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LINGUISTIC INNOVATION IN BOLESŁAW LESMIAN: MYTHEMATICS AND
EXTROPY

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LINGUISTIC INNOVATION IN BOLESŁAW LEŚMIAN:

MYTHEMATICS AND EXTROPY

by

Alexandra Chciuk-Celt

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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1984

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Abstract

LINGUISTIC INNOVATION IN BOLESŁAW LESMIAN: MYTHEMATICS
AND EXTROPY

by

Alexandra Chciuk-Celt

Adviser: Professor Gregory Rabassa

This paper examines the biography, historical context, poetic philosophy, and linguistic innovations of the Polish poet Bolesław Leśmian and contains an appendix which consists of 67 of his poems plus English translations. Each poem is translated twice: once in a completely literal, word-for-word manner which is neither poetry nor English, but which furnishes valuable insight into the thought pattern and sentence structure of the original; the second is in verse, since the poet himself considered rhythm and rhyme essential to poetry because they allow words to be classified in a manner not subject to the dictates of logical content. The poet generally used the thirteen-foot syllabotonic verse traditional in Polish; the translations were made into rhymed alexandrines or iambic pentameter, which are equally traditional in English. The translations are followed by notes containing information on the genesis and interpretation of individual poems, plus a discussion of translation problems encountered.

A quarter-century before such things became fashionable, Leśmian was already exploring the roots of poetry in primeval non-rational thinking and magic. Rather than a pointless duplication of reality, he strove

for alternative states of consciousness and for a depiction of ongoing metamorphoses, especially failed ones. He was able to accomplish this thanks to the ability of the Polish language to express aborted or dynamic transitions by means of prefixes and suffixes; English translation thus frequently involved the invention of equivalent neologisms, the combination of truncated but recognizable words, or the formation of adverbial expressions. It was deemed that the virtual inaccessibility to non-Slavs of this poet and the importance of Poland in international developments rendered an annotated translation of a selection of his works a novel and worthwhile undertaking.

FOREWORD

Bolesław Leśmian is a pseudonym for Stanisław Bolesław Lesman (1878? -1937), a provincial lawyer of Jewish descent who was born in Warsaw and studied in Kiev in the Ukraine in Russia. Before and after Poland regained political independence at the end of World War I, he contributed widely to Polish and Russian literary magazines such as Chimera and Vesy, co-directed experimental Artistic Theaters in Łódź and Warsaw, and became a member of the Polish Academy of Literature in 1933. In addition to a corpus of literary essays (Szkice literackie, compiled in 1959 by Jacek Trznadel), and some plays which have not been published, the poet produced four volumes of poetry: Sad rozstajny (The Crossroads Orchard, 1912), Łąka (The Meadow, 1920), Napój cienisty (Sipping Shade, 1936), and Dziejba leśna (Forest Chronicle, published posthumously in 1938). He also translated Edgar Allan Poe from Baudelaire's French translation and adapted the Arabian Nights stories for children (Klechdy sezamowe, Przygody Sindbada Żeglarza); Klechdy polskie constituted a set of original folklore stories for adults.

His poetic language is intricately linked to the subject matter and dynamic philosophy of his work, and has for that reason constituted a major barrier to translation into non-Slavic languages. Marian Pankowski and Rochelle Heller Stone have, in their doctoral dissertations, produced lined-prose translations into French and English respectively; the best-known Russian versions are in Stikhi, 1971; and isolated poems have been

translated into other languages, such as German. However, many of the translations have merely circumscribed his linguistic innovations (usually manufactured out of existing words plus suffixes, prefixes, or even infixes, a common practice in Polish but completely unorthodox in English) and ignored rhyme and rhythm, in spite of Leśmian's insistence (in Szkice literackie) that rhythm is poetry. I therefore believe that a translation into verse is a novel and worthwhile undertaking, and have endeavored to render Leśmian's penchant for linguistic innovations and descriptions of transformations, especially aborted ones, by inventing equivalent innovations in English. Sometimes these are adverbial expressions, sometimes two words put together. For instance, in "Departure," the poet gives a novel "twist" to the Polish expression "podbite sińcem" (hit-under with bruise, i. e. with a black eye); he calls it "podkute sińcem," i. e. "horseshoed under with bruise." The English translation was "with rings of horseshoe bruises underground." In "Transformations," a porcupine pouts at the vegetation; among other linguistic innovations; consequently, the English version became "porcupout," much as a wandering-erring shadow in "The Meadow" learns to "wanderr" into another.

Prof. Mary Ann Caws has furnished an excellent suggestion, which has been incorporated into this paper, namely to produce two versions of each translation. The first is a word-for-word version which is neither poetry nor English, but which furnishes valuable insight into the thought pattern and sentence structure of the original Polish; the second is a rhymed

and rhythmical translation which, by its very nature, must take occasional liberties such as changing a wall into a door ("First Rain") in order to rhyme with "floor."

Several Leśmian scholars, including Trznadel, have pointed out that the poet's philosophy was heavily indebted to Buddhism and Henri Bergson; he believed that it is the responsibility of poetry to register ongoing change, much like an analog computer; to break down the barriers among animate and inanimate objects ("The Zoo," for instance, blurs the distinction between man and animal, "Transformations" allows plants to metamorphose into animals, and "The Windmill" anthropomorphizes a mechanical construct); to incorporate plus, minus, and zero into a spectrum of existence and "nexistence;" and to reproduce the primeval mythopoetic function of pre-literate poetry. Other scholars, such as Ewa Olkuśnik, have eloquently pointed out his penchant for describing the energy expended by a life form in its attempt to metamorphose into something else, as in "Transformations." Some of these precepts are quite revolutionary even today--there are, for instance, important parallels between what Artur Sandauer calls "primevalism" and a "polyverse" in his essays on Leśmian and Jamake Highwater's contention that "primal" man lives in a "multiverse" rather than a "universe." Consequently, it appears logical to coin new words for what Leśmian attempted to accomplish with his linguistic innovations: "mythematics" denotes a mathematical mythopoetics which includes positive, negative, and zero; "extropy," by analogy with "entropy," denotes the centrifugal energy expended by a unit in its striving to become other.

Furthermore, since the Greek root of mathematics ("mathematikos") means "disposed to learn," the analogy becomes even more appropriate: Leśmian's poetry is often cognitive and epistemological, as in "Eliasz," wherein the protagonist journeys into "nexistence" in order to determine whether there is a form of consciousness other than that of existence.

Leśmian viewed the poet as a creative Faustian personality eternally at odds with the statistical, mediated prescriptiveness of society, symbolizing the latter's striving for mediocrity as His Highness King Rat, the Siamese Twenty. However, he also manifested a sense of humor at his own expense: autobiographical poems such as "Paltry" and "Silvron" abound in ironic self-deprecation. Along with Bergson, he believed variety necessary for progress in the creative Darwinian sense, and realized that only intuition is able to understand without analyzing (and thereby killing) an organism. However, whereas Bergson thought a reconciliation between the creative individual and society and/or God was possible, and frequently pointed out that negation cannot be more than an abstraction because it is a second-order statement, Leśmian was quite pessimistic about such reconciliation (both God and society were obstacles to him, i. e. something negative) and was able to create numerous negative existences disturbingly concrete in their description. (Emile Durkheim pointed out that God is society in anthropological terms, and later anthropologists have found religion to be a projection of child-rearing practices into the supernatural realm; it might be interesting for future scholars to research the possibility that Leśmian was an abused child.) Leśmian's pessimism increased

with age, as can be seen by contrasting his descriptions of nature in the early "In the Field" with the 1936 "Spring Ox." In the former, nature is a non-threatening, affectionate backdrop to lovemaking; in the latter, it has become malevolent and murderous, and warm weather causes an involuntary loss of consciousness rather than a pleasant sybaritic doze.

Unfortunately, Lesmian's pessimism proved as prophetic as some of his poetic metaphors (for instance, his fluidity and relativity of transitional states prefigured Einsteinian physics and liquid crystals, and his attempts to find the life-form inhabiting the crack between existence and nonexistence appears to intimate computer modems and their ability to insert images between frames). The poet's Jewish ancestry and non-adherence to any particular school of poetry caused him to be publicly vilified on occasion, and his work was pointedly ignored until around 1960. His prophecy of a horrible future ("Two Humble Humans" sounds like the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust, and "Terror" is reminiscent of the horrors of concentration camps) came true just a few years after his death. In retrospect, one may deem it merciful that Lesmian died of a heart attack in 1937, shortly after having expelled from his home a young man who refused to marry Lesmian's daughter because of her Jewish ancestry.

The first part of the paper presents biographical and philosophical data about Lesmian in order to elucidate the importance of his linguistic innovations and render them in a form comprehensible to English readers. The second portion contains two translations each of 67 poems by Lesmian, with the literal versions accompanied by footnotes furnishing information on the genesis and interpretation of each poem and the linguistic problems pre-

sented in the translator's attempt to render them into English. It is hoped that a combination of these two efforts will enable the English-speaking reader to glimpse the greatness of a man who has recently been vindicated as the most important Polish poet of the twentieth century.

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I. The Man

Although all sources seem to agree that Bolesław Leśmian was born in Warsaw, and that his parents were Józef Lesman and Emma née Sunderland, there is considerable discrepancy concerning the date of his birth. Zdzisław Jastrzębski¹ and the Nowy Korbut biographers² list it as January 22, 1877; Helena Wiewiórska³ says January 12, 1877 ; the Polska Akademia Nauk and Pietro Marchesani⁴ state January 12, 1878 "or" January 22, 1877 ; the poet himself, in a 1921 letter to his Czech translator František Kvapil, says he was born in 1878⁵ ; and an epitaph by his nephew, Jan Brzechwa, even indicates 1879.⁶ Jastrzębski dismisses 1878 as a date because the transcript of the poet's birth certificate lists January 22, 1877 and is "more authoritative" than the poet's own statement.⁷ Unfortunately, cavalier misinterpretation in this and other forms were to be the poet's lot until he died in 1937.

In reality, the poet's name was Stanisław Bolesław Lesman⁸ ; he did not adopt the pseudonym Bolesław Leśmian until later, but we shall call him by that name in order to avoid confusion. Bolesław did not remember his mother, Emma Sunderland Lesman, who died of tuberculosis (a disease which also killed two of her children and threatened young Bolesław as well).⁹ His father shortly married Helena Dobrowolska, who allegedly proved to be a loving stepmother.¹⁰ Bolesław's sister Aleksandra never married so as to be able to care for her stepmother, whom illness deprived of sight, hearing,¹¹ and speech.

Bolesław grew up in the lush Ukraine. Because he distrusted his stepmother, and because he lost his baby brother (who reportedly spoke only

in verse at the age of four), he possibly withdrew into his own world; he started writing poetry at eight and remained superstitious all his life. Leśmian and his biographers frequently mentioned the vast maternal greenery of the Ukraine, especially as regards the ambience of enveloping safety and historic folklore which were to prove so decisive an influence on the poet's works.

During Leśmian's student years in Kiev, he travelled all around this province and became influenced by the Russian Symbolists, particularly by their opinion that poetry recreates life instead of representing it; he thus became aware of the independent function of words. Leśmian reluctantly studied law at the University of St. Vladimir at his father's behest, although he was much more interested in folklore and biology, lacked legal talent, and made errors. His parents' Kiev home was a mecca and improvised hotel for musicians, literati, and artists. The city further abounded in other literary salons such as Glinka's, at which the sixteen-year-old Bolesław would attend and participate much as the young Goethe had done in Strassburg. One of his literary-salon improvisations on the occasion of Mickiewicz's birthday landed him in jail for six months; he was almost deported, as his "overly enthusiastic" declamation concerning the well-known Polish patriot was "anathema" to the authorities of the occupying Russian powers. In 1901-2, while a law student, Leśmian was also a founding member of a conspiratorial academic youth group named "Polonia."

However, as befits the nationals of an occupied country (Poland did not regain political independence until 1914), this impetuosity could be masked by affability. Leśmian was so charming and non-threatening that he even managed, at a political economics examination at Kiev University, to defuse

and persuade a czarist, anti-Semitic, anti-Polish professor named Pichno. 20 3
(It must be remembered that the Lesmans were of Jewish descent, although 21
they were long baptized and assimilated and were known to celebrate Christmas.)

After becoming involved in political activities in 1895 and subsequently
"taking active part in the Kiev gypsy life" of artists, Leśmian began writing
poems, both in Polish and in Russian. 22 His poetry was first published in 1895
in the Warsaw weekly Wędrowiec (The Wanderer). 23 In 1898 he received an
honorable mention from Życie magazine's competition editors for a sonnet; he
was barely twenty. His early poems still form part of the initial Modernist
trend and are full of romantic echoes and anonymous sensibilities such as those
which characterized the period in general; his image of nature was still overly
estheticized, decorative, and vague. 24 Głowiński calls these "juvenilia," con-
ventional Młoda Polska (Modernist Young Poland) poems, literal lyrics wherein
the poet does not yet create a vision, and in which the fairy-tale quality is
stereotyped and superimposed: Ossianic Romanticism rather than Symbolism. 25

Upon graduation, Leśmian moved to Warsaw in 1901. 26 His uncle,
Antoni Lange, a translator of Oriental literature, introduced him to the Chimera
circle after Leśmian began working for the Warsaw-Vienna railroad; this maga-
zine was also to publish his early poetry. 27 However, Leśmian's true debut
was between 1910 and 1915, especially the publication of his Sad rozstajny (The
Crossroads Orchard) in 1912. Herein, the poet's evolution is already evident:
the relationship with nature has transcended impressionistic ambientalism and
achieved sensualist unification as a value in and of itself; espousing the myth
of a return to a time in which man and nature were united in a primeval and
inseparable manner. 28

Significantly, young Leśmian was doubtful of and extremely modest about his talent. "I am fearful," he wrote to Chimera editor Zenon ("Miriam") Przesmycki in 1898 and 1900, "that my talent is neither very great nor very small.... Is it worth it? (I feel) continuous dissatisfaction with my own works (They) are very weak.... Everything I have written lately has the title
 29
 'meanwhile.'" Zbigniew Zalewski mentions that Leśmian considered himself
 30
 vastly inferior to Maria Konopnicka, and Anatol Stern quotes Dr. Zygmunt Klukowski's diary to the effect that the poet reworked his poems, often so drastically as to be unrecognizable, in the manner of Pasternak and Rilke. Leśmian said that his sad experiences caused his visionary poetic philosophy to become
 31
 clouded.

By 1898, Leśmian had begun feeling stifled in the provincial atmosphere of Kiev: In letters to Miriam, he mentioned that he was eager for impressions, sensations, and experiences so as to be able to create experience, not mere image. His "lack of scope" caused him to "set about spiritual begging," and he felt like "an eagle deprived of his wingspan," forced to poison himself with day-dreams as with "an insipid but necessary food—I understand how God suffered
 32
 when he had to create the world out of nothing!" His 1903 poem "Podróż" (The Trip) exemplifies his featureless Fernweh: Sorrento, the Ganges, Lethe, the Himalayas, Ultima Thule, and the Missisipi (sic) are mixed together quite
 33
 indiscriminately. He then managed to travel abroad to Salzburg, Vienna, Munich, Paris, and Concarneau from 1903 to 1907, although consumed by home-
 34
 sickness for the lush Ukraine, financial problems, and the like. In a 1901 letter to Miriam, he complained: "I am living alone... autonomously and auto-

bloodly. My shoes are well on the way to being holey, and I am lining my winter coat with wind instead of fur. However I am treating my situation humorously and even set aside certain hours for sincere laughter...." ³⁵ The financial need, linguistic daring, and sense of humor already evident in this early letter were to accompany him for the rest of his life.

Leśmian met the young painter Zofia Wiesława Chylińska in Paris in 1903 or 1904, when he was in psychological and creative doldrums, suffered ³⁶ financial problems, and did not know how to dispose of dirty clothing. Zofia ³⁷ was nineteen when they married in Paris in 1905, and unfortunately proved a ³⁸ poor economist and impractical housekeeper. (However, that did not prevent her from intervening energetically à la Christiane Vulpius when drunken sailors threatened her husband in Brittany.) The couple stayed in Switzerland for a short time, then continued to Italy after deaths in the family caused Leśmian to hemorrhage internally (much as Goethe suffered a "Blutsturz" every time adversity struck). While living in the same Amalfi pensione as Władysław Reymont and his wife (the former was composing his famous Chłopy), they became friends ³⁹ with the famous couple.

While in Paris around 1905, Leśmian became directly influenced by the ⁴⁰ French Symbolists, although it is not known whether he met them personally. Around that time, he also met the Russian poet Konstantyn Balmont, who was arguing with the future Mrs. Balmont in the Luxembourg gardens. Balmont helped Leśmian financially, encouraged him to write Russian-language poems, ⁴¹ and offered to publish these; Leśmian thereupon joined their literary salon. The Russian poems in question (published 1906-8) were the "Songs of the Over-wise Vasilissa" and the "Moon Inebriation" cycle, in which neologisms are

already evident⁴² even though Leśmian was working in a language which was not his native tongue.

Leśmian returned to Poland in 1907 and worked as director of the Warsaw Artistic Theater, but went travelling again in 1911 or 1913 (sources differ) after making some money on children's stories commissioned by the Morkowicz firm which was to publish all his works except for a small Zamość bibliophile edition.⁴³ The works in question were Klechdy sezamowe and Przygody Sindbada żeglarza,⁴⁴ adaptations of a French translation of the 1001 Nights stories. During the war, Leśmian also contributed to Morkowicz's Myśl Polska magazine under the pseudonyms Felicjan Kostrzycki and Jerzy Ziembolowski. Later, he was commissioned to write a volume of Polish folk tales (Klechdy polskie), which, however, were not published until 1956 in London. (Like Goethe, Leśmian was more interested in myth and legend.) He was to have written these tales as a children's book during a two-year stay in Italy, but was unable to do so because Polish folk motifs proved too primitive and realistic for his refined imagination; the compromise result was a "prose ballad" for grownups which he refused to⁴⁵ publish.

Leśmian's relationship with children seems worthy of note because it prefigured his interest in folklore, primeval man, and the basic unspoiled artistry of human beings uncontaminated by society. He liked children, took them seriously ("They look at the world differently, their view is real"), and once consented to be the sole spectator for a little girl's "theatrical presentation," complimenting the children on their enthusiasm and pointing out that unity⁴⁶ between actors and audience was important for theater. Children and young

people loved to play with Leśmian's poetry because it was like fairy-tale folklore, easy to memorize and to "przyswajać"—a beautiful y ambiguous Polish word (lit. "to be-self" something) which means anything from "to tame" to "to incorporate."⁴⁷

Both Pankowski and Trznadel take issue with Morzkowicz-Olczakowa's "overly cavalier and self-contradictory" reminiscences about Leśmian: the Klechdy polskie were composed in Cannes, not Alassio (Italy)—Xavier Glinka mentions that Leśmian was in Alassio in 1925—and the relationship between the poet and the publisher was not always idyllic. After one of his running battles, Leśmian wrote (1914 to Miriam) that Morzkowicz should be "treated like a dog—⁴⁸ protect me from such a 'patron of the arts'!"

In Monte Carlo in 1925, Leśmian thought he would win a large sum of money; actually, he won just enough to pay the pension (40 francs per person per day) and buy his wife a dress before losing 1,000 francs.⁴⁹ A gambler named Donat duped Leśmian into "lending" him 500 francs (Leśmian had unsuccessfully tried to break the bank, and Donat had a good reputation). The gambler⁵⁰ left to buy chips—and never came back. However, neither this adversity nor the Leśmians' financial difficulties (the poet was so impractical as to be childishly naive) prevented the couple from helping the poor out of apolitical compassion, such as feeding and clothing the children who posed for Zofia's paintings.⁵¹

Leśmian was so poor and unrealistic that he had to be helped by Alfons Krauze into an acceptable law office; debts plagued him all his life, and when he died, his widow lacked the funds to bury him.⁵² Although he was not a fighter, preferring to placate tormentors or to leave, he had a marvellous sense of humor in adversity.⁵³ Since he was so easy to deceive and would sign

documents blindly, trusting his staff without supervision so as to be able to write poetry, he was soon robbed of some 200,000 zlotys (originally destined for tax purposes) by his unscrupulous deputy, Władysław Adamowicz. Thanks to governmental contacts, particularly Minister of Justice Stanisław Car, Leśmian was able to avoid penal sanctions, but he was still responsible and still had to repay the government. His lifelong girlfriend, Dr. Dora Lebenthal, sold her luxurious apartment to save him and frequently assisted the Leśmian family with food and medical packages.

On October 6, 1932, Leśmian had a heart attack after the Adamowicz fraud; he had already suffered from ulcers since 1928 and had a lung hemorrhage in 1918. Thereupon, he became involved in ever more harebrained schemes to raise money: efforts at a kilim factory that failed, attempts to speculate in real estate, and a fantastic daydream about setting up a posh funeral parlor— all of them both pathetic and hilarious. His physique seemed consistent with his reputation as an absent-minded loner: his friends described him as a diminutive sorcerer, a wizened wizard, a musical cricket with a worried face, a desiccated bird (the irritable painter Protaszewicz cartooned him as a turkey), or a dwarf or goblin absorbed by the secrets of nonexistence—a non-human, non-material genius of poetry lost in accidental human form. (Both Lechoń and Leśmian himself paraphrased the Sarah Bernhardt "empty-carriage" joke to apply to Leśmian.) Tuwim's famous statement that Leśmian "was existed" (emphasis in original) rather than existing is reminiscent of the naturalism of Theodore Dreiser: "Man is not living, but is being lived by something which needs not only him but billions like him in order to express itself."

