresa Stepnowska, in her discussion of Stanisławski's work, termed "an escape beyond the limits of this world into the worlds of ideas and abstract symbols."[318]

In other works from Stanisławski's later career, the tension between deep perspective and flatness continues. The artist's *Night* (1903) (fig. 99) contains a limited number of objects: two cottages, two trees and a night sky with two clouds. Thanks to blurred outlines, juxtaposition of deeper and lighter colors in undulating rhythm throughout the picture and lack of a clearly determinable horizon, the viewer's eye focuses and refocuses in attempts to determine the parameters of space between the houses and trees. Stanisławski's bright stains of paint and minimal modeling (depth is recognizable only in the undersides of both clouds) reinforce a sense of flatness and decorativeness. *Night* also exemplifies art historian Jan Cavanaugh's characterization of Stanisławski's art as a combination of "impressionism, *nastrojowy* [*stimmungmalerei*] color and postimpressionist form."[319] Cavanaugh's description invites further analysis of the implications of each of these elements. Her discussion of *nastrojowy* painting in Poland relates it to the mood painting of traditional allegorical Symbolism. At the same time, the presence of what Cavanaugh terms Stanisławski's "postimpressionist form" definitively separates a work such as *Night* from the nocturnes of contemporaries Józef Pankiewicz or Ludwik de Laveaux.[320] As in the case of Malczewski, Stanisławski's Symbolism

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[318] "ucieczka poza granice tegoż świata w świat idei i abstrakcyjnych symboli." Teresa Stepnowska, *Jan Stanisławski* (Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1976): 39.

[319] Jan Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In: Early Modern Polish Art 1890-1914* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000): 120.

[320] Aleksandra Melbechowska-Luty's analysis of Ludwik de Laveaux's nocturnal scenes, for example, reinforces traditional understandings of Symbolism as defined by mood within a given composition. For Melbechowska-Luty, de Laveaux's Symbolism "stroszcza się w nastrojowości, pierwiastku mitycznym objawiającym intensywność ludzkiego przeżycia i przeczucie spraw ostatecznych [is erected in moodiness, in the mythic element revealing the intensity of human existence and the presentiment of ultimate matters.]" This criticism is closer to literary description than formal analysis and reveals the affinities of mood painting and poetic Symbolism, as well as the inability of such a critical mode to address the formal distortions of Stanisławski's work and their implications for

is syncretic and represents a challenge to traditionally understood synthetic Symbolism as practiced by the post-impressionists and Nabis.

In the first years of the twentieth century, Stanisławski collaborated with Zenon Przesmycki, the editor of the modernist Warsaw-based periodical *Chimera*, sending him lithographs for selected issues. Stanisławski's techniques of perspectival tension translate successfully into this medium, as in the case of *Tyniec* from 1903 (fig. 100). In contrast to the painted composition of the preceding year, the lithograph's point of view focuses on the Vistula river from a vantage point on the cliff directly underneath the monastery. The composition is made up of four principal areas: the opposite bank of the Vistula in green at the upper limit, the bulk of the cliff along the right side, the body of water in the center and a portion of riverbank with plants along the bottom. The sources of the reflections in the water appear to be trees along the far riverbank. While a viewer familiar with the topography of Tyniec might more readily identify the elements of the composition, the entire scene invites a decorative, almost abstract reading, despite the perspective offered by the reflections in the water and the cliffside plants projecting over the water. Indeed, examination of an earlier painting from the same vantage point, *Evening on the Vistula – Tyniec* (1902) (fig. 101), reveals the degree to which traditional perspective has been abandoned in the lithograph. Continuing his engagement with the Tyniec motif, Stanisławski's latest rendering of this scene from 1904 (*Tyniec at Dusk*) (fig. 102) at once solidifies the bulk of the cliff and monastery and features the crudest, most intensely material form of the group of renderings. While Mondrian's series of tree motifs results in eventual abstraction, Stanisławski's manipulations of form remain unresolved, set in a lasting pattern of tension. Cavanaugh suggests that Stanisławski's reluctance toward total abstraction is related to

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Symbolism in painting. Aleksandra Melbechowska-Luty, "O nokturnach Ludwika de Laveaux [On the Nocturnes of Ludwik de Laveaux]" *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 3-4 (1985): 299-312.

his attachment to national themes.[321] It can be further argued that general Symbolist philosophy offers a useful avenue for interpretation of Stanisławski's suspended form; in the terminology of Aurier, the artist's compositions are an abstracted synthesis of external phenomena.