When he died, he looked like an insect larva left behind by a butterfly,
61
or like a butterfly slowly killed off by life's poisons. However, evidently
no one had told him he was not handsome, to judge from his successful woman-
izing efforts and from the lush eroticism of his works, which struck contempo-
62
raries as funny when compared to his uneventful biography. He married the
descendant of a Napoleonic officer; his mother-in-law, Paulina Sawicka, had
63
been a student of Chopin's, but gave up her career for her family. Celina
Sunderland, the cousin who introduced Leśmian both to his future wife and his
64
future girlfriend, also had a romance with him. Celina introduced Leśmian
to Dr. Dora Lebenthal-Speer, a dermatologist, in Iłża in 1918; the lovers later
spent some time there (great-grandfather Sunderland had built a porcelain fac-
tory in Iłża), and it is here that Leśmian composed his famous erotic cycle
"W malinowym chruśniaku" (In Raspberry Brushwood). Dr. Lebenthal escaped
65
from the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942 and committed suicide in Iłża. She evidently
wanted a more permanent relationship with Leśmian, even converting to Chris-
tianity and divorcing her husband, but apparently resigned herself to the exist-
ing state of affairs. However, this did not stop Leśmian from torturing him-
self with jealousy and doubts, alternately calling her his "darling naïad child"
66
and fulminating that she would never see him again if she remarried. Helena
Wiewiórska, Leśmian's good friend and the first lady lawyer in Poland, tells
an anecdote of how the birdlike poet once saw a tall, buxom woman and declared
"I'd like to rape her!" Leśmian was even heard to defend lesbian love: he saw
nothing strange in having a woman fall in love with the esthetic appeal of a female
67
body, but he judged male homosexuality very severely—for esthetic reasons.

In spite of his timidity, however, Leśmian did once throw out of the house a much larger man who refused to marry his daughter Wanda because of her Jewish ancestry, proposing an affair instead. ⁶⁸ Two hours later the poet was dead of a heart attack. ⁶⁹ It must be pointed out that Leśmian was often reviled and ridiculed for his Jewish ancestry, which caused him to become a reserved and sometimes morose loner, especially toward the end of his life, when Marshall Piłsudski's death and Hitler's rise accentuated latent rightist tendencies in Poland. ⁷⁰ Since he was not a member of any literary clique, he was frequently rejected and ridiculed by the literati as well. A typical hurtful printed remark reads as follows: Leśmian's poems are pleasant but insipid, like artificial flowers; the Academy should not bother watering them. . He may be the best of pre-war academic poetry, but he is nowhere near immortal. "Ta poezja niewątpliwie jest przeżytkiem Młodej Polski. Albo może prze-żydkiem...." Free translation: "This poetry is doubtless an attempt to rejuvenate Modernism. Or perhaps to re-Jewvenate it...." ⁷¹

Other examples: a 1922 Gazeta warszawska (Warsaw News) review of Leśmian's macabre poem "Jadwiga" read in part as follows: ⁷²

"... należy do owadziego rodu nekroforów, z upodobaniem grzebiąc się w mogiłach, trupach i zgniłźnie, co zresztą leży w charakterze ducha żydowskiego...."

"... is a member of the necrophagous insect family which cheerfully digs into burial-mounds, corpses, and decay, which of course is in keeping with the character of the Jewish soul...."

Another newspaper, the right-wing Prosto z mostu (From the Horse's Mouth), ignored Leśmian's death and, in 1939, dedicated a racist article to the "impure, non-autochthonous" poetry of Jews, especially post-Romantic decadents like Leśmian who change their names in an attempt to appear Polish. ⁷³

Konstanty Troczyński thought Leśmian suffered from "logorrhea" and that all "such slimy impotents" should be sent to asylums and jails: "we must annihilate parasites and... burn out Asiatic dirt, as Europe will not wait for us."⁷⁴

Other reviewers were somewhat more restrained, only calling Leśmian's poetry "ostentatious costume jewelry," "mytho-folkloristic bric-à-brac," and the poet himself "scrofulous dust" with no relationship to reality or faith in life.⁷⁵ This saddened Leśmian, who felt his creative work was being wasted although he was to poetry what Chopin was to music.⁷⁶

When the poet died, the literary periodical Wiadomości literackie informed his readers thereof on the very last page, minus the usual necrologue; not much later, an entire issue was dedicated to the death of Zbigniew Uniłowski.⁷⁷ Dora attempted to have him buried in the Aleja Zasłużonych (translation: Merit Row), but he was not considered worthy of that honor; not until many weeks later did a quiet funeral take place.⁷⁸

Analogous vituperation accompanied the selection of the poetic pseudonym Leśmian (he continued to use his real name, Lesman, for official purposes).⁷⁹ Antoni Lange, his father's cousin, allegedly invented this name to Polonize the name Lesman; Leśmian invented the pseudonym Brzechwa ("Arrow-shaft"⁸⁰) for his own nephew so the two poets would not have the same name. Some speculate it was derived from "leśny" (forest) and "miano" (naming); one biographer titled his essayistic reminiscence "Bolesna sława leśnego miana"⁸¹ (The Painful Fame of the Forest Name). Another source states that Leśmian's great (both meanings) friend Franc Fiszer decided that Lesman was no name for a poet and decided to change it to Leśmian with his chicken-scratch handwriting.⁸² Leśmian allegedly first used the pseudonym in 1894, but the

earliest written instance I have found is a 1910 letter to Wilhelm Feldman. Considerations of numinosity (word magic) doubtless contributed to the choice of a pseudonym: Leśmian was superstitious all his life, bothered by tragic dreams and premonitions, upset by finding the surname Oszustowicz (translation: Fraudman) in his files. He was afraid of ghosts, especially after his baby brother died, and participated in séances to prevent evil.

Leśmian's sister Aleksandra (nicknamed Ola) is reported to have seen the ghost of her Angora cat before she found it dead (killed by a cat-hating Frenchwoman neighbor), and later to have been plagued by hallucinations and visions of dead friends. Five days after his burial, Leśmian, as related by his daughter, returned home as a sort of poltergeist to family and friends. He was also fascinated by space (especially moon) travel and by gambling (unsuccessfully attempting to break the Monte Carlo roulette), as well as being "hysterically" afraid of the aging process and interested in rejuvenation, especially in the biological experiments (later proved to be based on the power of suggestion) conducted by the Russian doctor Voronov. Leśmian is quoted as lamenting that the hair-replacement procedure via gold-wire threads was too expensive, and as saying that if Voronov's experiments (transplanting monkeys' sex glands for rejuvenation) were successful, he (Leśmian) would have to practice law in a tree.

Leśmian hated his prosaic profession and is reported to have said "What miserable times we live in, when poets must wear attorneys' togas to earn a piece of bread." He disliked its inspiration-killing functions and its tautologous language; it also weighed on him because of the responsibility it implied, which his poetic imagination exaggerated out of proportion.

Consequently, Leśmian was dubbed the best poet among notaries (= a lawyer-notary combination) and the best notary among poets. In 1918 he obtained a law office in Hrubieszów. One biographer living there did not even know that the conscientious administrator S. B. Lesman, Esq. was the poet Leśmian (whose books were so hard to find) until a friend told him, simultaneously dissuading him from following Leśmian so as to prevent damage to inspiration. It was during this "exile" that Leśmian prepared Ląka, published in 1920.

In 1922, Leśmian obtained a better law practice in Zamość and became a mortgage lawyer the following year. The move furnished two important advantages: Zamość had a lending library and electricity (in contrast to Hrubieszów's muddy dirt streets and petroleum lamps), and the staff was able to do most of the work, thus enabling Leśmian to stay home and write poetry. (As already mentioned, an unscrupulous employee took advantage of the situation.) In Zamość and Hrubieszów, few people liked Leśmian's poetry; contemporary poetry was unimportant in small-town social life. One of his few followers was his later biographer Adam Szczerbowski, a high-school principal who gave lectures on Leśmian's creativity and underlined his importance in Polish poetry; he considered him to be the founder of a new era, much as Kochanowski and Mickiewicz had initiated great periods in Polish poetry, although "defensive caution" prevented him from putting the latter assertion into print.

Although Leśmian was president of the Bibliophile Circle of Zamość, the residents rarely talked about him (except to quip "poets don't look like that") until a famous actress named Rychter declaimed his poetry there; the municipal library did not even stock his books. However, a few people such as Edward Kozikowski, who worked for the Artists' Association's Central Propaganda

Committee and met Leśmian at the Library Section, were already familiar with his work; Ląka had been published in Myśl Polska during the war before being issued in book form. Kozikowski mentions that the book helped him (Kozikowski) survive hunger and hardship because of the poet's inventiveness with simple words and the overwhelmingly original treatment of an old theme, namely nature.⁹⁴ Zalewski quotes his friend Stanisław Cieselczuk as saying that Ląka was immaculately lovely and simple and that he repeated the poems like prayers because they "exuded such a heady fragrance of fresh new earth," sensuality incarnate.⁹⁵ Leśmian's poetry, produced in the provinces and subsequently relegated to oblivion, today shines brightly and is considered the greatest Polish poetry after that of Cyprian Norwid.⁹⁶

There were two amusing attempts to compensate for this lack of appreciation during the poet's lifetime. In the first, Echo Tygodnia (Weekly Echo)⁹⁷ gave him the Young Poets' Prize in 1931—when he was 52 years old. In the second, a "noble falsification" took place before Leśmian's election to the Polish Academy of Literature: the general morning paper Kurier Poranny organized a reader plebiscite for the "ten most outstanding contemporary Poles." Leśmian was barely mentioned, as the readers had hardly heard of him, but Anatol Stern suggested that he be smuggled in.⁹⁸ In another contest, the 1931 Wiadomości Literackie reader plebiscite (whom would we choose for the Polish Academy of Literature?), writers like Boy-Żelenski and Staff received approximately 13,000 votes each; Leśmian was in 46th place with only 966, just barely ahead of Marshal Piłsudski.⁹⁹

A Polish Academy of Literature had been envisioned in 1918 by Stanisław Żeromski, but was not established until Piłsudski supported it in 1926.¹⁰⁰

Postwar Poland was a social Sturm und Drang, ruined by bloodshed and neglect
 101
 but reborn like a phoenix. In a letter to Miriam as early as 1913, Leśmian
 had advocated creation of a new literary effort: "Let us make another emigration
 in order to invent unknown miracles far away from the Warsaw lowlands." He
 suggested that a future Academy should have capital independent of private monies,
 i. e. be publicly funded (in order to prevent vested interests from taking over)
 by taxing book sales, cabarets, film theaters, and agreements between book-
 102
 stores and authors. He even raised the possibility of running a lottery. Other
 writers were similarly farsighted: Tadeusz Boy-Żelenski, for instance, wrote a
 pamphlet on "how to end women's hell" urging legislators in 1918 not to enact
 anti-abortion legislation (other countries would have to abolish existing laws in
 order to become humane, but Poland need do nothing at all); and Anatol Stern's
 collection of 1921-7 essays seems to have a common exhortation: we have a new
 country, let us take advantage of this opportunity to avoid suppressing courage,
 103
 repeating other nations' errors, and stifling experimentation. Predictably,
 however, the political and artistic situation rapidly disintegrated into factionalist
 chaos, with the Skamander movement fighting the Modernists and the Avant-Garde
 (which in turn accused the Skamandrites of lacking innovative ambitions) and the
 104
 traditionalists of course fighting everybody. The most unfortunate victims
 were loners like Leśmian, who had no faction to defend them and thus did not exist.

Given this factionalist atmosphere, Leśmian's 1933 election to the Academy
 was quite unexpected; it probably would not have been possible if he had not had
 105
 friends in high places, such as Academy president Wacław Sieroszewski.
 Election resulted in a small academic pension which made life easier, and
 106
 periodicals such as Skamander and Wiadomości literackie ended their boycott.

However, vilification and ridicule continued: his "impure" ancestry was criticized, as were his creativity and small stature (for instance, in caricatures of a shrivelled midget on an oversized academic armchair); only now is he beginning to be properly appreciated. ¹⁰⁷ Since the political thaw around 1955, Bolesław Leśmian has occupied his rightful position as Poland's greatest (and classic) twentieth-century poet. (For non-literary reasons, the period after World War II was no kinder to him than pre-war Poland had been.) ¹⁰⁸ He is now being appreciated posthumously; his "sublimated sensuality" and "inspired neologisms" are being acknowledged by a younger generation of poets. ¹⁰⁹

However, as is often the case with Polish literature, the bulk of the renaissance is due to non-literary reasons. Editors tried to justify republishing Leśmian by making him into an anti-imperialist, but here "propaganda in reverse reached the ridiculous before it could vulgarise the sublime." His poems "proved to be the most effective antidotes to the tedium and topical verse in a state-controlled literature:"

No propaganda bills can be stuck on the works of Leśmian... But in a paradoxical way it is (his) poetry which most effectively shows up the social-realist humbug of post-war Poland. Neither the didactic protests in poems 'for adults' nor the thawing cult of a 'healthy primitive' succeed so well in unmasking the collective failure of literary planners as does the uncommitted poetry of Leśmian.... (He was) almost the last to be allowed republication after years of suppression and neglect. Other writers who in the period between the wars had shown hardly any social awareness received an ideological brush-up from the party critics and were declared fit to 'illustrate the historical necessity of the recent past'.... The activists of propaganda think in labels, and so they cannot afford to waste hate on what is neither for nor against. ¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, this has not prevented critics like Artur Sandauer from trying to Hegelianize Leśmian's philosophy by describing it as follows: "Thesis: Existence.... Antithesis: Nonexistence.... Synthesis: The drama of nothingness." ¹¹¹

Neither has it prevented anti-Communists like the people at Radio Free Europe from championing Leśmian as an antidote to "Party Newspeak:" "poetry is probably the most sensitive seismograph of social changes.... one of the tools making it possible to resist slavery... and ideological... reductionism." They represent Leśmian as an example of "disciplined arbitrariness," subordinating himself only to "those boundaries which delimit the cultural meaning of human creativity" and refusing to kowtow to Socialist Realism.

A postscript: Napój cienisty appeared in 1936; Dziejba leśna was published posthumously in 1938 (Leśmian died November 5, 1937). The poet was not anthologized during his lifetime. His daughter dragged the manuscript of the Klechdy polskie out of the ruins of Warsaw after World War II, but many other materials were lost. Unlike Miriam, Leśmian was haphazard about keeping copies of his correspondence and newspaper articles (which he considered "one-day butterflies"), so there are many painful lacunae waiting to be filled. His wife and daughter carried a cargo of manuscripts, subsequently lost, to the Mauthausen concentration camp in 1944. The totality of Leśmian's letters addressed to biographer Adam Szczerbowski beginning with 1921 were burned during the Warsaw uprising. His daughter Dunia (Wanda) married an Englishman named Hills, whom she later left because of his drinking problem; she now lives in Paris with her daughter. Mrs. Zofia Leśmian moved to London, then to Argentina, and died June 3, 1964.

Ironically, Leśmian's death before the war spared him the horrors he feared were imminent. Musical crickets are not good survivors.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER I

- 1 In "Zejsście z Parnasu," Wspomnienia o Bolesławie Leśmianie (hereinafter abbreviated Wspomnienia) (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1966), p. 13.
- 2 Kazimierz Budzyk et al., Bibliografia literatury polskiej Nowy Korbut (Warsaw: P.I.W., 1973), p. 620.
- 3 "Bolesław Leśmian," Wspomnienia, p. 26.
- 4 Tadeusz Nyczek, "Nauka dla wszystkich: Bolesław Leśmian" (Cracow: Polska Akademia Nauk, 1976), p. 3; Pietro Marchesani, Niebo: Rivista di poesia, no. 11, February-March 1980, p. 15.
- 5 Bolesław Leśmian, Utwory rozproszone/listy (hereinafter abbreviated UR) (Warsaw: P.I.W., 1962), pp. 347-8.
- 6 Jacek Trznadel, "Bolesław Leśmian," Literatura okresu Młodej Polski (hereinafter abbreviated BL/LMP) (Warsaw: P.I.W., 1968), p. 831.
- 7 Zdzisław Jastrzębski, "Głosy do Leśmiana i Trznadla" (hereinafter abbreviated "Głosy"), Twórczość, January 1963, p. 110.
- 8 Maria Ludwika Mazurowa, "Podróże i praca twórcza Bolesława Leśmiana," in Wspomnienia, p. 73.
- 9 Jan Brzechwa, "Niebieski wycieruch," in Wspomnienia, p. 82.
- 10 Mazurowa, Wspomnienia, pp. 45-6.
- 11 Brzechwa, Wspomnienia, p. 82.
- 12 Rochelle Heller Stone, Bolesław Leśmian: The Poet and His Poetry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 4-5.
- 13 Marian Pankowski, Leśmian: La révolte d'un poète contre les limites (Brussels: University Press, 1967), pp. 38-9.
- 14 Kajetan Papierkowski, Bolesław Leśmian: Studium językowe (Lublin: Wyd. Lubelskie, 1964), p. 5.
- 15 Brzechwa, Wspomnienia, pp. 83-4.
- 16 Anatol Stern, "Powroty Bolesława Leśmiana," in Wspomnienia, p. 346.

- 17
Mazurowa, Wspomnienia, pp. 47-8.
- 18
Stone, pp. 5-7.
- 19
Stern, Wspomnienia, pp. 343-4.
- 20
Michał Daszkiewicz-Czajkowski, "Leśmian w młodości," in Wspomnienia, p. 116.
- 21
Pankowski, p. 37.
- 22
Nowy Korbut, p. 620.
- 23
Trznadel, BL/LMP, p. 831.
- 24
Ibid., pp. 832-3.
- 25
Michał Głowiński, "Rozmaitości leśmianowskie," Twórczość, no. 7, July 1963, pp. 66-7.
- 26
Marchesani, p. 15.
- 27
Nowy Korbut, p. 620. They must have met earlier, however, as evidenced by the 1898 letters in UR.
- 28
Trznadel, BL/LMP, pp. 833-5.
- 29
UR, pp. 236, 242.
- 30
Zbigniew Wiesław Zalewski, "Był sobie pan rejent...", Wspomnienia, p. 176.
- 31
Stern, Wspomnienia, pp. 348-51.
- 32
UR, pp. 236-8.
- 33
Ibid., pp. 68-70.
- 34
Pankowski, p. 41 ff.
- 35
UR, p. 245.
- 36
Mazurowa, Wspomnienia, pp. 53-5.
- 37
Nowy Korbut, p. 620.
- 38
Stern, Wspomnienia, pp. 338-42.

- 39 Mazurowa, Wspomnienia, pp. 52-3, 59-61.
- 40 Papierkowski, Studium językowe, pp. 6-7.
- 41 Mazurowa, Wspomnienia, pp. 57-9.
- 42 Papierkowski, Studium językowe, p. 6.
- 43 Mazurowa, Wspomnienia, 63-4; Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, "Wspomnienie o Bolesławie Leśmianie," Bunt Wspomnień (Warsaw: P.I.W., 1961), p. 117.
- 44 Trznadel, BL/LMP, pp. 834-9.
- 45 Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, pp. 114-116.
- 46 Maria Strzeszewska, "Spotkanie młodości z prawdziwą poezją," Wspomnienia, p. 217.
- 47 Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, "Znikomek który był Akteonem," in Wspomnienia, pp. 322-24.
- 48 Pankowski p. 56; UR pp. 334-4, 348.
- 49 UR, p. 361.
- 50 Zygfryd Krauze, "Ze wspomnień o Leśmianie," Wspomnienia, p. 184.
- 51 Helena Wiewiórska, "Bolesław Leśmian," Wspomnienia, p. 227; Mazurowa, ibid., p. 35; Brzechwa, ibid., p. 96.
- 52 Mazurowa, p. 39; Anatol Stern, "O liryce Bolesława Leśmiana," Głód jednoznaczności i inne szkice (hereinafter abbreviated Głód) (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1972), p. 143.
- 53 Michał Wiszniewski, "Strzępy wspomnień o Bolesławie Leśmianie," Wspomnienia, pp. 195-204.
- 54 Ibid., pp. 297-8; Edward Kozikowski, "Wspomnienie o Bolesławie Leśmianie," ibid., pp. 145-6; Mazurowa, pp. 70-2; Leopold Lewin, "Wspomnienie o Leśmianie," ibid., p. 304; Wiewiórska, ibid., p. 238; Brzechwa, ibid., pp. 90-3.
- 55 Jastrzębski, "Głosy," p. 111; Krauze, Wspomnienia, p. 190.
- 56 Edward Kozikowski, "Wspomnienie," in Wspomnienia, pp. 133-4; Izabela Czajka-Stachowicz, "Wspomnienie o Bolesławie Leśmianie," in Wspomnienia, pp. 260-66, 280 ff.

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Strzeszewska, Wspomnienia, pp. 216-17; Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, Bunt, pp. 111-122; Kozikowski, Wspomnienia, pp. 128-9; Czajka-Stachowicz, ibid., p. 272; Lewin, ibid., p. 304; Mazurowa, ibid., pp. 51-2; Stern, Ślód, p. 143; Szelburg-Zarembina, Wspomnienia, p. 328.

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Adam Ważyk, Kwestia gustu (Warsaw: P.I.W., 1966) p. 153; Kozikowski, Wspomnienia, p. 148.

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Julian Tuwim, "Leśmian: W dziesięciolecie śmierci," in Wspomnienia, p. 123.

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F. O. Matthiessen, Theodore Dreiser (New York: William Sloane, 1951), p. 239 ("The Myth of Individuality").

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Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, pp. 124-5.

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Artur Sandauer, Samobójstwo Mitrydatesa (hereinafter abbreviated Samobójstwo) (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1968), p. 13.

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Brzechwa, p. 100; UR, pp. 349-50 (1921).

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Wiewiórska, Wspomnienia, pp. 229-31; Włodzimierz Słobodnik, "Pieśni mimowolne," in Wspomnienia; Zalewski, ibid., p. 169; Lewin, ibid., p. 312.

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Kozikowski, p. 149.

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Trznadel, BL/LMP, p. 845; Trznadel, Twórczość Leśmiana (hereinafter abbreviated TL) (Warsaw: P.I.W., 1966), p. 13; Kozikowski, Wspomnienia, p. 131; Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, pp. 124-5; Wiszniewski, Wspomnienia, pp. 201-2; Słobodnik, ibid., p. 242; UR pp. 268, 277, 328-9.

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Trznadel, TL, p. 13, quoting Zygmunt Nowakowski's comments in Dzwonek niedzielny, 1934, p. 36.

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Stanisław Pienkowski, Gazeta warszawska, Apr. 13-20, 1922, quoted in Kozikowski, Wspomnienia, pp. 131-2.

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- 74
Ibid., pp. 12-13.
- 75
K. Zawodziński (Parada poetów no. 23) and Stanisław Brzozowski (pseud. of Adam Czepiel, Głos, 1904), quoted in Trznadel, TL, pp. 5-11.
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Brzechwa, Wspomnienia, p. 103; Stone, p. 11 and fn. 29, p. 294.
- 79
Jastrzębski, "Głosy," p. 110.
- 80
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Stone, p. 6 and fn. 17, p. 293; Marian Jachimowicz, "Bolesna sława," Mowy Leśmianowskie (Kłódzko: Towarzystwo Miłośników Ziemi Kłódzkiej, 1968), p. 21.
- 82
Czajka-Stachowicz, in Wspomnienia, pp. 293-4.
- 83
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- 84
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- 85
Mazurowa, in Wspomnienia, pp. 29-30.
- 86
Kozikowski, in Wspomnienia, p. 142-3; UR, p. 362; Brzechwa, in Wspomnienia, p. 102; Jastrzębski, "Zejście z Parnasu," in Wspomnienia, pp. 11-12; Krauze, ibid., p. 189.
- 87
Stern, Głód, p. 143; Zalewski, in Wspomnienia, pp. 167-8.
- 88
Wiszniewski, in Wspomnienia, pp. 196-7; Strzeszewska, ibid., p. 220; Krauze, ibid., pp. 180-2.
- 89
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- 90
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- 91
Trznadel, BL/LMP, p. 839.

- 92 Zalewski, in Wspomnienia, pp. 166-175.
- 93 Anatol Stern, quoting Dr. Zygmunt Klukowski letter dated June 27, 1948; "Powroty Bolesława Leśmiana," in Wspomnienia, p. 348; Strzeszewska, ibid., pp. 212-3; Słobodnik, ibid., pp. 242-3.
- 94 Kozikowski, in Wspomnienia, pp. 125-7, 128.
- 95 Zalewski, in Wspomnienia, pp. 164-5.
- 96 Zbigniew Biełkowski, Mowy leśmianowskie, p. 29.
- 97 Stern, in Wspomnienia, p. 353.
- 98 Ibid., pp. 353-7.
- 99 Trznadel, TL, p. 9.
- 100 Stern, in Wspomnienia, p. 352.
- 101 Wiszniewski, ibid., pp. 200-4.
- 102 UR, pp. 332, 343 (letter to Stefan Żeromski).
- 103 Głód jednoznaczności.
- 104 Sandauer, Samobójstwo, p. 9.
- 105 Stern, in Wspomnienia, p. 353; Wiewiórska, ibid.
- 106 Brzechwa, in Wspomnienia, p. 102; Trznadel, BL/LMP, p. 845.
- 107 Zalewski, in Wspomnienia, p. 176.
- 108 Michał Głowiński, Zaświat przedstawiony (hereinafter abbreviated as ZP) (Warsaw: P.I.W., 1981), p. 9.
- 109 Stern, in Wspomnienia, pp. 330, 359.
- 110 Jerzy Pietrkiewicz, "Leśmian and Czechowicz: Two Uncommitted Poets," Slavonic & East European Review, No. XXXVII, June 1959, pp. 346-7.
- 111 Artur Sandauer, Filozofia Leśmiana, in Zebrane pisma krytyczne (hereinafter abbreviated ZPK) (Warsaw: P.I.W., 1981), p. 507.

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II. The Historical Context

A. The Modernist Reaction

The failure of Romanticism to reestablish a political Poland, especially after the dismal suppression of the 1863 insurrection, led to a Positivist/Realist reaction: Romantic melancholy and futile heroism were criticized, and the antidote proposed was hard work, economic prosperity, a scientific tendency, and the requirement that literature serve society. However, this movement was not creative and did not capture the popular imagination the way Romanticism had; as a consequence, Romanticism remained latent beneath the surface, as exemplified by Jan Matejko's patriotic historical paintings. Optimistic Positivism, when exhausted, gave rise to naturalism: society was perceived as cruel, nature as pitiless.¹ By the turn of the century, poets felt asphyxiated by service to the Cause (whether national independence or social improvement)² imposed upon them by others.

The result was variously called Modernism, *Młoda Polska* (= Young Poland), and Symbolism. One of the major hallmarks of the revolt against Positivism was a change of focus from the collective to the private. As Krzyżanowski states in his history of Polish literature:

This return to the Romantic tradition consisted in turning away from the type of characters found in the works of the Positivists, working people, engineers and doctors, and from the sociological attitude towards the life of the community.... Sociology, as a basis for observation, was replaced by psychology and in more than one case by psychopathology... 'the naked soul' (was) recognized as the only thing worthy of the interest of an artist.³

Inspired by the Romantics, the Modernists attempted to replace a chain of thoughts with a chain of images; metaphysical symbols were identified with poetry itself, and form and content considered inseparable.⁴ In addition to espousing the French Symbolists' element of a magical faith in the word, the Polish movement took over part of the Romantic program, intentionally incorporating models from folk imagination.⁵

Zenon ("Miriam") Przesmycki, the President of the copyright protection association and editor of Cyprian Norwid's texts, founded the literary magazine Chimera in Warsaw in 1901.⁶ (He also edited Życie from 1887 to 1890 and Świat from 1890 to 1892.) He revealed the works of the great Polish Romantic (1821-1883) to readers and introduced new esthetic tendencies from abroad, such as translations of Arthur Rimbaud. Cooperation with Chimera not only brought Leśmian in touch with the European literary currents and esthetic problems of Modernism, but also furnished him an outlet for his own poetry.⁷ Another collaborator was Edward Porębowicz (1862-1937), who produced excellent poetry translations which enabled the élite to appreciate foreign literatures and permitted the evolution of esthetic discussions.⁸

European Symbolism was a reaction against the Realist ideal of art as a servant whose duty is to imitate nature; this was perceived as the superficial, average parvenu mentality. Jean Moréas and Stéphane Mallarmé championed Parnassian idealism; however, the hieratic symbols abounding in French Symbolism and its Polish imitators (cf. Leopold Staff's "dzień pracy") could not have remained long within this framework of monumental calm.⁹ In attempting to periodize twentieth-century Polish literature, Kazimierz Wyka

called the first stage (1890-1916) *Młoda Polska*, which was characterized by nostalgia, sadness, melancholy, and ennui. Although it was the literature of a politically unfree Poland, it nevertheless produced important poetry. Julian Krzyżanowski calls the entire period between Positivist Realism and modern Poland "neo-Romanticism" (pp. 451-557). Marian Pankowski describes *Młoda Polska* and its predecessors as interested in atmosphere, euphony, and the non-rational; he considers the term *Młoda Polska* preferable to Symbolism (of which it was the Polish version) because, in Poland, it contained political aims (rational self-determination, history, social justice) and a great deal of diversity, actually embracing all the writers born after the unsuccessful 1863 insurrection. *Młoda Polska* was to polarize Polish society between the world wars: its spectacular pessimism and *ars gratia artis* were considered vague, banal, and irritating throwbacks in a joyful, down-to-earth reconstruction era following the reconstitution of the Polish state; it was perceived as amoral, satanic, and irrelevant. It must be pointed out that, like many reactions, Polish Modernism was a hazy term at best; *Młoda Polska* was coined as a parallel to Young Germany and Young Scandinavia, and defined the phenomenon better than any "ism" precisely because of its vagueness.

After World War I, this movement separated into two groups: one representing "a lyrical flow, incantation, sonority," the other "controlled construction." An example of the latter would be the avant-garde literary magazine Zwrotnica, whose name literally means the switching-place in train-tracks (i.e. it represented a conscious and programmatic effort at change). It was founded by Tadeusz Peiper (1891-1969), who edited it during the 1920's and

continuously berated the Skamander movement "for its passive submission to a lyrical flow." There was also a marginal Futurist movement which, after World War II, married Communism.

However, the most important literary clique was the above-mentioned Skamander, which derived its name from Stanisław Wyspiański's 1904 play Akropolis and alluded to the mythical point at which the Vistula and Skamander rivers (Warsaw and Troy) merge. Skamander's manifesto was published in the first issue of the eponymous magazine: a new world is being born, and we are its children; we must not escape into illusion. The result was a tender, ironic poetry which found favor with the public. The Skamandrites championed everyday reality, and their idealized "gray man" took on populist tendencies. Since Leśmian believed that the soul of the average man was uncreative, composed of statistical data, this group predictably disdained him; Zawodziński and Troczyński further objected to his language, which they called artificial costume jewelry and logorrhea. (However, Jacek Trznadel notes that just as idealization of the masses can be fascist, non-idealization need not be ivory-tower élitism.) Conversely, Leśmian disdained Skamander's programmatic, populist optimism: In "Pejzaż współczesny" (Contemporary Landscape), for instance, he satirizes modern poets in devastating pictorial images reminiscent of the caricatures of Georg Gross, an element of grotesqueness which was to make him briefly popular during the 1930's.

The reason for documenting this plethora of factionalist movements (and it must be borne in mind that the Futurists have been given short shrift, Kwadryga not even mentioned) is to point out that any poet not belonging to one of these "armed camps" would be caught in the cross-fire as a matter of course.

Leśmian was one such unfortunate. During his lifetime, most critics considered him an old-fashioned, traditional, decadent, poetically impotent, marginal, and escapist esthete. The Skamander and Vanguard poets reviled him, expressing public admiration only long after his death. Also, since Leśmian had eschewed the tendentiousness and coded barbs against the occupying powers which had enabled Polish literature to survive political partition, hatred of things Russian was added to professional jealousy in ignoring Leśmian; he was "conspicuously absent" from "traditional surveys of Polish literature, and after World War II, Stalinization caused his work to be further neglected. He was considered perverse and antiquated, his neologisms "excessive," "routine," and mannered, although occasional grudging admissions of their "excellent pictorial effects" were made. His neologisms were often ridiculed as being childish (e.g. "the stable stabled," "stodoła sie rozstodoliła) and gave rise to parodies such as Tuwim's version of how Leśmian would have written the nursery-rhyme "Wlazi kotek na płotek," or the "Ballada o powsinóżnej kuśtydze" attributed to Emil Zegadłowicz. Even well after World War II, critics still persisted in calling Leśmian's poetry childish, tactless, pornographic, conventionally erotic "village impressionism" holding onto the belated Victorian neurosis linking eroticism with the concept of original sin. (His generation, it was explained, was raised on Schopenhauer and Hinduism as antidotes to fleeting time; they therefore bore grudges against God for something later generations wisely recognized to be interpersonal problems.) The "best" of Leśmian's poetry was considered to be that which contained no neologisms, no pretentiousness, no Leśmianisms. His artistic freedom was called arbitrary pseudo-novelty devoid of motivation.

Artur Sandauer and other contemporary critics considered Leśmian an amorphous masochist who clothed his lyrical effusions in destructive, self-deprecating commentary like Heine's, thus poisoning his creatures from the every outset so that they carry their own defeat within and die before birth. Later, however, some seemed to have fathomed some of the difficulties of Leśmian's poetry, conceding that Leśmian "breaks" language the way he does as a sensual form of expression which decomposes contradictions which destroy each other, leading them to brilliant absurdity, indulging in an irrational leap into the chaos of elements longing to become incarnated, but which have not been allowed to enter existence. Leśmian's redundant "tautologous" verb-formations (stables stabling), it was grudgingly acknowledged, may indeed be an existential attempt to show the essence of a thing, namely its identity with itself. A pure description of the essence of a thing would have to be existential (the horse exists) or redundant (the horse horses), so "existential action" is merely the item's fulfilling its own definition with "maniacal stubbornness." (It is interesting to note that this same Sandauer had previously impatiently criticized Leśmian's annominations as the tautologous dynamics of a vicious circle, senseless pseudo-action in the absence of a deuteragonist.) What Sandauer had earlier called haphazardness or willy-nilliness (bylejakość) leading to "logical suicide" was then sheepishly redefined as perhaps having had a purpose after all: Leśmian treated Modernist problematics negatively and in parody, accepting defeat as its own point of departure, and calling his territory nonexistent from the outset, thus acquiring a freedom of fictionality such as that championed by Sir Philip Sidney in his Defense of Poesy. We acted, writes Miłosz, like a tailor judging a man's character by the cut of his clothes.

B. Leśmian and Symbolism

One of the most exhaustive discussions of Symbolism defines a symbol as an individual, non-conventional, non-didactic, non-ornamental, non-precise, multi-significant, allusive correspondence to qualities which have no adequate characterizations in the linguistic system. ²⁴ Both the concept of Symbolism and attempts to localize Leśmian within its "system" are so problematic as to remain virtually unresolved even today; in addition, the differences between Polish and French Symbolism are so great that one may legitimately wonder whether one is in fact dealing with the same phenomenon.

The word "symbol" is derived from the Greek *symballein* = to put or throw together, and is thus related to other words denoting similarities, e. g. "synthesis." If defined as a mediator, a sensory correspondence to ideas, it would be difficult to differentiate it from allegory, except that the latter represents known ideas and is often pedagogical in intent. (Allegory is derived from *allos* = other + *agoreuein* = to speak in public assembly.) One of the problems is that symbols become hackneyed and must be periodically renewed; Viacheslav Ivanov defined the true symbol as expressing what is not coterminous with external categorizations, or what is not articulated. The idea of Symbolism was inspired by the Romantic attempt to replace a chain of thoughts with a chain of images, as the metaphoric symbol was considered "primitive thought." ²⁵ Baudelaire is said to have borrowed the term "Symbolism" from Swedenborg to denote an awareness of symbolic correspondences in poetry. Arthur Symons was later to say that poetry thus became a kind of religion. ²⁶

One of the myths of this new religion was that of a return to primordial knowledge and unity and innocence beyond the transitory appearances furnished

by perceptible sensory reality: nostalgia for childhood, anticipation of old age as "innocence regained," the concept of "original innocence" meaning a lack of consciousness of self, and the search for almost Platonic absolutes. The resulting myth of a "lost paradise" was merely a translation of Symbolist theory into the language of mythological imagination; if the myth had not existed, the Symbolists would have had to invent it. ²⁷ As we shall see, this myth figured prominently in Leśmian's poetry and poetics.

Another important concept was that of the musicality of poetic language. Mallarmé's ambition was to create absolute poetry (antiprose), i. e. something with no content at all. Verlaine ("de la musique avant toute chose") also believed that words "mean" not with sense, but with sound. Leśmian is similar to the French Symbolists in his desire to produce musical poetry (Mallarmé's "souci musical") and to furnish a substitute for the ritualistic human needs left unsatisfied by the abdication of religion; he also liked Baudelaire and Poe because of their metaphysical obsession with rotting and ugliness, Verlaine and Balmont for their intense colors, melodic poetry, and technical mastery. ²⁸

However, there are important differences, some of them caused by the hazy notion of Symbolism proper; not even in France was a well-delineated and unified program elaborated. ²⁹ Valéry himself indicated that what unites symbolists in their diversity is negation; "Ce pauvre mot symbole," he adds, "ne contient que ce que l'on veut." ³⁰ Leśmian would also have trouble with the Symbolists' striving for esoteric, self-contained aloofness (an anti-democratic ivory-tower reaction to the mass production of books) and with their insistence that since the senses cannot reveal the world as it is, any description would be absurd—³¹ Art should only deal with the eternal Idea. Further important differences are:

Unlike Leśmian's, Mallarmé's obsession with nothingness was not desirous of contradicting existence or being an anti-world which negated existing forms; death was not its beginning. Valéry's obsession with nothingness was a desire to give form to the amorphous, which led to the exaltation of the function of pure consciousness. ³² A comparison of the treatment of abysses may clarify this point: For Baudelaire, the abîme or gouffre was a symbol of icy black hell, fearful infinity—in other words, an existential value judgment. Leśmian's abyss (otchłań), however, is a Pascal ravine: infinity is objective, an immanent coagent of the abyss, a negative existence which can whine and thrash about in the thicket, suffer because it cannot surpass its limits, and entertain a dialogue with a hero who wonders how the abyss perceives him. Thus, it is a symbol of the impossibility of verifying subjective perceptions—an epistemological abyss. ³³ Similarly, Baudelaire considers nature and reality ugly; cities represented freedom for him, he aimed at creating an absolute kingdom of artificiality, as documented by a Hugo Friedrich comment on an 1859 salon letter. For Leśmian, on the other hand, nature was beautiful and dangerous. ³⁴

A comparison of Leśmian's and Miriam's attitudes will also prove fruitful. "Symbolism, as understood by Przesmycki, was an unchangeable 'cognitive' system, a means of perceiving something which, in essence, can never be fully understood." Since he collaborated on Chimera, and was thus considered Przesmycki's protégé, Leśmian was mistakenly identified with these views; further, ³⁵ he was overshadowed by Przybyszewski's flamboyant, satanic sterility. For Miriam, spiritualistic mysticism was derived from positivistic monism and universal determinism, but Leśmian disdained "the existing dominant trend in Polish Modernism which was a residue of Positivism and Parnassianism...."

(He) did not condone the approach of the fin de siècle decadent poets, who were determined to glorify themselves.³⁶ Leśmian opposed the identification of Symbolism with hazy contours and a withdrawal from the concrete, although he was not able to avoid its ornamentation in every case; he maintained that a symbol is only as concrete as long as it gives concrete results.³⁷ His poetry created a magical reality which was "biologically palpable, a sensory tissue of the most human of impressions and experiences" condensed and radiating otherworldly light woven of quite earthly rays.³⁸

Although programs and pronouncements were anathema to Leśmian, an "antithesis of spontaneous creation," and while he did in fact create spontaneously, "he was a theoretician in spite of himself.... the only writer to emerge from the Young Poland phase of Polish literature with a coherent program for Symbolist poetry.... Leśmian created poetry whose aim was to fix the fleeting moment eternally, and to make the ephemeral durable by means of concrete symbols rooted in myths." He "saw everything with the miraculous clarity and concentration characteristic of a child.... He expressed all phenomena with such perfect plasticity that doubting their reality became impossible."³⁹ Leśmian's belief that words performed two functions, being both the common coin of meaning and the golden coin of dance, is similar to that of Valéry and Mallarmé; he raised Symbolism in Polish poetry to its highest achievements in Europe and then surpassed that level.⁴⁰ His supranaturalism in the perception of nature was as uncannily close as observation under a microscope.⁴¹ He was able to intensify each form, saturating it and raising it to the second or third power; like Russian nested dolls, his forms also became a warehouse for other forms.⁴²

His attitude to the "secret" of life was a ceaseless, concrete intuitive process⁴³ for perceiving reality, not the creation of substitute symbol-signs. His symbolist manner of "communicating with nature" is "designed to show a symbol in the making... somewhere between myth and private magic," as the object must pass through the author's self "in order to lose its alien objectivity." For that reason, and although "few realized its importance, the publication of Lesmian's Łąka in 1920 was as great an event for Polish as that of Yeats' The Tower⁴⁴ in 1927 was for English poetry."

Leśmian may keep the language, versification, and themes of *Młoda Polska*, but he acts like a homeopath forcing the organism to produce its own antitoxins, tensing its characteristics to the very boundaries of self-contradiction,⁴⁵ often giving an activity no goal except the activity itself. It is true that *Młoda Polska* had already performed linguistic innovations, such as creating negative nouns with prefixes such as "bez" or deriving nouns from adjectival abstractions; Leśmian, however, was able to add the dimension of reification by treating an abstraction like a concrete thing, e. g. allowing an abyss to whine⁴⁶ or discuss the laboriousness of its life.

Karpowicz believes Leśmian is more similar to Yeats and the Russian Symbolists than to the French because of the concrete, magically suggestive nature of his myths and because his intuitive cognition is closer to the former; he does not believe, for instance, that it is the artist's responsibility to recreate or imitate reality (that would be producing a pointless copy of nature) nor to create artificial magic. Leśmian is more philosophical than esthetic, as exemplified in his criticism of totalitarian insistence on artificiality and control in Przygody Sindbada Żeglarza: a certain island is uninhabitable because of a

deafening gong which makes life impossible; the owner further miniaturizes
 people, flora, and fauna into two-dimensional pictures and stores them in a book. 47

French Symbolism was an unattainable model for Poland and Russia in terms of achieving classic Symbolist style and substance. In Poland, it was complicated by national concerns, in Russia by social problems and a tendency to assume the characteristics of mysticism. Furthermore, folk songs were much more important to the Slavic version of Symbolism (Nerval, for instance, might use them to express emotional values in general, or a feeling of nostalgia and reverie, but the rustic aspect was never accentuated in French). In Slavic Symbolism, however, Romanticism and popular literature lived on, and primitive peasants were often considered sources of inspiration. 48

Mallarmé's "Brise marine," for instance, sought the exotic out of ennui with the present, but in Russia this tendency was dynamic and iconoclastic, liberating the innocent primitive from outdated, overrefined civilization. Leśmian was inspired by the latter, and also by Cyprian Norwid's exhortations to model esthetic values 49

on the creative, primeval populace, although for him folklore was only a point of departure. Leśmian

deliberately transformed folkloristic elements in his poetry and made them vehicles for his philosophical problems.... He transformed them at will to serve and express his visions and ideas. These folkloric elements were never used in their original shape and context. This practice sets Lesmian apart from the widespread cult of primitive peasant culture (in Polish and Russian literature)... folklore was 50 to Leśmian of no more use than a dictionary, i. e., as raw material.