As in the case of Malczewski, early criticism of Stanisławski's painting seems unable to come to terms with the artist's formal experimentation and often resorts to statements that appear more aptly suited for Naturalist landscape. Jan Zakrzewski praises Stanisławski's "unusually subtle observation of nature, in the form of juicy, perfectly painted and drawn landscapes," ignoring the obvious manipulation of form in the artist's work. Later on in the same paragraph, however, the critic finds himself resorting to the vocabulary of Symbolism when he instinctively declares that "Even these small, miniature landscapes are treated broadly; in them is visible the attempt to grasp the entirety of a given motif…"[322] Zakrzewski's distinction between detail and whole recalls Juszczak's statements about microcosms and macrocosms, also echoed in Rosenblum's arguments about the Romantic tradition in European painting.

Other contemporary critics, sensing the unique formal manipulation of Stanisławski's work, resorted to inexact poetic language when describing his work.[323] Przesmycki described Stanisławski's landscapes in musical terms, arguing that the painter functioned as musician and

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[321] Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, 126.

[322] "…nadzwyczajnie subtelnych obserwacjy natury, w postaci soczystych, doskonale malowanych i rysowanych pejzażów...Nawet te drobne, miniaturowe pejzażyki traktuje on szeroko; widoczne jest w nich dążenie do ujęcia ogółu danego motywu." Jan Zakrzewski, „Jan Stanisławski. Sylwetka [Jan Stanisławski. Silhouette.] *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 10 (1898): 192.

[323] "…prawdziwe poematy o naturze." Jan Kleczyński, in Feliks Jasieński and Adam Lada-Cybulski, eds., *Sztuka polska: malarstwo* [Polish Art.: Painting] (Lviv: H. Altenberga, 1904): 42.

proclaiming each canvas to be a "piece of the great mysteries."[324] By implying the esoteric nature of Stanisławski's work, Przesmycki's analysis calls to mind the elitist and rarified mentality of Sâr Peladan's Symbolist activities in Paris. Contemporary critic Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki contributed to this characterization of Stanisławski as artist-adept with his proclamation that "Nature itself was already a composition to Stanisławski, not a basis for composition," and that the artist's compositions in comparison to those of other landscape painters were "more precise, closer to the mysteries of being."[325]

This attribution of unusually sensitive powers of perception to the artist is perfectly in accordance with contemporary understandings of the artist as seer. While Malczewski was often praised for the appropriate content of his work, praise of Stanisławski focused on his artistic temperament and his ability to reveal a higher, previously invisible reality through his landscapes. In this sense, the early classification of Stanisławski as an Impressionist artist is at odds with the purely optical emphasis of such a style.[326]

Zenon Przesmycki, made a rare attempt to precisely analyze Stanisławski's formal process in painting, describing the artist's style as follows: "…in deep syntheses more and more often glimmered ungraspable, otherworldly, - one would say, metaphysical elements and accents; bold stylization of lines and transpositions of hues occasionally reached the purely rhythmic

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[324] "rąbka wielkich tajemnic." Zenon Przesmycki, "Fragment pracy o Stanisławskim [Fragment of work on Stanisławski]" in Feliks Jasieński and Adam Lada-Cybulski, *Sztuka polska: malarstwo*, reprinted in Wiesław Juszczak, *Malarstwo polskiego modernizmu*, 379.

[325] "Stanisławskiemu sama natura była już kompozycją, nie zaś podstawą do kompozycji...ściślejsza, bliższa tejemnej istoty." Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, "Wystawa prac uczniów J. Stanisławskiego [The Exhibition of the Work of the Pupils of J. Stanisławski]," in *Jan Stanisławski. Wystawa Pośmiertna* [Jan Stanisławski. Posthumous Exhibition] (Krakow: Stefan Filipkiewicz i Henryk Szczygliński, 1907): pages unnumbered.

[326] See, for example, Marian Olszewski, „Odczyt [Lecture]," *Nasz Kraj* (1908), reprinted in Wiesław Juszczak, *Malarstwo polskiego modernizmu*, 394-95.

essence of nature, reached her mysteriously symbolic meanings."[327] By referring to Stanisławski's deliberate manipulation of line and color, Przesmycki implicitly recognizes the formal distortions that separate the artist from his predecessors in landscape painting – acknowledging not only Stanisławski's higher "vision," but also the innovative painterly means used by the artist to achieve this vision on canvas. As Cavanaugh has argued, Przesmycki's association of the artist's work with his Symbolist concept of "living analogy" meant that the critic recognized the critical absence of traditional allegory in Stanisławski's painting and its implications for the development of a modernist Symbolism (although Przesmycki never explicitly labeled Stanisławski a Symbolist.)[328]