Edward Porębowicz's translations of Celtic, Germanic, and Scandinavian 51 folk songs furnished Leśmian abundant inspiration; he was, of course, also influenced by Russian folklore (byliny and skazki = epics and folk-tales) and by the second-generation Russian Symbolists for whom Symbolism was not "a

literary school but an attitude toward past literatures and a means of improving
 the future of mankind." ⁵² Myth was to be the basis of all esthetics, and thus
 future-oriented; in a 1921 letter to his Czech translator František Kvapil, Leśmian
 mentioned that he was interested in Czech literature and especially attracted by
 its easygoing fairy-tale approach to life. Only poets, he wrote, can detect the
 elements of primeval proto-Slavic dreams, whose charm is undeniable. He
 thereupon suggested publishing an anthology of Czech writers and solicited the
 translator's cooperation for such an endeavor. ⁵³

Leśmian encompasses both the Romantic tradition and folklore elements
 structured in accordance with Symbolist esthetics: folklore is an example of a
 creativity in which rational strictures are not obligatory. ⁵⁴ Some of the folklore
 elements in Klechdy polskie and various ballads are witches, talking animals and
 plants, supernatural creatures such as "rusaikas" (nymphs or naiads), cripples
 in love, and nonsensical questions. Like folklore riddles which are designed to
 determine whether the interlocutor has been initiated, there is often no answer
 possible (except "I don't know")—with Leśmian, such questions are not posed to
 elicit an answer, but to verify others' knowledge or lack of it. ⁵⁵

In Slavic folklore, trichotomy is a standard form: songs are segmented
 into three symmetrical members, possibly for magical reasons. Leśmian uses
 this principle in the ballads "Świdryga and Midryga" and "The Girl"—there are
 three dances in the former (specters, coffins, protagonists) and three sets of
 effort in the latter (brothers, shadows, hammers). ⁵⁶

Jacek Trznadel, who considers Leśmian an Existentialist rather than a
 Symbolist, distinguishes the following elements of folk tradition used by the poet
 in order to synthesize a universal poetic world-view:

1. An impersonal union with Nature without sacrificing human consciousness. Folk tradition has maintained a unity between humanity and nature in the form of metamorphoses, talking animals, etc.; it also allows man to escape the tragic bondage of religion, since he came from nature and not from God. (Nature, not Jesus, is the redeemer.)

2. Folk humor as a means of controlling horror, not eliminating it. Leśmian laughs, dances, or saws his characters to death in "Ballada dziadowska," "Świdryga and Midryga," and "Piła" (The Saw) respectively. Folk humor tends to be stoic, tragic, and skeptical, "making friends with horror" like the demented general in "Apocalypse Now;" it realizes that any knowledge is partial and unclear and therefore worthy of ridicule. (Cf. Aristotle and Bergson: any laughter cancels out compassion.) This element is also heavily influenced by the Russian "bylina," with its grotesque diminutives and its violence.

3. The hidden narrator as a stylized "primeval man" posing ontological questions civilization cannot answer. Sometimes he openly addresses assemblies, as in the Łaka ballads; others (e. g. in "Dwaj Macieje," Two Matthews),
57
the narrator is a "pleciuga," a folksy yarn-spinner.

Leśmian thought folk language was inclined to poetry and innovation because of its imagistic, earthy concreteness, and was influenced by Porębowicz's
58
translations as well. In a conversation with interviewer Edward Boyé, he mentioned that folk songs were probably written without print in mind, so poets had to take mnemonics into account. That was why, in his ballads, he favored distichs for easy memorization and never used enjambments.
59
Some people found that his obsession with the rhythmical and primitive elements rendered his
60
poetry irritatingly incantational.

However, as mentioned by Sandler and Stone above, Leśmian's treatment of folk style and substance is often intellectual, philosophical, or parodistic. In "Jaś uzdrowiony" (Johnny Cured), a child is able to see God, the angels, Jesus—and two suns. An eye operation cures him of seeing double, but he can also no longer see God, the angels, or Jesus. Trznadel considers this an ironic look at a visionary peasant cured of talent by the fiery sword of civilization.

Instead of interrupting an activity, Leśmian's folksiness eternalizes it; instead of ending with the voice of a girl buried alive, "The Girl" begins with the voice—and everyone dies except the girl, who never existed. In "Don Juan's Funeral," Leśmian picks up on the folk-tale of a peasant who drops dead while witnessing his own funeral; however, he does so at the point where the folk-tale leaves off, and adds material from the Don Juan literary tradition. Also, folk-tales usually do not specify the individuality or economic situation of protagonists (possibly in an unconscious attempt to reconstruct a Golden Age in which such things were unimportant) nor the geographical setting. Leśmian adopts this technique, but uses it to inject philosophical considerations of a general nature.

To sum up: Leśmian transformed folk motifs by means of creative treatment, taking great liberties and using tradition as a point of departure. (With the Magi in "Betleem," for instance, "the emphasis is placed upon the process of seeking and not finding." Leśmian's "philosophical preoccupations gave the motifs he took from these sources a new twist." He shared the French Symbolist preoccupations with the negative, the musical, and the creative process, but the overriding importance he attached to rhythm and traditional folklore (secondary at best to the Western Symbolists) cause his periodization within that movement to become extremely problematical unless the movement is redefined to include those elements.

C. Beyond Periodization

Głowiński and Stone consider Leśmian a Symbolist; Trznadel believes him to be an Existentialist; and other writers such as Pankowski and Marchesani call him Baroque, sometimes with Romanticism on the ascendant. Others have indicated that he has ties with Futurism and Absurdism: he prefigured developments such as liquid-crystal technology and computers with his transitional metamorphoses and analyses of what exists between the positive and the negative, and his pessimistic laughter in the face of senselessness could easily link him to Gombrowicz and Miciński. Since he was an outsider who belonged to no school, however, it might make more sense to avoid categoring him altogether, and perhaps compare him to another great poet who had a similarly individual influence on his country's literature while it was undergoing important transformations, namely Johann Wolfgang Goethe.

It has already been mentioned that both men became lawyers, reluctantly, at their fathers' behest; loved and studied folklore, painting, philosophy, and mythology; travelled widely and became aware of their roots while abroad; were very close to their respective sisters; and suffered hemorrhages when adversity struck. There are some further similarities, however:

As was the case with Goethe (especially the West-östlicher Divan), Leśmian contributed as a translator to his nation's literary output: Baudelaire, Poe, Shchedrin, Verlaine, Ibsen were all translated into Polish by him, albeit in some cases (Ibsen and Poe) from other translations. He also appreciated the difficulty and importance of this underrated art: in translating Shchedrin, he wrote that he should have been paid as for an original work, since translation necessitated creation of an equivalent language and style and was thus creative.⁶⁸

Like Goethe, Leśmian was a theater director. (For an interesting analysis of his work, see Ratajczak's book about his Artistic Theater.) He directed the Teatr Artystyczny in Warsaw with Kazimierz Wróczyński beginning in 1911 and the Teatr Miejski (Municipal Theater) in Łódź with Mieczysław Limanowski beginning in 1917. Both enterprises were artistically noble but proved a "shipwreck of unrealistic hopes."⁶⁹ He wrote "felietony" (literary-magazine articles) on theater art, but many were rejected.⁷⁰ From 1917 to 1918 he tried his hand, without much success, at Warsaw literary cabarets.⁷¹ His vision was that the theater should have artistic autonomy and be anti-realistic, i. e. close to myth or fairy-tales; he consciously included dance, mime, and folk and primitive elements.⁷² Like Goethe, he loved puppet theater and considered it very subtle; he would have enjoyed directing such a presentation. He disliked banality, compromise, and logorrhea and expected a piece to produce new revelations.

Leśmian also functioned as a literary critic, and frequently reviewed translations or wrote essays on theater in this capacity. After Chimera closed in 1907, he cooperated with Krytyka and Miesięcznik Literacki i Artystyczny.⁷³ A brief sampling of his critical pieces, as compiled by Jack Trznadel into the Szkice literackie, indicates the depth and breadth of Leśmian's knowledge:

The review of Ise-Monogatari (pp. 467-474) is an introduction to the poetic conventions of Japanese: poetry is meant to spellbind, not move, and to indicate the poet's degree of education and knowledge of life. Suitors, for example, were expected to write poems ("tanka") to ensnare their ladies, and it was these poems, not the ladies and gentlemen, who are the heroes of this novel.

"Wielki starzec" (The Great Old Man, pp. 432-7) is a short biographical analysis of Tolstoy, who learned truth only through self-hatred; his own Doppelgänger, he never knew whether he was sinner or penitent. He seemed the born martyr, since all Russia was doing penance in his soul; with the exception of the archetypal Peasant, he found no one whom he could love truly and sincerely.

In "Miłość platońska" (Platonic Love, pp. 426-32) Leśmian states that "eternal ideas" are the only reality, since they alone are able to give form and finiteness to the chaos of matter. The soul is the repository for memories of the secrets of existence; thus Plato loved Life itself.

St. Francis of Assisi (pp. 420-5): For saints, imagination is intensified action and empathic reality: flowers rejoice and pray, life is a miracle. For this, one must be capable of ecstasy, a talent which cannot be learned, since it is more like an instinct or a reflex.

"Men of Letters Working for a Living" (pp. 495-6): Work kills talent, which is fleeting and can die as quickly as a meteor (Mickiewicz is adduced as an example). Society does not recognize literary work as socially useful and remunerable, just like physical work is. Other countries (Denmark, Czechoslovakia) have literary scholarships and grants to further their national cultural heritage, whereas in Poland in 1933, men of letters are deprived of all social rights.

Many of Leśmian's statements, particularly those dealing in general literary matters and upholding the values of experimentation, are still timely in the United States in 1984; Sławinski, in his review (p. 219) of the Szkice (Literary Sketches), states that a reading thereof is very satisfying to modern readers. One is reminded of the solid scholarship and prophetic exhortations contained in Goethe's literary criticism, as in his introduction to the West-östlicher Divan.

The Szkice were considered marginal writings during the poet's lifetime and never taken seriously enough to fulfill the function of a literary program or manifesto. However, since most of his reviews dealt with second-rate or even peripheral works, the statistically average nature of the subject matter made it possible for Leśmian to grasp the spirit of Modernism and Symbolism. Leśmian did not accept Modernism as a literary fashion, but he did think its problematics through to the end. Those sketches which dealt with literature in general rather than being reviews of specific pieces (Rhythm as World-View, Musings About Poetry, etc.) frequently discussed the function of poetry in contemporary life—or, rather, the function it should fulfill in contemporary life. They are therefore

a pendant to his own poetic creativity, a lecture of sorts on his "formulated poetics," a theory of poetic language firmly grounded in parapoetic attitudes such as philosophy or a metaphysical orientation.⁷⁴

Leśmian also believed that the method of "our so-called critics" was pathological,⁷⁵ and frequently critiqued the critics. In a 1922 letter to Emil Zegadłowicz concerning Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz' scathing attack against his own neologisms,⁷⁶ Leśmian privately stated his belief that Skamander, which had run the diatribe, was too tendentious, personal, and self-contradictory, as well as arbitrary in judging other people's work. "These faults are worth avoiding," he added laconically. "Besides, every author publishes too many of his own poems."⁷⁷ He believed replacing moral values by esthetic ones was characteristic of decadence.⁷⁸ In 1932, when the Skamandrite Kazimierz Wierzyński published some of Leśmian's works in his Kultura, the poet started becoming a person to pay attention to even if he did not agree with Skamander, as on the moral/esthetics value issue. Significantly, this coincided with that movement's loss of faith in optimistic values.⁷⁹ Skamander finally accepted him into the Wiadomości literackie when he became a member of the Polish Academy of Literature, although they had previously ignored him because his influence on some of them was uncomfortable.⁸⁰

We have seen how Leśmian's activities, experimentation, and exploration closely paralleled those of Goethe, who studied botany, considered metamorphosis to be a structural law of constant change hidden in humans but manifest in plants, and expressed his wonder at the world ("So gestaltend, umgestaltend/ Zum Erstaunen bin ich da," in Parabase).⁸¹ Leśmian paralleled these interests in biology and metamorphosis: in "Sidi-Numan" (Sad Rozstajny), a man from India

turns his faithless wife into a horse so he can whip her. Compare this to
 82
 Goethe's "Paria," wherein an allegedly erring wife is also transformed.

In an apparent prefiguration of Lévi-Strauss' binary opposites, Goethe
 compared life and art to inhaling and exhaling; all living things were considered
 83
 a harmony of opposites. Leśmian seems to have had a similar philosophy.
 84
 In a 1900 letter to Miriam, he wrote "I feel a twofold wholeness within." He
 had a predilection for paradoxical descriptions (as in "Your Portrait") wherein
 the contrasts are reconciled, the meanings contained within each other, and
 85
 the words confirming each other's meanings in endless parallel reflections.
 Like Goethe, he took his cue from nature, not from other art, and emphasized
 that the supreme calling for both art and nature is to give form.

Both poets experimented widely in form: let us remember here the
 variety of form (ghazal, Alexandrine, Knittelvers) in Goethe's works, especially
 the artistic and psychological effect of unexpected rhyme and metrics in Faust.
 In "Pan Błyszczyński," an amalgam of Roman epic and Slavic folklore meters,
 Leśmian used unexpected 17-syllable lines; in "Asoka," modified terza rima;
 and various ballads in authentic form ("Skrzypek opętany," for instance, can
 86
 readily be compared to Goethe's "Totentanz").

87
 Leśmian loved nature and could stare for hours at a developing flower.
 He was also very modest. Although he knew art—he could deliver impromptu
 lectures on Japanese art, organized his wife's art exhibit in Paris, and went to
 the Louvre every day for a whole year—he claimed to know only a few rooms in
 88
 that museum. He also loved philosophy and was sorry not to have studied it.
 When he tried to register for philosophy courses in 1927 in Lwów, Dean Edward
 89
 Porębowicz tactfully suggested that it might be "too late" for someone his age.

Finally, an anecdotal example of Leśmian's varied interests: he was a gourmet who invented two recipes reportedly worthy of Brillat-Savarin, namely a "meat braid" and apples fried in butter and honey. He was a Renaissance man who considered life and literature, reality and dream inseparable unity, not standardization. For him, creativity was an organic, mysterious process: a 1903 letter to Miriam mentions that he had "meant to write just a novella, but a novel unexpectedly slipped out," probably the unpublished Pani atamanowa. A "full relationship between the soul and the universe should contain everything human," he paraphrased Terence; "I know of no scalpel... which could divide a truly poetic work into content and form." Any attempt to impose poetic manifestos or programs is thus "analogous to making a cage for a nightingale."

A few years before his death, he found himself being thundered at by Franc Fiszer, who demanded a definition of a poet. Intimidated, Leśmian replied that a poet is a person who sees that others do not.

Like Goethe, Leśmian has had a great influence on subsequent poetry and poetics; his Szkice, for instance, are considered seminal, even prophetic, in terms of literary criticism, and some of the problems are still with us today. His "hidden influence" on the Skamander poets and the Cracow Vanguard was not admitted at the time, but he has since "achieved recognition as one of the classics of Polish poetry and its most outstanding poet since Norwid." Tuwim's "Słowie, as well as the works of Przybos, Karpowicz, and Białoszewski, are literally unthinkable without Leśmian; his poetics is self-contained and consistent and has the visionary energy needed to create and inspire true poetry. Today's poets can find in him a pattern for a creative method, for searching out their own relationship to art.

Much of Leśmian's inspirational message for young poets is derived from his neologisms: his influence on the formation of the basic structure of poetic language is comparable to that of Kochanowski, Sep-Szarzyński, and Norwid.⁹⁹ He knew that real poets must fight and take risks, not merely engage in easy rhyming without obligation; his world contains Van Gogh's anxiety and nature's expressive exuberance and mystery, as nature is an independent reality rather than a pretext.¹⁰⁰ A real artist's ethics must be extreme and uncompromising as regards the "standards" of any particular period; "the only unvetoes error he can commit is the error of incompleteness," and he must under no circumstances limit his cognitive rule.¹⁰¹ In aiming to describe the full possibilities of reality instead of merely painting a static moment, Leśmian thought the poet's responsibilities included to "chisel his words to the exact dimensions and requirements of the elusive, unrepeatable moment, teach and elevate readers by giving abstractions form instead of hoarding them for the elite, and find truth and "refurbish it for application to contemporary situations."¹⁰² Few other poets are so condensed extracts of lyricism and unparalleled intensity.¹⁰³

For Leśmian, Symbolism is the same as Romanticism, and Romanticism the same as Greek tragedy: the characters come directly from nature and only strike future generations as strange; he always strove for eternal newness and unrepeatable individuality.¹⁰⁴ Since his concept of nature admitted no distinction between the physical and the spiritual (like Goethe's "Kern und Schale," it is both and identical with itself), we can readily understand why, in "The Drowner,"¹⁰⁵ greenery is a demon, not a soul, spirit, angel, or devil.

Leśmian's genius is not narrowly time-bound, but rather universal and "prophetically current." In substituting a "polyverse" for a universe, i. e. introducing a concept of plural time and alternative realities, he intuited Einstein and intimated existentialism. The following chapters will seek to explain Leśmian's personal poetics and the manner in which he endeavored to express it in his own inimitable language.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER II

- 1
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- 2
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- 3
Krzyżanowski, Julian, History of Polish Literature (Warsaw: P.I. W., 1978), pp. 453-4.
- 4
Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, "Pojęcie symbolu w okresie Młodej Polski," in Głowiński, ed., Studia z teorii i historii poezji (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1970), pp. 184-5, 194-9.
- 5
Karpowicz, pp. 247-8.
- 6
Brzechwa, "Niebieski wycieruch," in Wspomnienia, p. 94.
- 7
Pankowski, pp. 21-3, 28, 145-6; Miłosz, pp. 270, 279.
- 8
Pankowski, p. 21.
- 9
Podraza-Kwiatkowska, see fn. 4 above, p. 169; cf. also her "Gdzie umieścić Leśmiana?" in Studia o Leśmianie, pp. 15-18.
- 10
Karl Dedecius, Zur Literatur und Kultur Polens (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), p. 301.
- 11
Kazimierz Wyka, Modernizm polski, pp. 158, 164-178.
- 12
Miłosz, pp. 323-3.
- 13
Dedecius, see fn. 10 above, pp. 302-4.
- 14
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- 15
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- 16
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- 17
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18

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19

Ważyk, Kwestia gustu, pp. 154-9, 163-8, 173.

20

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21

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22

Leopold Lewin, in Wspomnienia, p. 302; Miller, Bez kropki nad i, p. 338; Sandauer, Filozofia Leśmiana, pp. 507-9, 514-15, 519; Samobójstwo, pp. 13-18, 28-31.

23

Quoted in Głowiński, ZP, p. 9.

24

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25

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26

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27

Jerzy Kwiatkowski, "Le thème du paradis perdu dans la poésie de la Jeune Pologne," in Le Symbolisme en France et en Pologne, pp. 153-66.

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Paul Valéry, Etudes littéraires, Oeuvres complètes, Vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 686 ff.; Podraza-Kwiatkowska, see fn. 4 above, p. 197.

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Pascaline Mourier-Casile, "Figures et formes de clôture dans le récit symboliste," in Le Symbolisme en France et en Pologne, pp. 77-82.

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- 34
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- 35
Stone, pp. 32-3.
- 36
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- 37
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- 38
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- 39
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- 40
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- 42
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- 44
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- 45
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- 46
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- 47
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- 48
Hana Jechova, see fn. 2 above, p. 132.
- 49
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- 50
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- 51
Miłbsz, p. 324.
- 52
Stone, pp. 154-172.
- 53
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Michał Głowiński, "Słowo i pieśń," in Studia, pp. 189-90.
- 55
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68; Głowiński, ZP, pp. 158-67.
- 56
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- 57 Trznadel, TL, pp. 231-64.
- 58 Papierkowski, p. 21.
- 59 Leśmian, "Dialogi akademickie," in Szkice literackie, pp. 497-503.
- 60 Papierkowski, p. 207.
- 61 Leśmian, in UR, pp. 113-17.
- 62 Trznadel, TL, p. 130.
- 63 Ibid., pp. 180, 188.
- 64 Ibid., pp. 195-6.
- 65 Ibid., pp. 198-9.
- 66 Stone, pp. 229-33.
- 67 Ibid., p. 350.
- 68 Leśmian, UR, p. 327.
- 69 Kazimierz Wierzyński, "Mowa o Bolesławie Leśmianie," Wiadomości literackie, May 7, 1939, pp. 2-3; Papierkowski, p. 7.
- 70 Mazurowa, in Wspomnienia, pp. 67-9.
- 71 Brzechwa, in Wspomnienia, pp. 90.
- 72 Nyszek, pp. 17-18.
- 73 Papierkowski, p. 7.
- 74 Janusz Sławiński, "Recenzja 'Szkiców literackich' Bolesława Leśmiana," Pamiętnik literacki, Vol. I/1969, pp. 219-225.
- 75 Leśmian, UR, p. 303.
- 76 Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, "Pierwszy zeszyt Czartaka," Skamander, No. 17/1922, p. 126.
- 77 Kozikowski, Wspomnienia, p. 133.
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- 79
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Brzechwa, in Wspomnienia, pp. 88-9; cf. also Stone, pp. 23-4.
- 81
Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Gedichte (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980), p. 197.
- 82
Ibid., p. 200. "Sidi-Numan" is in Sad rozstajny, any edition.
- 83
"Talisman," ibid., p. 167.
- 84
Leśmian, UR, p. 238.
- 85
Sławiński, "Semantyka poetycka Leśmiana," in Studia, pp. 103-7.
- 86
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- 88
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Ibid., p. 239.
- 94
Stern, in Wspomnienia, p. 338.
- 95
Stern, "Bolesław Leśmian jako krytyk," in Głód, pp. 149-53.
- 96
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- 97
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- 98
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- 99
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- 102
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Stern, "O krycie Bolesława Leśmiana," in Głód, pp. 145-46.
- 104
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- 105
Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, "Odczłowieczając duszę," in Studia,
pp. 216-17.

III. The Poetic Philosophy of Bolesław Leśmian

Both Leśmian's poetry and his metapoetry (poetry about poetry), not to mention his theoretical works (particularly the Szkice) present a complete, holistic poetic vision, although the styles sometimes differ. Even more so than Goethe, Leśmian aimed to recreate the minutiae and dynamics of nature within his work and was practically impervious to changes in poetic fashion. His personal philosophy, however, did change with the years, becoming increasingly ethical and pessimistic toward the end of his life.

¹
Trznadel mentions that in Sad rozstajny, the first few poems are strongly stylized, contradicting the immediacy of experience. In Łąka, however, especially in the "Raspberry Brushwood" erotic cycle, there is a joining of Romantic "Ich-Lyrik," Baroque love poetry, and folk verse. The parallels and "Verfremdungseffekt" are a reaction against Młoda Polska's emotional, pseudo-sincere logorrhea. In Napój cienisty and Dziejba leśna, the poet makes declarations of humanism and represents general truth within particular occurrences (e. g. "Etherealness"). In his last collections, Leśmian presents a person left completely to his own devices, torn from the secret links of nature and divine power which nourished him before; he is at the mercy of a dangerous, painful, and cruel fate. The resigned humanism of the late Leśmian is particularly evident in his reminiscences of childhood: he presents the myth of an individual's return to a time preceding defeat, before the dichotomy between
²
consciousness and the subconscious rendered human existence tragic.

Since fate furnishes humans no absolute certainty regarding the purpose of existence, life ends with nothingness. In his pessimistic existentialism,

Leśmian saw only two possibilities: (a) quietism and despair and (b) ethics, i. e. human activity in spite of despair (as exemplified in "The Little Cobbler"). Other poems, such as "Pan Błyszczczyński" and "The Girl," are allegories of effort and creativity within tragic existentialism: although no certainty is possible whether the effort will be meaningful for posterity, man can at least create himself and, through humanistic love and ethics, redeem and console humanity by joining with another person, by establishing solidarity in misery. For instance, the brothers in "The Girl" join efforts, and the protagonists of "Dzień skrzydlaty" (The Winged Day) in Napój cienisty declare:

Zrozumieliśmy wszystko! -- I że właśnie tak trzeba!
 I że można—bez szczęścia... I że można—bez nieba...
 Tylko drobniec i maleć od nadmiaru kochania.
 A to była—odpowiedź, i nie było pytania.

Free translation: We understood everything! — And that it had to be just that way! / And that one can make do without happiness and without heaven... / Just become small and tiny from a surfeit of love. / And that was the answer, but there was no question.

This is strongly reminiscent of the ancient Greeks' "ideal-born of despair;" caught in a bind between the desire for perfection and the danger of hubris, they became conscious of the "finiteness and precariousness of every human life. So the thing to do is to take advantage of everything that can be offered by the present ... to live wholly, but nobly...." Cf. John Donne who, in a 1626 sermon at the funeral of Sir William Cockayne, neglected God for a fly-buzz momentarily distracting him; Leśmian goes one step further and makes God actually dependent upon a fly.

In the earlier Leśmian, death was something temporary, like a trip to Hades; it merely separated the earthly world from the world beyond, which

strikes the poet as much more interesting. In the late Leśmian, however, death is permanent and one-way; it separates existence from nonexistence and is no longer a return to the comforting womb of nature. There is thus no point in learning anything, as death annihilates the learner; everything is thus a dream of a daydream. The discovery that there is nothing after death (the hero kills God and finds out there was nothing there) horrifies man and deprives him of hope for a better future or a return to a primeval past in which he was semi-divine. In "Ubóstwo" (Poverty), Leśmian reminisces about his dead family and concludes that nothing ever existed, he had merely loved phantoms; in "The Girl," the protagonist is a nonexistent girl. In "At Night," "Belated Confession," and the end of the Raspberry Brushwood cycle, love has become melancholy clinging.⁶ However, this compassionate resignation, reminiscent of the Boddhisattva tradition, was already embryonically present in the early Leśmian. In "Fragment," he wrote:⁷

Staram się na świat biedny innym patrzeć okiem....
 Biorę iskrę nadziei ze świata ułudy....

Free translation: I try to look at the poor world with other eyes.... / I catch a spark of hope from the world of illusion....

If, at the time of death, the poet wonders whether "God secretly weeps or perishes together with him,"⁸ "Horace's carpe diem is the only reality left for man."⁹ In the absence of theodicy and ontology—in "Nocą," for instance, all the gods have died—nothing remains for man except ethics.¹⁰ The most God can provide is insurmountable limitation: any attempt to escape is absurd by definition. In the eponymous poem, Eliasz manages to reach the limits of existence, but finds only nothingness: God is not only the limit, but also the limit of imagination, i. e. the impossibility of any other kind of

consciousness. Such transcendence, being a transcendence of nothingness, is
 a colorless victory, a Promethean loneliness of tragic resignation.¹¹

Leśmian simultaneously rejected God's existence and "maintained a running polemic with the indifferent, cruel deity who habitually fails man when man is in crucial need of aid." If Leśmian's agnostic pantheism was a reverence for Life, God was the defendant; man is ethically superior to God. For Leśmian, a "dying Yakut" was "greater than Zeus," and the Two Matthews give God the herb of immortality out of compassion. Like God, however, man will also
 tragically die, leaving behind only his own creation, namely myth.¹²

Karpowicz presents a masterful analysis of Leśmian's ambivalent relationship to God, although he fails to adduce anthropological evidence to the effect that God is society (Durkheim) and a projection into the supernatural of child-rearing practices. (Future scholarship could investigate whether Leśmian was an abused child, which might explain his hatred of God and society, his fixation with the negative, and his pessimism.) His points, which are well taken, can be summarized as follows: If God is unacceptable, you war with him; if acceptable, you have a human relationship. God is man's thinking partner (in "The Little Cobbler," he has become a client); his immortality is therefore in human hands, and man is made to feel responsible for him. Mankind, however, is not afraid of God's death, but of the void he would leave behind. Such a God stops governing human fate; he becomes tractable to human fears, becoming a human projection. In effect, Karpowicz contends, this is not an attempt to humanize God, but to deify man: God is a manifestation of human pride and of man's cryptic desire for immortality; killing him would thus be suicide, and the
 problem of faith in God thus becomes a problem of faith in the self.¹³

In "Jam — nie Osjan!" (I am not Ossian!), Leśmian compares the Ossian hoax to the God hoax: someone donned a God mask, created the world, and is being prayed to. Trznadel believes Leśmian's attitude to God to be a philosophical system rather than a religion, something close to Voltaire's definition of theism or Angelus Silesius' concept that God is absolute Nothingness without time or measure.¹⁴ We must remember that through Schopenhauer and Antoni Lange (who translated the literature of India into Polish), Leśmian was familiar with Hindu and Buddhist philosophy; he must have been influenced by the dialectics of destruction and creation, the fact that negation is necessary for creation, the concept of the soul's oneness with Brahma, the definition of reincarnation as metamorphosis, and the concept of Nirvana as a desirable negative existence.¹⁵

That Oriental philosophy also influenced Leśmian's poetics becomes evident when we read a contemporary Buddhist treatise on the dynamic (non-static), functional nature of form. Objects, form, and emptiness

condition and penetrate each other. They co-exist inseparably... (The) all-producing emptiness... is the primordial ground, the ever-present starting point of all creation. It is the principle of unlimited potentiality which can be experienced only in moments of complete, unconditional freedom... in moments of spontaneous insight, in which we are lifted out of the net of cause and effect and find ourselves faced with pure being. (The relativity of all things and conditions) is more than a mere causal, time-space relationship; it is one of a common ground and a simultaneous presence of all factors of existence, although certain factors may take a momentary precedence over others... we must consciously go through the process of creation and dissolution... experience that form is emptiness and emptiness is form by consciously creating form... form-creation and form-dissolution... (are)... both poles of... incommensurable nature.¹⁶

Man is thus left to his own devices; God is either powerless (Two Mathews) or actively withholds support (Eliasz), but in either case otiose (as in

the story about Światowid, the creator-god who dies after finishing his work). This concept of an otiose god is interesting and significant and deserves to be dealt with before we analyze the elements of primeval religion in Leśmian's poetic philosophy. Creator gods sometimes become "otiose" and withdraw from the world; an example would be Brahma among the Hindus, and the Christian God the Father seems to be involved in a similar tendency. Such gods "receive very little ritual attention" and "are addressed only in very extraordinary circumstances, when only a divine act of 'recreation' can set the world right again."¹⁸

Oriental philosophy also furnished Leśmian with a pre-dualistic, productive view of life and primeval unity possibly best exemplified by the Zen striving toward a knowledge "upstream of all conceptualization." Another part of Leśmian's myth, namely the illusory and kinetic nature of form, is also attributable to Indian thought, wherein "the extinction of fire does not mean its annihilation but merely its regression to the mode of potentiality."¹⁹ (Leśmian and his Oriental masters seemed to anticipate the discoveries of twentieth-century physics: in addition to solids, liquids, and gases, matter can be in transitional forms such as crystals, liquid crystals, and glass.)²⁰ Leśmian transferred this knowledge to the domain of perception and esthetics; his poetry was a cognitive process which sought to imitate nature in the sense that it strove to recreate her dynamic flux, cruel beauty, painful metamorphoses, holy holism, and simultaneous diversity. (These aspects also derive from the philosophy of Henri Bergson.) Leśmian expresses the pain of nonexistence, the simultaneity of being and non-being, the paradox of a universe negated and living off its own negations, i. e. a negative theology in which God is as fragile as man.²¹

An adequate understanding of Leśmian's poetics, however, must begin with Spinoza: the poet frequently referred to the dichotomy between natura naturans (creative, dynamic, immediate, personal, unpredictable nature in which the symbol and the object are identical) and natura naturata (hierarchically abstract, static, mediated, social, statistically predictable, with a secondary intellectualized reality separating primeval identity).²² Leśmian concedes that stable, proven principles are socially useful but points out that they are inimical to artists, who crave to "live themselves" like storks "craning their necks into the future." As an example of social abstraction, he analyzes the function of money, which renders experience indirect. Money begets money and hesitates to give up its abstract independence by supporting creative work; possession of money further allows the owner to keep reality at arm's length. (Perhaps that is why Lesmian's poetry is so heavily populated by cripples and paupers, whom he considered closer to the roots of primeval life.)²³

Like the Buddhist master quoted above, Leśmian disdained mechanical cause-and-effect relationships; for him, "causality.... fetters creativity and does not allow the effect to be a total surprise."²⁴ Since reason poisons poetry, Leśmian searched instead for the movement which preceded the prime movement, a pre-zero point of reality; "praprzyczyna" (protocause) was one of his favorite words. Karpowicz has called Leśmian's poetry "the threshold's attempt to cross itself," a trip into the infrastructure of the unconscious ("infracolors,²⁵ infracolors"), and relentless retracing of the crystallization process. Sandauer adds that Leśmian's anti-causality is an attempt to penetrate to the very core of objects, where matter becomes energy.²⁶ Głowiński believes Leśmian shared

the views of anthropologists such as Tylor, Ribot, and Lévy-Bruhl, to the effect that primitive man is not interested in cause and effect because he ascribes causes to spirits; Leśmian considers causality an anti-personal limitation which imposes a false, static order, and prefers a "fantastic necessity" which is creative instead of regulative. Like primitive man, Leśmian substitutes dreams for causality, i. e. synthesis for analysis; primitive man does not distinguish
27
between knowledge acquired asleep or awake.

Leśmian himself designated the cause-and-effect relationship as an antagonistic one, like that between the older and younger generations. The effect is contained within the cause; an added factor legitimizes it ("gives it citizenship rights"), but does not in fact create it. The average man, however, knows only the chain of cause and effect, the structure of interrelationships; he knows nothing of the human soul (nor does he want to), and denies his protection to extraordinary persons. The individual thus loses his personal dignity and
28
gets social dignity instead. Thus, Leśmian has incorporated Spinoza's idea that creative evolution is inimical to obsolescent reality.

However, the influence of Bergson was much more direct: Creative Evolution was Leśmian's favorite philosophical book, and he became involved in frequent vehement discussions concerning the concept of intuitive perception of
29
reality. Leśmian "poetified" Bergson, whose influence helped him "crystallize his poetic vision" by exercising his Weltanschauung with concepts of myth, creative evolution, rhythm, and ambiguity of form, and by introducing dynamic, future-oriented concepts such as intuition, the cognitive and philosophical functions of language, and creativity as a comforting approximation of the divine in
30
a world bereft of God or eternity.

31

Trznadel believes the following Leśmian characteristics to be Bergsonian derivations:

1. rhythm as an organizational principle beyond logic, an intuitive comprehension of what concepts cannot explain
2. tautologies (e. g. stabling stables) as intuitive percepts complementing themselves by rhythmical suggestion, indicating that the symbols are inseparable from the things themselves.

We might also add the creative, dynamic imitation of nature and the Goethean concept of fruitful opposites to the list of Bergson derivatives.

In addition to poetifying Bergson (for instance, by inventing dynamic verbs to replace static descriptions, e. g. "daleczeć"—to far, to distance—in "The Little Cobbler" or "The Spring Ox"), Leśmian took many of Bergson's concepts one step further. The philosopher liked to compare duration to melody and pointed out the importance of rhythm to biology; the poet said that melody was created by rhythm, which liberates words from their intellectual meaning and thus takes them into the creative realm of natura naturans.³² Bergson believed that art is always concerned with the individual and non-repeatable, and that its highest ambition is to reveal nature to us (except that he means the élan vital,³³ not Pope's "nature methodiz'd"). Leśmian conceived of poetry as an act of freedom intuitively perceiving the creative nature of existence, i. e., cognition of reality is a cognition of the creative process,³⁴ and berated the average man for being an unconscious Positivist and anti-Bergsonian.³⁵ Bergson wrote that change and non-repeatability are a fundamental rule of life; Leśmian invented neologisms as ephemeral metaphors calculated for maximum effect in terms of fluid, dynamic metamorphosis: he used prefixes of incomplete action to indicate the "constant state of becoming" which replaces "obsolescent reality."³⁶

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Bergson's "élan vital" stands for continuous transformation in nature; in
 "Niedopita czara" (Not-quite-drunk magic potion), a flower "contains something
 which is not flower nor butterfly, but rather dream, fog, or other-world..."³⁸

Leśmian's Szkice, a corpus of essays written between 1909 and 1915,
 are an expression of his poetic creed and a "commentary and guide to his own
 poetic work.... defining his own stand on aesthetics." (Many of these essays
 were reviews of second-rate literature; the poet believed weeds had a right to
 live too, and was sensitive and objective enough "to detect deviations from the
 code and see in them the forecast of a new kind of poetics."³⁹) The most in-
 teresting essays, however—which merit inclusion in all standard textbooks of
 literary criticism—are the more general ones, which adapt Bergson's ideas in
 such a way as to make them useful to literature; the essays dealing with rhythm
 are particularly important.

In contradistinction to music and painting, for whom sound and color are
 their own essence, poetry has a grave problem. Words have two painfully
 disparate functions: being themselves and being hackneyed, colorless concepts.⁴⁰
 Rhythm, as a mysterious Dionysiac "content of sound," enables words to be-
 come magic by creating secret relationships of eternal kinship, ignoring logical
 relations of meaning, discerning hidden similarities within arbitrary separations;
 since rhythm is based on feeling and illogic, it confers primeval freedom by
 liberating words from their conceptual slavery and reinstating their capacity
 for constant creative metamorphosis and ongoing adaptability.⁴¹ Although ideas
 and ideologies are crueler than life because they demand submission to absolute
 logic, poetry is able to escape this despotism due to its rhythm, i. e. its meta-
 linguistic, metalogical content.⁴²

Because rhythm gives words an independent billowing, a winged daring to survive their content, poetry becomes independent word-creation, a living, miraculous, "gigantifying treasure" of word-magic, whereas prose is content only.⁴³ Joined by rhythm, the words rejoice after long separation. Rhythm also confers immortality upon tragically irreversible, unrepeatable life-facts:⁴⁴ it creates joy because it is repeatable and can return. Through rhythm, words⁴⁵ become a surprise and a revelation; intoxicated, they dance as a sign of joy.

Rhythm further establishes a relationship to the universal cosmic rhythm, helps people remember poetry, and allows poetry to become a micro-cosm of true reality. It is superior to syntax (which is only rational order) because it is joyful and indestructible in its recurrence, and therefore immortal.⁴⁶ Leśmian's words in effect undergo morphological and semantic transsubstantiation as though driven by some internal demon; rhythm is creative because it liberates words from their intellectual meaning. Of course, the immortality conferred by rhythm is not of substance, but of eternal movement—i. e. of the élan vital rather than the particular organism in question.⁴⁷

Although Leśmian barely mentioned rhyme in his theoretical works, all his poetry contains it, and it functions as an organizing principle similar to rhythm. The more dissimilar the meanings, the greater the surprise of similarity of sound (and, of course, the danger of verbal acrobatics): the effect of unexpected rhyme is close to the effect of magic, like a good waiter silently⁴⁸ imparting a feeling of security to the guests.

Leśmian believed poets should write poetry as though there were no such thing as print; the original purpose of poetry was mnemonic and a function of rhythm. He disdained rhythmless, conceptual modern poetry because of its

lack of spontaneity, its contrived preoccupation with philosophical opinion; he likened it to a clipped-winged stork in a zoo, whose "freedom" is mere appearance. Modern ideational poetry, he believed, tries to enthrall us not with the magic of words (which it considers outdated), but with the content of sentences. Living, poetry, however, is magic and indefinable (definitions are only sad glass coffins which kill transparently): we stop being poets as soon as poetry stops being secret. Furthermore, since contemporaneity is no secret to anyone, modern poetry's attempt to avoid mystery is like that of a woman who lies about her age--just a temporary stopgap way of surviving.

For Leśmian, poetry represents the world in the process of being perceived: the reader becomes a witness to the transformation process instead of being shown only the result.⁵⁰ He attempts to express the haphazard, unsatisfactory, and temporary nature of forms by showing their metamorphoses from one incarnation to another.⁵¹ He considered art a correlate, not a reproduction, of reality, and artists doomed heroes à la Prometheus. What is exalted is the effort itself: "Pan Błyszczński," for instance, is a paean to the work involved in creating an evanescent but human garden.⁵² "If reality had made my eyes," Leśmian wrote in the "Dream" cycle,⁵³ "I would not hear songs among the voices of the universe, nor would colors gush from the bottomless darks." Nor, of course, would a peasant woman dream she is walking along a mottled sunlit path trying to step on the sunlight in a quasi-drunken but joyous dance.⁵⁴

Leśmian's poetry, particularly his neologisms, is dynamic, not static--even Nothingness is only potential Being.⁵⁵ For him, life is an experiment, rebellion and challenge against destruction; even cripples are perfect in view of the imperfection of all existence. Since everything is fleeting, unrepeatable, and

destructible, it is therefore precious (its value increases in proportion to the obstacles surmounted), and every detail becomes supremely important and dignified. A camel (The Zoo), a mouse (The Moths), or the space of an absent human body (Two Convicts) becomes pivotal, and a crippled soldier (The Soldier) is the equal of God. Since nothing is repeatable, even resurrection is a fraud (On Resurrection Day); individuality (a refusal to allow the sterile masses to dominate) and memory (the defense against being devoured by the world) consequently join the list of Leśmian's obsessions.

A consequence of eternal becoming à la Bergson in Leśmian's poetry is the unfinished, uneven, often unfulfilled degree of characteristics, such as the mist in "Pan Błyszczącyński" trying to become a girl. Leśmian invents neologisms in order to present such aborted solidifications (e. g. the "fragrant incarnations fraught with doom" in "The Drowner"). His lexicographical innovations are a poetic corollary to Bergson's statements in the Introduction to Metaphysics: in contradistinction to static analysis, intuition and creativity work with reality, i. e. constant change. Leśmian therefore invents surprising dynamic words such as "to cricket" (even visual impressions are dynamic), thereby directly contradicting the Symbolists' "hieratic calm" and qualifying his poetry as expressionism.