The tools used by Stanisławski (and Malczewski) -- flattening of space, stylization of line, distortion of perspective – immediately signify to the viewer that the artist is in command of the means of illusion and throws them into question by exposing their illusory nature. This purposeful distortion has been discussed by Reinhold Heller in his analysis of the formal qualities that unite different Symbolist paintings. In his description of Edgar Degas' painting *Portrait of Mme. Dietz-Monnin (Portrait after a Costume Ball)*, Heller notes the varying techniques and media used on a single canvas, describing the resulting effect as follows: "…the emphatic presence of the technique and the material in the produced image achieves the effect of accenting the artificiality of the picture – its deviation from the visual model of natural forms

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[327] "…w głębokich syntezach coraz więcej migotało nieuchwytnych, zaświatowych, - rzec by, metafizycznych pierwiastków i akcentów; śmiałe stylizacje linii i transpozycje barw sięgały niekiedy aż do czysto rytmicznych esencji natury, aż do tajemniczo symbolowych jej znaczeń." Zenon Przesmycki, "Fragmenty pracy o Stanisławskim [Fragment of a Study of Stanisławski]," 382.

[328] Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, 124. Przesmycki's concept of the living analogy differs from Aurier's notion of synthesis in its understanding of the relation of what is painted to external reality – Przesmycki explicitly stated that the living analogy or symbol does not synthetize, in contrast to allegory, but is a separate entity with its own life. In the case of both critics, however, the Symbolist project entails an appeal to a higher reality that transcends the domain of the painted image. Zenon Przesmycki, "Z psychologii sztuki [From the Psychology of Art]," *Chimera* 6 (1904):401.

rather than its adherence to an illusionistic practice that seeks to deny the reality of medium as well as of support."[329] In Stanisławski's *Poplars*, the combination of Impressionist brushstroke with flat, broad areas of color also deviates from the Naturalistic model, actively working against illusionism. Based upon his analyses of selected Symbolist works of the fin-de-siècle, Heller suggests that it is this very awareness of surface and, by extension, the inherent artificiality of the art object, that characterizes the Symbolist project and places it in opposition to other "allegorical" works from the same period. Relating this insistence on artificiality to Symbolism's roots in the work of Schopenhauer and others, Heller describes a natural pessimism towards the outward appearance of objects common to Symbolist painters.

Heller's thesis offers an intriguing escape from the poles of allegorical and synthetic Symbolism. At its core is the issue of formal manipulation on the part of the artist, but it does not exclude the tendency to return to specific fin-de-siècle themes on the part of Symbolist artists. The content-based designation of allegorical Symbolism and the formal criteria of synthetic Symbolism appear to have little in common, raising the question of what defines Symbolism as a unified and separate style. While criticism of Symbolist literature and poetry has encompassed certain thematic concerns as well as formal devices, the discussion of Symbolist painting has tended to deny one at the expense of the other. The clearest means of classification has taken place by way of theme, but the work of Edvard Munch, Jan Toorop and Ferdinand Heller, while sharing the theme of the femme fatale, are so very different in terms of form and execution that their divergent approaches demand further investigation. A clearly integrated criticism of these works would take into account theme, formal approach, and Symbolist theory in order to create a multi-faceted interpretation.

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[329] Heller, "Symbolism," 149.

While Symbolist painting in general has been critically analyzed with too little attention paid to the critical tenets of literary Symbolism, Polish Symbolist painting has grappled with an additional critical problem, that of its transplantation from abroad. It has been argued and accepted that formal innovation and fin-de-siècle theme are in large part grafts from foreign sources, and thus Symbolist painting is not an organic native development, but a less daring version of a Western European original. In this sense, the critical analysis of Polish Symbolist painting has been doubly diluted.

In fact, neither Jacek Malczewski's figural paintings nor Jan Stanisławski's landscapes fit neatly into the category of allegorical Symbolism or synthetic Symbolism. These two artists are emblematic among the spectrum of Polish Symbolist painters because of the narrowness of the critical lens through which they have been traditionally viewed. Other Symbolists such as Wojciech Weiss and Witold Wojtkiewicz have been labeled as Expressionists, while Impressionist painters such as Józef Pankiewicz and Władysław Podkowiński have been assigned to the Symbolist camp due to the melancholy content of their oeuvres. Applying either category of Symbolism to the work of Malczewski and Stanisławski means that their original brands of formal distortion slip between accepted boundaries of definition and has allowed their style to remain largely unexamined in the literature to date.

In fact, the unique set of circumstances and solutions arrived at by Malczewski and Stanisławski invites a blurring of the categorizations of Symbolism and a reversal of the prohibitive attitude towards work that transcends this traditional categorization. Without abandoning earlier motifs, themes and styles common to the naturalist legacy of nineteenth-century Poland, Malczewski and Stanisławski employed devices borrowed from the theories of Symbolist literature – dissonance, nuance, exaggeration and ellipse. While these formal

distortions appear, at first glance, less strikingly original than those of Western European Symbolism, their very subtlety indicates the careful balance of both artists between tradition and modernity.