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Paraphrasing Bergson, Leśmian states that intellect and instinct alone are both insufficient. We can only "know" what we test experimentally, i. e. what is dead; total knowledge would be identification with the life being studied. Poetry allows us to become internal tourists in the cosmos, delirious both with the world's immensity and its tininess; truth and beauty, like the determination of another creature's consciousness, escape any measurement. For Leśmian,

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as for Bergson, the intellect can only analyze dead things; physiology dissects cadavers, and any medicine which tries to cure cadavers is imperfect by definition.⁶¹

Another consequence of Leśmian's attempt to "hug the curve" of dynamic reality is his tautologies, such as the stabling stable. The poet looked at a stable and realized what was happening to it: the action derived from what the thing was, much as Chinese adjectives are verbs and some languages derive nouns from verb forms. Adam Szczerbowski first noticed this phenomenon, commenting that it was the best way of describing the contents without falsification: a magical, non-conceptual, tautological naming. Artur Sandauer, on the other hand, called it the "dynamics of a vicious circle" and the root of Leśmian's "momentary mythology."⁶² Karpowicz believes that a stabling stable or streaming stream is not Leśmian's attempt to reach the Kantian Ding an sich, but an achievement of its pure function; since Leśmian was obsessed with defending unrepeatability and individuality, any effort to be what one is not would destroy the hybrid. For instance, Sindbad's fish, stream, and willow become unhappy when humanized; Sindbad is terrorized by his own double, Hindbad, who becomes an uncontrollable rival with whom Sindbad must live and die. Similarly, Leśmian's questions and riddles are often self-contained and require no response, as there is a tautological relationship between the question and the answer.⁶³

For Leśmian, intuition is holistic; any "logical" criticism would be like a lover grown tired of his beloved and now suddenly finding a thousand faults precisely where love, inebriated with its own illogic, had seen nothing but perfection. Reproaching a poet with illogic is like reproaching Nature for being less precise than a barometer or a calendar; a poet's function is precisely to

synthesize disparate elements and "stumble upon" (napomykać) knowledge
 serendipitously, intuiting what is beyond "knowledge" per se. ⁶⁴

Critics have pointed out that Leśmian unites with nature rather than observing it; his poetry creates an "illusion of communion with the elements" because of his "panpsychism by analogy with animism." ⁶⁵ His words are thus palpable and corporeal, sensually present—a highly visible, touchable, verifiable, and concrete reality. Leśmian's creative realism actually renders the words "cherry pit" as hard as a cherry pit; reality is carried to its greatest mathematical power. ⁶⁶ Karpowicz calls him a Klein bottle of unity, without an inside or an outside, nothing but a 360° horizon with a wraparound eye in the middle. ⁶⁷ In behaving like existential nature, which is self-creating and self-liquidating, Leśmian has replaced an anthropocentric universe with a polycentric polyverse. ⁶⁸ (This reverberates an eerie premonition of Jamake Highwater's statement that primal man lives not in a universe, but a multiverse.) ⁶⁹ The resultant plethora of possible points of view requires great courage on the part of innovators and artists; those who hang on to the costly historical skirts of tradition can never discover a new reality. ⁷⁰ Like metamorphoses (such as the poppy turning into a rooster in "Transformations"), metaphors are powerful but dangerous; they can be painful, bloody processes, as exemplified in the crunching transsubstantiations indicating that the fundamental unity of nature (man, animal, and plant) exacts a price. ⁷¹ The poet intentionally breaks down the man-nature hierarchy: meadows and abysses become animate in "Otchłań" (The Abyss), and nature longs for man in "In the Field." (In a letter to Miriam, he wrote that he wanted to give nature the opportunity of observing him the way he observes her.) ⁷² Further, the "Spring Ox" observes the protagonist, and the

original title of The Crossroads Orchard was Kwiaty widzace (Flowers That See).⁷³

Leśmian thinks of nature as a living being; consequently, his poetry deals in fantastic visions, microscopic concreteness, alogical phenomenism (e. g. no cause and effect in "Deaths" and "The Zoo"), the equality of elements (e. g. in "In the Evening," a pond can see), continuous motion and change, anthropomorphization (e. g. the hump in "The Hunchback"), and non-human protagonists (e. g. "The Windmill").⁷⁴ Nature is a partner, not a pretext,⁷⁵ and he frequently observes things from her point of view (e. g. looking at a field from below in "The Stable"). Leśmian added the following anthropomorphic details to the Sindbad stories (pp. 8-10: the ocean, angered by doggerel thrown into it, becomes even stormier; a sea-devil fish writes a poem loosely translatable as follows: I'm no more horrible than you, You eat fish too! / I don't like my name, but it's better than none."⁷⁶ In Łąka (The Meadow),⁷⁷ Leśmian talks to a horse and suggests they pray together; J. K. Iłakowicz later wrote a children's rhyme, "Lullaby for a Bay Horse," with a similar theme.⁷⁸ Leśmian causes a stone to fall in love; raindrops turn to liquid heads ("First Rain"), and a stag becomes degraded to human status in "Akteon," a reworking of the Greek myth.⁷⁹ Snow sticks greedily to people's soles in order to make them round and slippery, then crackles like the gnashing of teeth; air hardens around the lips and resists being breathed; lanterns shake the edges of the light they throw as though to shake off dust; and oaks die in a human fashion, their death announced by a crow.⁸⁰ Wacław Gralewski relates that when he first met Leśmian, the latter interrupted his invitation to join a Lublin poetic circle by asking if he had ever thought about cricket love and tried to empathize with insect orgasm.⁸¹

Leśmian's language attempted to recreate this disintegration of dif-
 ferences: the same verbs and adjectives are used for abstracts and concretes. 82
 He often degraded majesty (such as God's), gave animals human attributes,
 left characteristics unfulfilled, and created verbs from nouns (roślinnieć,
 jeziornieć, człowieczeć), thereby designating not a thing, but a characteristic. 83
 (This is highly reminiscent of the Hopi language, wherein things are events.) 84
 He also causes mosquitoes to "cricket" and crickets to "skylark." 85 Leśmian's
 famous tautology of subject and predicate was also part of his attempt to destroy
 the hierarchy of semantic units; one of the duties of poetic diction is a continuous
 reminder and presentation of their many-faceted, many-levelled nature. 86 For
 Leśmian, poetry was a flight from stabilized reality into primeval reality, to
 the boundless kingdom of possibility. 87 His is an epistemological adventure
 based on experience and the relativity of perception; he can make negatives
 such as nicość (nothingness) and bezbyt (existencelessness) into things; and
 these reifications behave and are acted upon as though they existed. 88 His
 tales and myths fulfill the function of cognitive structures: since the gods are
 either dead, useless, or hostile, religious systems are unable to quench the
 human thirst for unity with nature. Art will do that henceforth, by means of
 myth and legend constructed anew. As we shall see, Leśmian's mythopoetics
 approach mathematical perfection, which is why I call this "mythematics."

For Leśmian, the real world lives in the mathematical crack between
 existence and death. 89 His concentration of the weight of the entire world upon
 a single item (such as the camel's hump in "The Zoo" or the pansies' eyes in
 "Departure") makes it an Archimidean support point of zero action; however,
 this point is jealously concealed so as to maintain the wonder of balance. 90

Since this mathematical support point is precarious, like a triangle perched perilously on one angle, Leśmian's creations themselves are also often marginal, unstable existences such as dreams, figments, artistic imaginations, namings,cripplings, post-mortems, ghosts, artificial (dolls) or non-existent (mists trying to "girlify") entities whose common denominator and basis for their uncertain existence is the effort to exist.⁹¹ In "Ballada bezludna" and "Eliasz," there is always something rustling and struggling, an incorporeal phenomenon fighting for material form. The battle for existence is almost always a struggle for elimination of a disadvantageous form, as everything strives for unity and abhors duality. Leśmian's art externalizes the subject's movement of consciousness, its effort and dissatisfaction; the poet paints a holographic portrait of the creative tension brought about by threatened equilibrium, e. g. the energy used to transform oneself from something invisible to something visible.⁹² By analogy with entropy, a term from thermodynamics designating the energy required to maintain a structural configuration, I have decided to call Leśmian's centrifugal, transformational energy "extropy." Since the poet invented not only a new poetics, but also a new language to accompany it, it is only fitting that both mythematics and extropy be neologisms in English.

For Leśmian, the Bergsonist action is "toiling, alert existence with all its might," and his "seeing" or "observing," much like Goethe's famous "schaun,"⁹³ an epistemological relativism of existence being perceived. Leśmian creates a fiction of perception which is itself, but simultaneously crosses known boundaries. Free manipulation of possible worlds by means of language intensifies arbitrary and playful constructs and enables the poet to effect surprise perceptions such as looking at things through narrowed eyes. This fabularization of

the perception process means reaching hidden reality by "illegal" means,
but it also makes human consciousness per se the subject matter of a poem.

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For Bergson, consciousness meant freedom and was coextensive
with life (memory and anticipation). Leśmian took this one step further,
tracing the evolution of human consciousness and graphing a history of its
glory and pain. Primeval man, he stated, saw no difference between himself
and the gods and thus anthropomorphized them. The subsequent rise of con-
sciousness (and thereby choice) became the loss of paradise. For a sawfish,
for instance, there is neither difference nor choice between wanting to saw and
sawing. If the animal possessed a consciousness, however, there would be a
difference, and the creature would experience the pain of wanting to saw but be-
ing unable to do so. Reflex would thus become handicraft: intellect and industry
are both born of such conscious work. Combining instinct and intellect, how-
ever, would obviate the need for consciousness and permit a true perception of
the world as it is. Consciousness, after all, only serves to impart a purpose
to an action; if there were no dichotomy, there would be no need for guidance,
as there would be no difference between the object and the thought thereof—just
as the sawfish makes no distinction between sawing and thinking about sawing.

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Consciousness permits the creation of elegies and idylls, or the almost
mathematical severance and synthesis of "Świdryga and Midryga" or "Your
Portrait." In the latter, the subject of the portrait is separated into the present-
day adult lover and the little girl she formerly was; consciousness stereoscopical-
ly reconciles the two. Recollection thus becomes a creative act, valid for
purposes of epistemology and perception; the act of remembrance becomes the
subject of the poem, and the act of cognition becomes the moving force generating
endless metamorphoses, alternative realities, and mathematical myth.

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Comprehension of the power of Leśmian's mythopoetic philosophy requires a short digression into general semantics. From the earliest times, an accurate mirroring of reality has been considered the responsibility of language: Plato's *Kratylos* and Confucius' concept of the rectification of names, however, indicate that this responsibility is not always met. (Characteristically, Confucius tried to change the behavior of sons to coincide with the word "son," whereas Plato sought to persuade a somewhat dense interlocutor to question the validity of language.)¹⁰⁰ Many artificial languages, from Esperanto to the *Encyclopédie's* "Langue nouvelle," have been invented in an attempt to achieve a 1:1 correlation between language and reality, but to no avail; none of the inventors understood that words frequently differentiate between indistinguishables (ends and means, cause and effect) or cause us to search for nonexistents (physicists long tried to find a substance "heat" to correspond to the substantive noun), even to endow abstractions (legal persons) with life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.¹⁰¹ In reality, furthermore, many things are indissolubly bound together; it is impossible to move in space without moving in time as well, or to separate intellect from emotion, although language causes us to ignore this reality and build "jails for the 'animal' and churches for the 'soul'."¹⁰²

It is true that the tendency to believe the word to be the thing can sometimes be advantageous if delusion is necessary (cf. the story of the starving boy who would "feel full" after looking up food words in a dictionary); by word-magic identification, babies tend to identify their own cries with food, as they need only make the appropriate noises in order to be fed.¹⁰³

Many writers and philosophers of language (such as Jonathan Swift)¹⁰⁴ have considered truth to be an attainable absolute; and man therefore a liar because he can both conceive of and enunciate a falsehood. More recently,

however, we have learned that truth is a percept, an interpretation, and therefore relative; thus, any 1:1 correspondence between language and "reality" (as in logic or mathematics) would be redundant by definition. Like the near-perfect correlation between IQ and schoolwork performance, it would have the irrelevant congruence of two different measurements of the same phenomenon measuring each other.

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Falsehood and denial may be crucial to sanity, even to survival.

(This may explain why language so often gives substance to chimeras, why grammatically flawless nonsense can be so beautiful, and why nonexistent

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items can be defined.) "Falsity is not... a mere miscorrespondence with a fact. It is itself an active, creative agent" denying determinism and reality by affirming that "The world... can be other." Being able to say anything provides us a safety valve of creative falsity or fiction and confers freedom upon our imagination; after all, stating that the water-hole is where it is would simply mean uttering a tautology. Mathematically, falsity could be symbolized as negative numbers. Could this be why Korzybski and Steiner repeat so frequently that mathematics approaches the structure of the human mind and of reality, that the shape of reality is mathematical, and that language should imitate mathematics if it wants to approximate reality more effectively?

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Leśmian's mythopoetic language is greatly mathematical in its description of the negative, its fluid tracing of both genesis and perception of the world's eternal transformations and rebirths, its horror of immobility, its reification of possibilities, and its simultaneous comprehension of the inside and outside of a thing.

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Leśmian did not create words—he created consciousnesses and strove to widen the boundaries of cognition by tearing concepts away from the absolute

rule of the creator-intellect, which cannot perceive all life-phenomena. For instance, he spoke of the resting of the "drunkenness" of a body: what rested was not the body, but its attribute of drunkenness. His poetry was the creation of a dynamic, future-oriented myth in which "minuteness of detail coexists with the fantastic of the theme" and change is constantly being documented. The poet was thus "the conscious architect of a poetry of almost mathematical precision." His work is a self-sufficient totality containing past, present, and future and expanding the universe of possibilities beyond positive (being) and negative (non-being) to include a third possibility (zero?) which is neither. Since the word "mathematikos" in Greek means "disposed to learn," etymology vests the mathematical analogy with a poignancy Stone and Bierkowski may not even have intended; since Leśmian's poetics is both mathematical (both meanings) and mythopoetic, I have decided to call it "mythematics" in order to coin an appropriate, holistic neologism for an appropriate, holistic innovation.

Artists, like primeval men, live in a timeless environment in which myth is often valued more highly than temporary reality because it is more indicative of general truths, and recognized as necessary. ("Tous les pays qui n'ont plus de légende," writes Patrice de la Tour du Pin, "Seront condamnés a mourir de froid.") Myth makes "sacred beliefs intelligible by rendering them in terms of human action and human language," establishing rites and sanctions, justifying the status quo, and explaining why things must be the way they are and cannot be otherwise. Nietzsche believed that only myth and Dionysiac frenzy could prevent the nausea caused by the ghastly absurdity of existence; men stripped of myth must dig for roots so as not to starve.

Leśmian points out that the church took charge of the instinctive and emotional side of our nature, but with its fall, the 'gods' which were formerly its exclusive property and privilege receive freedom and citizenship rights in secular life. Poetry now takes on the function of myth, evoking "a primeval and prehistoric past in which man is primarily still an element of nature" and thinks animistically. ¹¹⁷ By and large, most anthropologists would probably agree with Leśmian's view that primeval man and poets discover and remake the world as though time and history did not exist: in pre-literate times, poets were historians, file cabinets, priests, prophets, lawgivers, etc. Only with the invention of writing did this change; the functions were already becoming separated and questioned in Periclean Athens, much as film has questioned theater and painting was affected by photography.

Furthermore, for primeval man art has magical powers: rather than being mere decoration, it is something "powerful to use." (Even today, we are ¹¹⁸ atavistically chary of poking the eyes out of the photograph of someone we like.) As we shall see in greater detail in the next chapter, Lesmian tried to recreate the magical quality of words by coining new ones and treating them as though they were activities, not entities, rejuvenating hackneyed language by returning it to the roots of mythology and etymology. He believed that stiff, arbitrary definition hindered poetic creation and that poetry which disdained rhythm and magic was dangerous.

For Leśmian, primeval man is still within us. Prelogical items such as fairy tales "warmed up" the intellect and prepared it for logical, rational thinking, but logic now rejects them ungratefully and refuses to admit that we need a history of our instincts. (Even science, Leśmian contended, required

sinking its roots into the "juicy black earth" of folk-tale in order to develop.)

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In the "Song of the Overwise Vasilissa," fairy-tales have no grave; wherever
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they are, God is present as well.

The philosophical underpinnings of Leśmian's stories could fill several
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dissertations, so we shall mention only a few. In "Legenda o żołnierzu pol-
skim," a Polish soldier dies while fighting on his enemy's side in World War I;
St. George fills a goblet with the soldier's blood and then cannot tell the difference
between that blood and Christ's. The soldier goes to heaven, Christ accepts him
as a near-equal, and heaven entertains the soldier's request that the Polish
122
language be revived. In "Czarny kozioł" (The Black Billy-Goat), a peasant
turns into a talking goat which declaims "You never know what kind of creature
123
comes into this world under human appearance." (This is a good example of
Leśmian's appropriation of folklore for philosophical purposes, mentioned in
Chapter II.) In "Legendy tęsknoty" (Legends of Longing), a goddess-statue longs
to become human and die. Her funeral cortège is joined by countless other statues.
124
However, the Goddess Longing's corpse cannot be buried anywhere at any time.
Finally, in "Wiedźma" (The Hag), a spiritually limited law-and-order village
chieftain is given a love potion by a witch who wants to die. The only way to free
her from painful life, and him from this undignified love, is to have her transmit
her knowledge to another. The man's wife agrees to accept the knowledge, and
the chieftain is free to be a chieftain again. His pompousness is symbolized (p. 147)
by a stick standing in the snow with a hat on top, which only falls when the snow
melts. At one point the chieftain becomes two-dimensional by falling down, but
125
regains his third dimension by standing up again.

Interesting in this regard, and worthy of more detailed analysis, is Leśmian's treatment of the 1001 Nights stories, which he translated and adapted from an earlier translation (which one precisely has not yet been determined). Roman Zimand believes it was the Polish version of the A. L. Grimm translation, published in 1893; Pankowski considers it to have been either the Galland or Mardrus French translation. Leśmian's version, the Klechdy sezamowe (Sesame Stories) was dated 1913 but almost certainly sold in late 1912 as Christmas gifts. (The poet was mostly known as "Mr. L., the author of fairy-tales.")¹²⁶ As can be expected from children's literature, both the Klechdy and the later Przygody Sindbada żeglarza were much gentler than the original; Leśmian substituted generic "monsters" for racist references to repulsive black lepers, for instance, and rewrote or left out almost all the misogynistic violence, including the framework story of Sheherezade appeasing the uxoridical monarch. (However, the fact that his readers were children does not adequately explain the elimination of "thieving Jews" and "disgusting black slaves.") The most interesting adaptations are those which reflected Leśmian's poetics; they are quite consistent with both his literary essays and his poetry in general, and are listed in an appendix hereto.

For Leśmian, art "is a tunnel of mirrors—representing, by means of reflection and echo, a durable link between the present and the mythical past....¹²⁷ Art is eternal and emerges victorious over the transitoriness of life." In "Wieczór" (Evening), for instance, a birch reflected in a stream turns into a birch again; in "Prolog," two mirrors reflect each other into eternity. As we shall see in the next chapter, the possibility that reflexive verbs may have

colored the Polish language and Leśmian's particular experience, in terms of implying self-creation and verbal validation of something that does not exist, would be fascinating for psycholinguistic research. (Jamaké Highwater mentions that his "disinherited mother" taught him to dream himself into existence.)¹²⁸ We shall only mention briefly here the fact that "to dream" in Polish (*śnić się*) is a reflexive verb, literally translated as "to dream oneself," i. e. the dream-object dreams itself to the dreamer and therefore must exist (grammatically speaking) in order to be able to undertake this action. Leśmian takes this phenomenon one step further and eliminates the quotation marks around the dream, thus shifting the internal reality outward. Interestingly enough, some of his dream sequences (such as "Sen wiejski") are quite literal and unsymbolic, which reminds us both of Leśmian's impatience with gratuitous symbols and Janov's assertion that dreams and psychedelic experiences, contrary to common belief that they are symbolic almost by definition, are only symbolic for neurotics whose overall behavior is symbolic; non-neurotic people, according to Janov, have surprisingly literal dreams (although the medical establishment does not seem to favor his view).¹²⁹

Contemporaries of Leśmian contend that he must have been influenced by Freud's interpretation of dreams, as much of his poetry is occupied by dream.¹³⁰ Leśmian further adduced a theory of poetry which sounds much like Freudian dream interpretation: poetry compensates for what is lacking in life.¹³¹ In "Białocha," for instance, the genesis of a dream is determined by its real-life referent: a gray existence transsubstantiates itself (reflexive in Polish) into a magnificent fairy-tale vision in which a stranger's caressing of a dozing peasant woman causes her psyche to process this sensory input into a dream of

132 royal luxury. In the Sindbad stories, dreams' only revenge is to stop dream-
 ing themselves to people who do not believe; the sea-devil stops visiting Sindbad
 once the latter has become a "married and serious person." The author insinu-
 ates that he does not believe dreams to be literally prophetic, but rather some-
 thing which comes true "approximately and with many variations" required for
 their reality and their immutable laws. 133 In the Klechdy sezamowe, a princess
 "probably" dreamed about a certain prince, but cannot tell because she slept
 so soundly; dreams are stated to impart information symbolically; and a prin-
 cess specifically did not dream about a certain magic horse because she had not
 yet heard about it. 134 A dream warns Sindbad of impending disaster (his uncle
 wants to drug him and tattoo his doggerel onto his skin), but this "prophecy" is
 actually closer to subconscious intuition. 135

Leśmian's knowledge about the function and symbolism of dreams is quite remarkable when we remember that Poland between the wars was still very much a nineteenth-century phenomenon struggling to repeat itself, wherein research material about dreams was more likely to be esoteric occultism along the lines of Chodkiewicz's Świadomość księżycowa (Lunar Consciousness). Therein, the author speaks of "astral bodies" (do not sleep in your daytime clothing because others' astral bodies have left fragments on it); imagistic "lunar consciousnesses" and lethargic "Saturnine fog;" charts of symbols (fish, gold, churches, etc.) and their meanings according to the dreamer's zodiacal sign; telepathic dreams, sometimes from dead people detailing the manner of their murder; prophetic dreams which "save" the dreamer from a fire (although the opposite is in fact true—the function of dreams is to keep the dreamer asleep by inventing plausible excuses for outside sensory phenomena); and superstitious

puns, often based on foreign languages. (For instance, a wedding is a portent of death for Chodkiewicz because the German word Hochzeit can be interpreted to mean "supreme time," i. e. death.)³⁵ We must also note that the Polish word "sen" is used for both "sleep" and "dream."

For Leśmian, dreams are considered mutually enriching the state of possession, facilitating contact with the subconscious, and getting closer to an independent existence; they are perfect because they allow the dreamer to make peace with what would be impossible in the waking state. Dreams examine the possibilities within the boundaries of the impossible, as evidenced by the astounding stubbornness of objects dreaming themselves. (Note the reflexive nature of dreaming in Polish.)¹³⁷ They mirror our hidden desires to unite contradictions and contain the mechanics of the cognitive process; the dream is a partner in the sudden dazzling penetration into simultaneity and the essence of things.¹³⁸

The poet considered dreams to be "the bloody leftovers of failed incarnations"¹³⁹ (krwawa reszta nieudanych wcieleń). He defined himself as a "man with a burden of dreams"¹⁴⁰ and "saw the world through the prism of dreams." His treatment of dreams was typical of his philosophy: the dream cannot be separated from the dreamer, synthesizing both into an "onirical naturalism."¹⁴¹ In his letters, he mentioned that his dreams were stronger than he was and that everyone owns his own dream, although no one owns his own reality.¹⁴² That is why Białocha dreams the king is spoiling her in a palace, granting her every whim, letting her ride in gold carriages eating cracklings and forcing his son to look like her boyfriend. (The dream is caused by a stranger fondling Białocha in a deserted barn.)¹⁴³ Similarly, the tracks of a disappearing sled constitute "half

its dream," and anyone who can dream "loves ruins and will find traces of God's footsteps there."¹⁴⁴ Dreams further allow erotic perfection in a cruel world: The poet tells his lover that there are other worlds whose lilies are different from ours; "there, and in my dreams, you are totally mine."¹⁴⁵

Although I have found no solid evidence in Leśmian's letters or essays that he in fact had read Freud, he must certainly have known the essay "Le rêve" (in L'énergie spirituelle) by his hero, Henri Bergson. In this essay, the philosopher incorporated and applauded Freud's solid research and encouraged future work to complete the many lacunae in contemporary psychology. Basically, Bergson said that sensations (e. g. light) can cause the dreamer to have dreams explaining away the phenomenon; that the dreamer does not lose consciousness; that dreams contain memory and intuition but are not prophetic or creative per se; that memories are invisible ghosts as long as we are awake and busy, but clamor to get through the door as soon as we are asleep to initiate their "danse macabre;" that dreams are Gestalt-like, i. e. filling in gaps and not noticing every single detail; and that dreaming is total mental life minus concentration, a reversion to the natural state (as concentration on reason is very tiring).¹⁴⁶ The manner in which Leśmian treated dreams seems to indicate that he was basically in accordance with Freud's teachings as filtered through Bergson.

So far, we have seen how much of Leśmian's philosophy approximates Bergson. However, there are three important areas in which the two are so divergent as to be diametrically opposed: namely, their respective attitudes to society, religion, and nothingness.

In contradistinction to Rousseau, for whom society was inimical to natural man, Bergson believed that human nature contains society, that man is social because of his biology. (We must remember that Emile Durkheim's famous statement that God is society had been coined in the meantime.) He did, of course, differentiate between a closed society (conventional religions, static communities good only for war and industry) and an "open" one (mysticism and dynamism which would permit variety, thus enabling humanity to improve because geniuses are always exceptional). Evidently prefiguring Bateson's stochastic processes, he favors a kind of creative Darwinism which would allow oscillation between individuation and association, and thus permit mutations which would, according to Darwinism, ultimately make the group as a whole more likely to survive.

For Leśmian, however, the individual and society are inexorably opposed: the only authentic people (e. g. cripples) are those expelled from normal philistine life because they long for wholeness and harmony. The miserable crowd cannot tolerate exotic flowers; only lonesome individuals can possibly approach the mysterious truth. The creative individual is always craning his neck into the future, but society considers him nothing but firewood for the "holy flame of the common good." Since society is built with the average man in mind, who can think only in terms of statistical repetition, the mediation process made necessary by such an approach creates abstract chains of cause and effect in order to keep the creative act in a mnemonic museum, where it may not be touched directly; only the "appropriate" portions are sanctified by means of indirect perception. Leśmian believes society should actively foment abundance, even if weeds are a necessary consequence;

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 let weeds grow in poetry's garden, just as we allow beggars to eat. Further-
 more, society often makes erroneous judgments anyway; Leśmian waxes abso-
 lutely bilious when he documents the treatment accorded people like Maria
 Konopnicka, who had to apologize for writing poetry and keeping the fire of in-
 spiration alive in the face of ridicule during the Positivist period of "organic
 work." 154

For Leśmian, creativity can only occur on the individual level, never on
 the irretrievably ossified societal level. The process of mediation is the pro-
 cess of loss of existence: life literally dies when under the thumb of societal,
 utilitarian intellect. Leśmian's metaphysical man, on the other hand, is im-
 mediate and non-intellectual, not dichotomized by operations of practical reason. 155
 Rather than attempt a conciliation with society, Leśmian calls the latter a King
 Rat: a Siamese Twenty of averages inseparably joined by the tail. The mediocre
 presiding editor, His Siamese Highness, signs in the plural, as King Rat is an
 organization of "yes-yessing" average minds. King Rat may be twenty, but it
 does not have the creative force of twenty; all it can do is kill young poets, whom
 it overwhelms with its power and talks out of their prophetic, magical talents. 156
 Since the artist must live in continuous conflict with established society because
 the elements of natura naturans he introduces are unknown and creative (therefore
 dangerous), it makes no sense to be "contemporary" if the rest of society con-
 siders your work mere historical ornamentation. Artists should therefore live
 for posterity, an eternal avant-garde. 157 Zbigniew Bieńkowski attributes Leśmian's
 popularity today (when the human personality is subject to such powerful levelling
 tendencies) to his exaltation of the individual, non-stereotypical, and human. 158

The Renaissance, Leśmian contends, was so productive because it championed exceptional individuals, while modernity champions the average masses, an anti-artistic stance because artists are always exceptional. We can even see the different attitudes in criminology: Renaissance crimes were usually unique acts of vengeance, whereas modern crimes are repeatable ad infinitum; punishment thus focuses upon future prevention (crime is a bad example) and prediction of statistical results, thereby sentimentalizing both the crime and the punishment.

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A nation's culture, Leśmian believes, is always the work of individuals, not of groups, and he faults Poland for sitting on talent and then excusing laziness and bad taste by political considerations such as the partitions. In his Szkice, he makes an eloquent plea for fomenting good art and good criticism, as the kind of patriotism which does not take care of the nation's spirit is not a very good one. A common artistic heritage would be very useful: an indivisible national unity, a Common Dream. The lack of common and conscious cultural work loosens and trivializes such unity; Poles who meet abroad wind up avoiding each other because they have nothing to say to one another.

To foster its soul, a nation should acquire a cultural inventory, which represents its national treasure and foments spiritual development. The will of society at large, or the special political conditions of a partitioned nation, may be a good excuse for having accomplished less than expected, but they are no excuse for having done nothing at all. Those who would protect the "Polish soul" by compulsively covering its wounds are doing that soul no favor; if the nation is really so incurably ill, let it suffer in silence rather than stifling criticism, discouraging analytical questioning, and annihilating talent by means of misery and hunger. Polish culture (on the eve of World War I) is succumbing

ever more to Russian, mostly because submission and imitation are cheaper in terms of effort, struggle, and capital. A concerted endeavor, courage, and harmony would be needed in order to foment a national culture. 160

This attitude was also manifest in Leśmian's political thinking. Around 1912, he wrote a letter to the writer Stefan Żeromski, as follows: 161
 Russia and Austria are both courting Poland for purposes of war; however, we should choose neither. "We can only count on an idea which is independent, our own, born within us. Only that can save us. We may not search for hope or support outside ourselves." That this is not a narrowly jingoistic attitude is proved by an article concerning Ukrainian creativity: Poland and the Ukraine are united by a common past. We must tie together the broken threads and keep abreast of new cultural developments so as not to become like a dilettante singer strumming his mandolin and fulfilling only domestic needs. 162
 Neither must we be guilty of the kind of patronizing hypocrisy which will not permit anyone to become better than we are: generosity for lower-grade education and niggardliness for excellence, for instance, is a caste system of mediocrity which serves only the self-importance of the "superior" givers. 163

Leśmian lays much of the blame for Poland's cultural mediocrity upon His Siamese Highness King Rat, the establishment of literati and critics, contending that they are like trained monkeys: if they were ever human to begin with, so much the worse for them, as the subsequent reconstitution must have cost them a good deal of struggle and humiliation. The members of the literary establishment would like to put an ass' head on every reader to keep him in a state of blissful delusion so they can continue to sow idylls of total respect everywhere, thus coddling mediocrity for the benefit of a group afraid to ac-

knowledge its lack of expertise or vision. "That is how readers are taken care of and educated!" Leśmian explodes. "That is how one lives at peace with them!" The average is never sure of itself, but good criticism demands more detailed principles than simple praise; the critics adulate the well-known and are only honest with unknown writers. Literary critics foment peace and overall contentment because if they were forced to polemicize, their spiritual poverty would be revealed—in other words, the sheep is in one piece only because the wolf is satiated.

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Leśmian's theatrical essays are quite instructive in this regard. Dramatic art, he contends, has not caught up with dramatic literature; we should return to the roots of theater instead of believing that the theatrical realism of 1913 (which is prosaic and uglier than reality) is the only kind of drama that ever was. Since we live in a pluralistic world, we cannot expect to stage every play in the same way, forcing drama onto a Procrustean bed; nor can we allow the subject matter to dominate. We must allow experimentation in order to avoid artistic stagnation. Furthermore, mediocre direction which tries to curry favor with the public by levelling standards and turning poetry into prose can ruin even the best play: insipid sentimentality, a failure to experiment or innovate, and subjection to chance and fashion are the result.

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Theater, Leśmian contends, is a composite art in which hierarchy and agreement are necessary to prevent it from being an administrative office. The audience is every bit as necessary as the actors or the director--it must be won the way disciples are, as it becomes a co-creator. In order to complete the spectacle, i. e. make it contemplation instead of gaping, the viewer must add his secret of contemplation and empathy. The actors should help the audience recreate the chosen characters within themselves, with an onstage Hamlet hamletizing the

audience into thousands of invisible Hamlets; each viewer can participate in this miraculous transfiguration to the degree that he himself deserves.

Furthermore, since contemporary (911) Polish theater is mediocre and uninspired, importing foreign masterpieces would be a patriotic act raising standards, fomenting talent, and opening the door to daring ideas. Our theaters, Leśmian contends, allow no experimentation and thus become abstractions; they prefer to think the fickle public needs to be amused, rather than attempting to move it and fill it with the "ceremonious shudder of sudden commingling with the secret of life."¹⁶⁷

Leśmian believed that Polish realism was equally deficient: only shortly before World War I did Polish novelists embrace the realism which the rest of Europe had abandoned long ago. Consequently, realism was misunderstood as a recreation of gray reality, whereas it is in fact artistic "verisimilification" of dreams, and novelists did not comprehend that they had the responsibility of creating a new reality instead of hiding behind silence and historicity. For our poet, the true hero of the Polish novel was yet to come. We will recognize him, he prophesied, because he is realer than reality, the word become flesh; he is¹⁶⁸ within all of us, and in order to liberate him, we must first become ourselves. As already mentioned, this echoes the position that objective "reality" is not true because it is derived from a static concept of the world (res = thing), whereas true reality is actually a dynamic interaction, something that only makes sense¹⁶⁹ in relationship to something (or everything) else.

Two of Leśmian's literary essays, "Confessions of a Journalist" and "A Primer for Literary Reviewers," are actually delicious satires on journalists and editors; the latter, redolent of Herausgeberfiktion, purports to be an anonymous

Baroque manuscript of twenty "commandments," some of them in the thirteen-foot syllabotonic verse traditional at the time. Foment mediocrity and sit on talent, these essays command; create illusion and arbitrariness, claim to fulfill a social function, drape yourselves in false humility, pretend to suffer because your editorial art is so fleeting, use great (and safely dead) writers as a pretext and opportunity for self-aggrandizement; also, destroy or silence whatever is not mediocre in the name of patriotism; damn with faint praise or slippery enthusiasm if you are not sure you can get away with sneering, or if the public for some reason likes your victim; from your invulnerable position, show how very perceptive you are by couching your dislike in vague ideals meant to indicate your high standards; protect the reader from any breath of fresh air; and entertain the public with mock-intimate anecdotes on occasion. At all times remember to be your own future statue; you are the wall between the artist and the public, and will survive both.

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We have thus seen how Leśmian's attitude to society does not leave room for reconciliation in the Bergsonian manner. As a logical consequence, Leśmian's view of God is that of arbitrary boundaries, hostile lack of assistance, and a demand for exaggerated adulation on the part of someone who does not even deserve respect. (Anthropologists consider religion to be a supernatural projection of a society's child-rearing practices; from my experience, the Polish family structure seems to approximate the above negative conditions.) According to Emile Durkheim, God is coterminous with society; according to Ruth Benedict, society itself is a work of art, a patterning or "configuration" of "articulated wholes" deliberately selecting some data and rejecting others in an eternal straining for consistency. The social order seems to need repression and entropy (Bergson

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believes this need to be outdated and changeable, whereas Leśmian is more pessimistic), which would give added poignancy to Sonia's statement in Crime and Punishment, to the effect that justice not only does not, but cannot exist. ¹⁷²

Leśmian's pessimism logically flows into an absurdist view of life in which grotesqueness is an ever-present possibility--in parody, for instance, items are "grotesque by mutual interference." He exaggerates intentionally in order to create doubt and allows half-wit peasants to formulate complicated philosophical questions of theodicy and the like. ¹⁷³ He also appears to reject Bergson's view that comic absurdity and dreams are on the same level, and that logic must correct both. ¹⁷⁴ Human existence is questioned as senseless, absurd, and unhappy; why continue silvering ("Silvron"), i. e. existing, if God is "omni-rotten," cruel and impotent, and human beings no better than lemmings undergoing absurd migrations? The only consolation appears to be nature, rebellion, erotic love, and dignified solidarity with earth and man, and also a type of humor or laughter which approximates lyrical absurdism. ¹⁷⁵ In a tragic situation, there is often nothing else left to do. ¹⁷⁶ For Leśmian, laughter is a creative way of circumventing and synthesizing the opposition between matter and spirit, especially since the latter (God) does not exist. ¹⁷⁷ The comic and the tragic in Leśmian are thus inextricably intertwined. ¹⁷⁸ This is quite different from Bergson's lighthearted view that whatever is comical must be human: "Un paysage pourra être beau, gracieux, sublime, insignifiant ou laid; il ne sera jamais risible." ¹⁷⁹ Rather, it more closely approximates Aristotle's view that the comic is "a subdivision of the ugly," consisting of "some defect" which gives us pleasure when imitated although we might not be so delighted when contemplating the original with minute fidelity. ¹⁸⁰ It is often ironic (eironeia = pretense)

in that it documents the "comic destruction" of someone or something demanding recognition by revealing weaknesses and showing apparent praise that any knowledgeable listener would instantly recognize as ridicule--in other words, a type of humor which is more critical than conciliatory, and harkens to Romantic irony.¹⁸¹

Crippledhood is one such theme: the absence of something has a life of its own.¹⁸² In "Podlasiak," for instance, a one-armed man reaches out with the hand he does not have; in "Zaloty" (Courtship), a non-handicapped girl is wooed by a cripple whose torso is tied to a wagon. "The cry of anguish for sexual love from this remnant of a human body is pathetic, tragic, and revolting."¹⁸³ Jacek Trznadel believes Leśmian loved human oddities because of the Eastern topos (a blind man carrying a cripple) symbolizing the symbiosis of body and soul.¹⁸⁴ Jan Prokop links physical deformity in Leśmian to a loss of individual identity, i. e. a return to the world of nature, a thirst for melting into the unidentified stream of overall existence, and a return to the amorphous stage of death.¹⁸⁵ Krzyżanowski considers this symptomatic of Leśmian's love for the negative (he loved nightmares and adored voids); the poet would eliminate "certain details from the component parts of the picture, giving them a spectral, independent life in which they assume uncanny, mysterious dimensions" such as two disembodied hands gliding through fairy tales.¹⁸⁶ Sandauer believes that Leśmian's cripples are a throwback to the Russian cult of abnormalities which "are redeemed by their monstrosity,"¹⁸⁷ and Roman Jaworski believes that since the "edifice of administrative esthetics is collapsing," this constitutes an attempt to write about "ugly beauty" and "create a necessary contemporary esthetics of ugliness."¹⁸⁸

Karpowicz's analysis may be the most incisive in this regard. He points out that cripples are high in Leśmian's hierarchy (e. g. a maimed soldier is the equal of God) and that cripplehood is Leśmian's defense against the lowest common denominator: being different any way one can. In "Karczma," for instance, Leśmian attempts to defend man's internal crippling because it is so unique in its ugliness that it earns man his right of primogeniture; in "Magda," the poet takes great pains to point out that "Beakface Magda is worth looking at."¹⁸⁹ Karpowicz considers Leśmian's grotesque magical realism and horror (e. g. cannibalism) to be an esthetic, not a moral, provocation: man is pulled into fairy-tale adventures to determine his ethical reaction. He thereby disagrees with Pankowski, who accuses Leśmian of being a sadistic, cruel, and monstrous agnostic.¹⁹⁰ Leśmian is too humorous to let us believe in his magic too long (magicians are bored by riding ordinary horses, for instance), and his laughter is rehabilitational instead of macabre, like a "totally crocked" Heraclitus complaining that God is a "slob." For Karpowicz, the inventors of paradox are not those who passively submit to the chaos of reality, but rather those who try to determine the laws governing that chaos. However, he concedes that the horrible history of the twentieth century after Leśmian's death confirmed the poet's absurdist view of things and showed the "outdated escapist" actually to be in deeper touch with the secrets of reality than anyone could have imagined.¹⁹¹

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An interesting aside would be Leśmian's treatment of erotica. For instance, he gives a novel twist to the red/white rose dichotomy, inventing (in "Trzy róże," Three Roses) a third rose which is neither body nor soul, but an unspecified, misty allusion to a symbolized concept.¹⁹³ (Could it be that dichotomy was too primitive for him, and that he thus invented a zero to place between the

positive and the negative?) Krzyżanowski attributes his love of life to his fear
of the eternal void surrounding everything, including God. ¹⁹⁴ Pankowski links
Leśmian's eroticism to religion because, in "Strój," a girl rejected by bride-
groom and society for participating in an orgy is accepted by God as an equal,
i. e. a suffering individual betrayed by human hostility; he interprets this as a
revolt against limits, an attempt to blur the distinction between the sacred and
the sensual in a manner as ambiguous as St. Theresa and other mystics. ¹⁹⁵

Łapiński believes that love literally means seeing the world through the beloved's
eyes--the subject is not "given," but "becomes" in conjunction with the percep-
tual world it calls to life. ¹⁹⁶ For Leśmian, the beloved woman is immortal and,
by continuous metamorphoses, escapes the love/death linkage usually attributed
to the grotesque. ¹⁹⁷ Teresa Skubalanka points out that Leśmian avoids the typi-
cal expressionist sadism and traditional coupling of love and death--except for
his ballads, which are of a folksy and often perversely violent nature. ¹⁹⁸

Trznadel believes that horror and eroticism are psychological archetypes which
go together in ballads, wherein sexuality is dangerous (man came from nature
and returns to her, love and death are identical). ¹⁹⁹ Karpowicz, on the contrary,
believes that Leśmian's erotica contain an aftertaste of necrophilia: both love
and death imply the immobility, i. e. total possession, of the beloved, depriving
love of all defenses in a battle for hegemony. However, for Karpowicz, the bat-
tle of the sexes--the cruel disintegrating role of love--is quite human and thus
requires no prettification; the lover panics when the beloved escapes into her
own egotism, unable to understand that love ignores not only the surrounding
world, but the lovers themselves as well. He therefore identifies love with
death, and death with God; any unification of opposites such as these three fac-
tors results in blind devouring, not democratic assimilation, as the madness

of unfulfilled dreams and the ambivalence of feelings causes animal jealousy and
 200
 erotic aggression.

We must remember that for Leśmian death was not the end of existence, but its continuation on the negative side: for instance, corpses are still able to perform life functions, such as drink. (In "To My Sister," corpses are sobered; in "The Girl," nobody ever dies enough.) It is hard to tell where life ends and death begins; Leśmian said that death should contain everything human, since it is laughter's sister, and thus repeated death is a repeated change in states of
 201
 nonexistence.

According to Jan Kott and Jan Parandowski, Napój cienisty (Sipping Shade) was originally titled "Strange and Funny Posthumous Customs," as Leśmian thought more was known about life after death than life before death; the latter cannot be apprehended, while we at least have imaginings about the
 202
 former.

For instance, Leśmian's adaptation of a medieval danse macabre (such as the one taking place "between heaven and hell" in "Karczma," The Inn) is not a dance of death, but a dance of life, i. e. into another form of existence
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 graced with memory and joy.

According to Karpowicz, for Leśmian death, love, and God are almost synonymous; but death was a more important and enigmatic partner than God. Each death was different, like women who can be quiet, talkative, etc. Death is a state of consciousness, namely disappointment: instead of getting rid of feelings, it involves having no one to give them to. It is only definitive if it immobilizes or disperses matter; it means being everywhere and nowhere,
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 surrounded by collective rather than individual memory.

Leśmian's view of death is quite close to that of "primitives" studied by anthropologists and historians of religion. It has been pointed out that burial

may have been meant to restrain, not shelter, the dead: the Inca, the Nama, the Hottentots, and the Hopi wrap and bind their dead so tightly that the practice appears to indicate fear. One Peruvian account documenting burial in the fetal position points out that the spirits could not possibly walk while in that position. Since the dead are severed souls, the live community may move on, burn the home of the deceased, or placate the dead in order to keep them either happy
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or far away.

The poet tries to become a "fictitious," i. e. recreated, primeval man, but he cannot achieve total fusion with nature because his level of consciousness is different from that of the real primitive; folklore is an example of compromise
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A meeting point of folklore, elegy, and death, would be Leśmian's treatment of Don Quixote (who continues his escapades after death) and Don Juan (who marches proudly at his own funeral): Leśmian takes the commonplace of dead and living Doppelgänger and infuses it with a "unity in
207
separation" based on simultaneous objective and subjective perceptions.

Similarly, Leśmian's "zaświat" (otherworld) is not redolent of the traditional vertical heaven/hell dichotomy; it is a question of the human condition, not of morality. The otherworld may, for instance, be an antiworld reached through a cemetery-like gate, as in "First Tryst" and "In the Night."
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Artur Sandauer says that Leśmian's poetry is like the ancient Roman religion which is Europe's
209
"most primitive," animistic and full of personifications such as Silvrón.

As in many animistic religions, particularly those with otiose gods, the creator-god in Leśmian is weaker and more mortal than his work, which deserves immortality. While the creator is finishing his job, Death stands smiling beside
210
him, reminding him that he has almost finished his creative song. For Leśmian,

death is a process, not an event, a gradual metamorphosis of decomposition--
 a stylistic expression of nothingness, which for him was a creative principle.
 Some of his meditations on death ("Two Humble Humans," "In the Night") are
 211
 more dramatic and realistic than most of his straightforward descriptions.

Toward the end of his life, Leśmian's horror of death increased; repeated death
 became one of his favorite hyperboles. Also, the resultant decomposition of
 form--the purpose of grotesqueness is to impart a feeling of chaos--mirrors the
 decomposition of the certainty that poetry and its forms are clean reflections of
 212
 some essence of existence.