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In recent years, the critical understanding of Symbolism has undergone significant transformation. Symbolist painting, once viewed as a solipsistic and cultish offshoot of modernism with limited social relevance, has been explored through the lens of the political and cultural milieu of its time, and has been reevaluated as a direct, albeit nuanced, response to rapid and complex changes in the societies of late nineteenth-century Europe. Scholars have demonstrated how the motifs of the style, once viewed as a celebration of the irrational and a result of flights of whimsy on the part of the artist, are actually strikingly appropriate to the clashing realities of their time. The growth of the field of psychology and the decline of established religion encouraged the cultural expression of the doubts left in their wake. Tropes of Symbolist painting such as the femme fatale and the degenerate individual, for example, have been recast in art historical scholarship as crystallizations of contemporary fears about disease and the pemicious effects of urban industrial life. Likewise, Symbolist formal devices such as deformation, ambiguous perspective and disjunction enact new understandings of psychic space and interiority associated with the realities of urban existence.

In Polish territory, these same social and cultural changes were repeated

on a much more modest scale, particularly in the urban centers of Krakow and Warsaw. Polish Symbolist painting was not without references to urbanity, degeneration, and the new psychology of the mind, especially in the work of artists such as Wojciech Weiss and Stanisław Wyspiański. The not insignificant overlap between the tropes of Polish Symbolism and those of its Western counterpart might, at first glance, lead one to believe that the former was essentially similar to the latter in its aims, goals, and cultural reception, and that Polish Symbolists were relying upon similar devices in order to tease out the commonalities between their everyday reality and that of artists across Europe.

Such a reading, however, would ignore the unique complexities of the Polish cultural landscape at the fin-de-siècle - a landscape that was charged with continuing a nineteenth-century artistic tradition that directly engaged issues of statehood, identity and nationalism. Due to the political subjugation of the state of Poland, Polish Symbolists were the inheritors of an obligatory cultural mission that often had didactic, if not messianic, overtones - a mission of maintaining social consciousness of the Polish state and Polish identity for the greater public.

Symbolists were emotionally burdened with this heritage and its resulting critical and public expectations; instead of using the Symbolist style to escape from the burden of national expression, however, they manipulated its language in entirely novel ways, transforming the style in the process. The irony of expressing ideas about statehood and civic unity through something as tenuous and mystical as Symbolist motifs may seem contradictory. However, Symbolist tropes - in their very ambiguity and multivalence - were ideally suited to express nationalist desires and concerns. In the case of other "marginal" areas of Europe, Symbolism has

been freshly reevaluated as a means for expressing these concerns and ideas. Polish Symbolism, too, benefits from a fresh examination in the context of national identity.

As reluctant spokespeople for the nation, Polish Symbolists, the majority of whom originated from landed but impoverished gentry, were often of two minds about Polish tradition. On the one hand they strove to be modem and eagerly absorbed examples from Western Europe, the source of Symbolist ideas. On the other hand, they were loath to entirely turn their backs on the source of their own identity, which was tied up in typically nineteenth-century notions of land, soul, class and race.

Their pessimism was reinforced by Polish cultural tradition, in which history and Christian cultural heritage reinforced the understanding of the nation as a martyr writ large. This cultural tradition, heavily endowed with didacticism, stipulated that artists make use of cultural motifs with unambiguous associations in order to incite public nationalist sentiment. Symbolists were able to retain and enrich that tradition without separating themselves from modernist change.

The natural pessimism of European modernism found unlikely reinforcement with this native tradition and imbued the Polish fin-de-siècle cultural environment with a kind of melancholy best encapsulated in the works of Malczewski. In Polish Symbolism, tropes such as the angel, the femme fatale, and the living landscape expressed many of the same concerns as they do in the art of Western European Symbolists. Simultaneously, these tropes became stand-ins for the artist's ideas about identity and nationhood. They not only reflected but also filtered understandings of identity, soul and nation, allowing for a more nuanced expression of longstanding preoccupations.

The transformation of Symbolist motifs in the Polish context was accompanied by

formal experimentation that made traditional categories of Symbolism problematic. By combining formal distortion of space, ambiguity, and abstraction with straightforward representation and legibility, Polish Symbolism maintained ties to earlier tradition while adopting the innovations of modernity on its own terms. The standard practices of Westem Symbolism, combined with references to local realities created a heady mix of tradition and innovation.

Polish Symbolists expanded the known boundaries of the style and its inherent capacity for social and cultural expression. Symbolism represented a unique solution to the quandary of modernity in Poland - an understanding that seemed, at first glance, to reject tradition, retained allusions to Polish heritage while incorporating the formal innovations and strategies of modernism.

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