This horror and grotesque absurdity, however, appear attributable less
 to Leśmian's pessimism than to the third major difference between him and Berg-
 son, namely what I believe to be their diametrically opposed concepts of negativity.
 According to Bergson, a negation is not the mere opposite of a positive statement,
 which declares something about reality; it is a refutation, i. e. a second-order
 judgment, or a statement about a statement. A negation cannot be objectified,
 it only implies the "latent affirmation of its replacement by something else," just
 as a void is the absence of an object which is presently somewhere else (i. e. the
 absence of itself). Obviously, only a creature with a memory could possibly con-
 ceive of a "void" at all, according to Bergson; similarly, disorder exists only
 as a word, since there is no such thing as "disorder" in reality, only disappoint-
 ment, i. e. an order we are not presently searching for. (An unfurnished room
 does not have "nothing" in it; it is full of air, but we cannot sit on air.) Thus,
 nothingness is also just a word, a concept for a nonexistent thing, a construct of
 our disappointed memory which has not yet found what it is looking for; nothing-
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 ness cannot exist because nothing can be annihilated without being replaced.

Knowledge does not need to be verbalized, then; only lack of knowledge does. This makes negation a creative act, as already documented by Steiner: via language, one can talk about what does not exist. However, Leśmian not only refutes Bergson's logical refutation of nothingness²¹⁴ and champions fictionality as undisprovable à la Sir Philip Sidney's Defense of Poesy; he makes nescience the subject of poems about knowledge (and this nescience does not exclude knowledge), such as in "The Spring Ox," "The Girl," "The Passerby," and "The Snow Idol" ("not knowing" figures prominently in these works), thus according his negations diplomatic immunity.

He achieves this in part by simply reversing the point of view. In his Bergsonian essay, for example, he says that a prisoner attempting to regain his freedom by hitting the wall with a hammer would produce some sort of indentation in that wall. That indentation, however, can be interpreted not only as an achievement of the hammer; it also represents the resistance offered by the wall, and is therefore both affirmation and negation, triumph and failure, existence and nonexistence.²¹⁵ In "Jam--nie Osjan!" (I am not Ossian!), Leśmian sings in the name of the nonexistent Ossian; similarly, God exists only as a mythical reality with nothing hidden behind him.²¹⁶ Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska believes that Albert Thibaudet's title for a monograph about Mallarmé, "Les ordres négatifs," would be very applicable to Leśmian's poetry, which is full of nothingness, not-quite-incarnatedness, absence, and void (the "Two Convicts," like Shakespeare's Constance, feel an emptiness precisely the size of their absent bodies).²¹⁷ Papierkowski interprets Leśmian's many negations as the poet's hesitant, skeptical Weltanaschauung, further quoting A. Sandauer and W. Kubacki to the effect that Greek and Slavic languages frequently use negative or imprecise

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 definitions. Finally, Sandauer says that Lesmian lifts the psychological object to the level of existence but allows it to keep its characteristic of nonexistence, thus producing a contradictory, half-real creation, an act of imagination
 219
 in the process of becoming independent.

For Leśmian, the otherworld is within us, just like death is merely a mythemathical minus sign before normal occurrences; the negative and positive coexist. He builds upon commonplace antecedents: the classical epic katabasis (trip to the underworld), the medieval allegorical travel into reified abstractions, and the Romantic voyage in search of self. Thus, the otherworld is full of movement; time and space are fluid, and often fall apart and decompose. He wants to "furnish" the otherworld (cf. Urszula Kochanowska's attempt to recreate her home in heaven), domesticate it, and give it a form, but realizes that it cannot be exactly like this world no matter how hard one tries. Since it is a world of possibilities, completion and unrepeatability are impossible; that may be why Leśmian occasionally identifies the past with that which does not exist. Leśmian causes negative knowledge to supplement positive knowledge, has his heroes talk in negatives, and makes negative heroes like religion makes negative
 220
 definitions of God (invisible, boundless, infinite, etc.). This is reminiscent of the negative crosses of Ethiopia and of Martin Heidegger's statement to the effect that nothingness is something which is not in existence, but which is
 221
 nevertheless something.

Leśmian lengthens "existence" in the direction of nonexistence; they cease to be a separable pair, since nonexistence (nothingness) has a positive
 222
 existence. The Overwise Vasilissa wants to be loved because she does not exist; "The Girl" is a poem about a nonexistent girl. The apotheosis of such

existing nonexistence could easily be "Pan Błyszczynski," which is a poem about nothingness, about the fleeting nature of dreams--only Słowacki had previously managed to weave such an ephemeral net of airiness. (Similarly, God seems to depend on his worshippers for his very existence: both are illusory.) "Pan Błyszczynski," in some Polish dialects, is God, but in the Leśmian poem we see how "the poet-demiurge supersedes God by conjuring in his presence a new gardenlike existence." The fictional garden is so concrete that God stops to admire it (just like Infinity admires the greenery in "The Meadow" and groans from tortures inflicted upon her in "Eliasz"). As in "Ballada bezludna" (Uninhabited Ballad), wherein a mist tries to "girlify" but does not quite achieve incarnation, this is a creative process resulting in failure; the poet has lost the power of magic.

Leśmian, like other Symbolists, was of course indebted to the Romantics for their negative images, exemplified by the "zero intruder" in Mickiewicz's Crimean Sonnets: "Let's go, no one's calling!" However, Leśmian's "minus forms" are highly original, as they contain exceptional semantic tension; in his poems, nothingness has the same effect on matter as vice versa. Sandauer calls this "meaningless dynamism" comparable to suicide, but does not draw the necessary ethical conclusion from his own interpretation: in "Two Matthews," the heroes give the dying god the herb of immortality they found for themselves, stating that "the highest value is a person who dies after having created truths more durable than himself."

Leśmian considered himself a "crazy recaller of nonexistent happenings" who was able to objectify and concretize what does not exist, thus enclosing a world-view within the microcosm of a word. His metaphysics

is revolutionary (especially when we consider that his generation was brought up on heroic nationalism and insipid pseudo-Symbolism), since he composes sentences which contradict themselves internally, thus threatening them with a loss of meaning. He was able to use even tautologies to describe holism and dynamics, as his epistemology was sensual; however, the limits of existence were intolerably narrow for him, and he wanted to grasp the ungraspable forms of existence much like his Eliaz wanted to determine whether there is a consciousness beyond that of existence.

230

His language, in true psychological fashion, was capable of creating worlds to which no reality responds. We have visited some of these worlds already; the next chapter will uncover the linguistic means by which he takes us there.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER III

- 1 Trznadel, TL, pp. 341-3.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 345-6, 350-1.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 356-8, 361-2.
- 4 Mircea Eliade, A History of Religious Ideas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), Vol. I, pp. 262-3.
- 5 Karpowicz, pp. 136, 289.
- 6 Eugeniusz Czaplejewicz, "Gra miłości i śmierci," in Głowiński, ed., Studia z teorii i historii poezji (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Im. Ossolińskich, 1970), pp. 250-2.
- 7 Leśmian, UR, p. 16.
- 8 Miłosz, p. 349.
- 9 Stone, pp. 138-9.
- 10 Trznadel, TL, p. 316 ff.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 321-3; Pankowski, p. 71.
- 12 Stone, pp. 174-6.
- 13 Karpowicz, pp. 61-76.
- 14 Trznadel, TL, pp. 270-5.
- 15 Stone, pp. 121-4.
- 16 Lama Anagarika Govinda, Creative Meditation and Multi-Dimensional Consciousness (Wheaton, Ill.: Quest Boo, s 1976), pp. 100-105.
- 17 Leśmian, "U źródła rytmu," in Szkice literackie, p. 74.
- 18 Annemarie de Waal Malefijt, Religion and Culture: An Introduction to Anthropology of Religion (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), pp. 152-3.

19

Eliade, Vol. II, pp. 17-35, 105-6.

20

"Zielona godzina" in Sad, as well as "The Drowner" and "The Meadow" in The Meadow, present an intuitive unity with nature, a nostalgia for a golden paradise in which there was no division between the thing and the concept, so much so that the thinking, perceiving subject is totally submerged and lost. Trznadel, BL/LMP, pp. 836-7.

21

Jastrun, pp. 58-62.

22

Trznadel, introduction to Szkice literackie, pp. 13-14; Jan Błoński, "Bergson a program poetycki Leśmiana," Miesięcznik literacki, no. 8/1968, p. 38 ff.; Stone, pp. 57-62.

23

Bolesław Leśmian, "Znaczenie pośrednictwa w metafizyce życia zbiorowego," in Szkice, pp. 45-8, 50-1, 63.

24

Stone, p. 48.

25

Karpowicz, pp. 5-6, 8-9, 12.

26

Artur Sandauer, "Filozofia Leśmiana," in Odrodzenie no. 59, January 1946, rpt. Moje odchylenia, Cracow 1956, p. 96.

27

Głowiński, ZP, pp. 42-5.

28

See fn. 23 above, pp. 53, 61.

29

Krauze, in Wspomnienia, pp. 187-90.

30

Błoński, in Studia; Stone, pp. 51, 129 ff.

31

Trznadel, TL, pp. 47-8.

32

Błoński, p. 41.

33

Henri Bergson, Le rire (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1940), pp. 119-23; Pope's Essay on Man, any edition.

34

Błoński, pp. 33-36.

35

Głowiński, ZP, p. 100.

36

Stone, p. 47.

37

Miłosz, p. 349.

38

Anatol Stern may have summarized this attitude most succinctly in Głód, p. 109: The Muses do not like bureaucracy.

- 39
Stone, pp. 52-4.
- 40
Leśmian, "Z rozmyślań o poezji," in Szkice, p. 76.
- 41
Leśmian, "Rythm jako światopogląd," in Szkice, pp. 66-8.
- 42
Leśmian, "Savitri," Szkice, p. 265.
- 43
See fn. 40 above, p. 89.
- 44
See fn. 17 above, pp. 69-74.
- 45
See fn. 40 above, pp. 84, 90.
- 46
Stone, pp. 72-8.
- 47
Błoński, pp. 41-2.
- 48
Mieczysław Giergielewicz, Rym i wiersz (London: Polski Uniwersytet na Obczyźnie, 1957), pp. 115, 120-1.
- 49
-See fn. 40 above, pp. 76-9.
- 50
Stone, pp. 35, 60.
- 51
Sandauer, see fn. 26 above, p. 512.
- 52
Trznadel, TL, p. 360.
- 53
UR, p. 8.
- 54
"Białocha," UR, pp. 166-7, 1915.
- 55
Nyszek, p. 24.
- 56
Karpowicz, pp. 113-34.
- 57
Ewa Olkuśnik, "Słowotwórstwo na usługach filozofji," in Studia, p. 165.
- 58
Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, "Leśmianowy 'czyn'," pp. 265-6.
- 59
Bergson, L'Energie spirituelle (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1919, rpt. 1967), p. 6; see fn. 40 above, pp. 37-40.
- 60
Ibid.

- 61
Leśmian, "Z rozmyślań o Bergsonie," in Szkice, pp. 29, 33, 40-1.
- 62
Papierkowski, pp. 165-6.
- 63
Karpowicz, pp. 143, 121-4; Głowiński, ZP, p. 169.
- 64
Trznadel, introduction to Szkice, p. 11; Leśmian, see fn. 61 above, p. 30; Nyszek, p. 12; Stone, pp. 44-50; Leśmian, "Poezja żalu," in Szkice, pp. 356-7. It may be interesting to note that I instinctively approached translating Leśmian in such an intuitive and unconsciously holistic manner well before I knew anything about his poetic theory, reasoning that (a) analytical knowledge can kill synthetic inspiration, and (b) translations shown to be mistaken by later analytical research could always be corrected in the future. By and large, my intuition was only corroborated by rational analysis and therefore was probably correct.
- 65
H. Markiewicz, "Czytając Leśmiana," Dziennik Polski, January 24, 1947; Krzyżanowski, p. 493.
- 66
Julian Przyboś, "Mowy leśmianowskie," pp. 8-9; cf. also Stępnia and Wilkoł, p. 99.
- 67
Karpowicz, pp. 174-8.
- 68-9
Sandauer, Samobójstwo, pp. 25-6, 39; Jamake Highwater, The Primal Mind (New York: Harper & Row, 1981; rpt. New York: New American Library, 1982), pp. 4-6.
- 70
Stern, "Walka z konwencją," in Głód, p. 263.
- 71
Ewa Bułhak, "Noc spragniona przemian," Poezja, no. 7, pp. 26-7.
- 72
UR, p. 312.
- 73
Ibid., p. 311.
- 74
Stone, p. 185 ff.
- 75
Karpowicz, p. 155.
- 76
Leśmian, Przygody Sindbada Żeglarza, pp. 8-10. See also the Appendix to this dissertation, which compares the 1001 Nights stories and Leśmian's treatment thereof.
- 77
Jastrun, "Pierwsze spotkanie z Leśmianem," Poezja i rzeczywistość, p. 227.
- 78
Published as SR 160, Spectrum-Uni/PRO Records, Harriman, New York, translated by Sandra Celt.

79

Stone, pp. 239-40.

80

Leśmian, Klechdy polskie, pp. 100-1, 157, 180.

81

Wacław Gralewski, "Skrzydlaty rejent," in Wspomnienia.

82

Głowiński, "Słowo i pieśń," in Studia, p. 200.

83

Olkuśnik, see fn. 57 above, in Studia, pp. 163-5, 179-81.

84

Highwater, pp. 104-9.

85

Papierkowski, pp. 177, 193.

86

Janusz Sławiński, "Semantyka poetycka Leśmiana," in Studia, pp. 108-11.

87

Głowiński, ZP, p. 26.

88

We must remember that many languages have established negative verbs: se taire, callarse, schweigen, and milczeć all refer to the activity of not speaking, and escampar means to stop raining.

89

This is eerily reminiscent of Telidon telephone transmission of computer information onto a television set: the image is inserted in the space between the frames. Leśmian and his master Bergson seem to have anticipated computer technology, especially the distinction between digital units, which register many static details and analog computers, which register ongoing change. Computers are even able to eliminate the distinctions between sensory categories, which was a Symbolist dream, by, for example, finger-painting music on a screen.

90

Karpowicz, pp. 147-9, 155.

91

Podraza-Kwiatkowska, see fn. 58 above, p. 263; -, "Gdzie umieścić Leśmiana?" in Studia, pp. 2304.

92

Karpowicz, pp. 18-20, 53.

93

Podraza-Kwiatkowska, "Leśmianowy 'czyn'," p. 260-2; "Gdzie umieścić Leśmiana?" in Studia, p. 22 ff.

94

Zdzisław Łapiński, "Metafizyka Leśmiana," in Studia, pp. 42-3.

95

L'Energie spirituelle, pp. 10-13.

- 96
Leśmian; "Znaczenie pośrednictwa," in Szkice, p. 48.
- 97
Leśmian, "Z rozmyślań o Bergsonie," in Szkice, pp. 39-40.
- 98
Ibid., pp. 35-7.
- 99
Sławiński, in Studia, pp. 100-2.
- 100
Fung Yu-Lan, A Short History of Chinese Philosophy (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1948, rpt. Free Press Paperback, 1966), pp. 41-2.
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Harry Weinberg, Levels of Knowing and Existence (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), pp. 247-9, 187; Alfred Korzybski, Science and Sanity (Lakeville, Connecticut: The International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Company, 1933, rpt. Clinton, Mass.: The Colonial Press, Inc., 1958), pp. 499, 676, 107; Stuart Chase, The Tyranny of Words (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1938), pp. 185, 8-9, 22-3.
- 102
Korzybski, pp. 318, xxxiii, 1-li, 30-31, 184, 218, 243, 498, 657, 733.
- 103
Ibid., pp. 201, 260, 401, 513, 755, 224, 320, 510, 613, 693, 727.
- 104
Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels, p. 310 ff., 257-69.
- 105
George Steiner, After Babel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 203, 223-4, 280, 375, 407; Charles Hockett, A Course in Modern Linguistics (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958, rpt. 1964), p. 266.
- 107
Anatol Rapoport, "What Is Semantics?", The Use and Misuse of Language, ed. S.I. Hayakawa (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1962), p. 17; Wendell Johnson, "You Can't Write Writing," ibid., pp. 106-7; Steiner, After Babel, p. 341.
- 108
Arthur Janov, The Primal Scream (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc, 1970), pp. 22-5; Steiner, After Babel, pp. 216, 223, 214, 226, 235; Korzybski, p. 246 et seq.
- 109
Karpowicz, pp. 36-9, 253-8.
- 110
Olkuśnik, in Studia, pp. 157-60.
- 111
Stone, pp. 27, 55-6, 183-4, 261-2.
- 112
Zbigniew Bienkowski, "Szczyty symbolizmu," Twórczość, 1968, no. 8, p. 54.

- 113
Trznadel, TL, pp. 20-25.
- 114
In H. Lemaitre, La poesie depuis Baudelaire (Paris: Arman Colin, 1965), p. 13.
- 115
Malefijt, pp. 165, 12-13, 54, 78, 195, 47.
- 116
Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, tr. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1967), chapters VI, VII, VIII, X, XII, XVII, XVIII, XXIII, and XVI.
- 117
Stone, p. 241.
- 118
E. H. Gombrich, The Story of Art (Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1950), p. 20 ff.
- 119
Leśmian, "Znaczenie pośrednictwa w metafizyce życia zbiorowego," Szkice, pp. 47-53; "Z rozmyślań o Bergsonie," ibid., pp. 31-3.
- 120
UR, pp. 74-7.
121.
Leśmian's philosophy is cogently expressed in the Szkice literackie, but also "hidden" in the unlikeliest of places: folksy stories, fairy-tales, and the like.
- 122
UR, pp. 176-81 (1916).
- 123
Klechdy polskie, pp. 165-9.
- 124
UR, pp. 140-3.
- 125
Klechdy polskie, pp. 95-152.
- 126
Roman Zimand, "Preliminaria do Klechd Leśmiana," in Studia, pp. 371-5, 385-6.
- 127
Stone, p. 249.
- 128
Highwater, p. xvii.
- 129
Janov, pp. 301-2, 356-7, 366.
- 130
Stern, "Bolesław Leśmian jako krytyk," Głód, pp. 150-55.
- 131
Głowiński, "Rozmaitości leśmianowskie," Twórczość, no. 7, July 1963, p. 67.

- 132
Leśmian, UR, pp. 68-9.
- 133
Przygody Sindbada Żeglarza, pp. 78, 212, 166.
- 134
Pp. 33, 24-5, 20.
- 135
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- 136
K. Chodkiewicz, Świadomość księżycowa (Wisła: Lotos, 1938),
p. 5 ff, 18-19, 45 ff, 26 ff.
- 137
Karpowicz, pp. 197-9.
- 138
Ibid., pp. 205-6.
- 139
Leśmian, "Savitri," in Szkice, p. 264.
- 140
Krzyżanowski, pp. 490-2.
- 141
Głowiński, ZP, p. 227.
- 142
"Legendsy tęsknoty," UR, p. 134.
- 143
"Białocha," UR, pp. 168-75 (1915).
- 144
"Niedopita czara," UR, p. 53.
- 145
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- 146
Henri Bergson, "Le rêve," in L'Energie spirituelle, pp. 107-9,
87-8, 93-4, 95-6, 97-8, 103-4; 85-110.
- 147
Henri Bergson, Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion
(Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), p. 998 ff., 1209.
- 148
Ibid., p. 1201 ff, 998 ff, 1149 ff.
- 149
Trznadel, TL, pp. 329-337.
- 150
Leśmian, "Niedopita czara," in UR, pp. 54, 62.
- 151
Leśmian, Klechdy sezamowe, p. 109.
- 152
Leśmian, "Znaczenie pośrednictwa...", in Szkice, pp. 56-60.
- 153
"Kwiaty grzechów," ibid., p. 229.
- 154
"Maria Konopnicka," in Szkice, pp. 272-76.

- 155 Błoński, "Bergson a program poetycki Leśmiana," pp. 75-84.
- 156 Leśmian, "Z rozmyślań o poezji," in Szkice, pp. 81-3.
- 157 Trznadel, TL, pp. 81-6.
- 158 In Mowy leśmianowskie, p. 32.
- 159 Leśmian, "Ludzie odrodzenia," in Szkice, pp. 401-20; cf. also his review of Kazimierz Chłędowski's 'Ludzie odrodzenia' (ibid., pp. 415-19).
- 160 Leśmian, "O potrzebie pracy kulturalnej," in Szkice, pp. 101-11.
- 161 UR, pp. 326-7.
- 162 "Próby twórczości na Ukrainie," in Szkice, pp. 249-50.
- 163 "O potrzebie pracy kulturalnej," in Szkice, p. 108.
- 164 "Sen nocy letniej," in Szkice, pp. 95-9.
- 165 "Kilka słów o teatrze," in Szkice, pp. 200-3.
- 166 "Teatry warszawskie," in Szkice, pp. 206-14.
- 167 "O sztuce teatralnej," in Szkice, pp. 177-85; "Tajemnica widza i widowiska," ibid., pp. 141-5.
- 168 "Rozmyślenia o powieści polskiej," in Szkice, pp. 377-80; "Andrzej Galica: 'Przysięga,' ibid., 173.
- 169 Lama Govinda, p. 159.
- 170 "Spowiedź dziennikarza," Szkice, pp. 113-28; "Poradnik dla recenzentów literackich," ibid., pp. 129-38.
- 171 Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1934), pp. 46-91.
- 172 A further example of Leśmian's pessimism compared to Bergson: he interprets the French philosopher's statement about man sailing into unknown distances to the effect that this is a "mare tenebrarum" devoid of joy or hope. Błoński, "Bergson a program poetycki Leśmiana," p. 70.

- 173
Stone, pp. 209-13.
- 174
Le rire, pp. 11, 32.
- 175
Jastrun, "Na łańcach," p. 63; Pankowski, 76 ff.
- 176
Ibid.
- 177
Edward Balcerzan, Oprócz głosu (Warsaw: P.I.W., 1971), pp.
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- 178
Lapiński, in Studia, p. 41.
- 179
Bergson, Le rire, pp. 2-3.
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Aristotle, Poetics, translated by S. H. Butcher (New York: Hill
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Gero von Wilpert, Sachwörterbuch der Literatur (Stuttgart: Alfred
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- 182
Nyszek, p. 26.
- 183
Stone, p. 281.
- 184
Trznadel, TL, p. 178.
- 185
Jan Prokop, "Niepochwyć złoty," in Studia, pp. 58-60.
- 186
Krzyżanowski, pp. 492-3.
- 187
Artur Sandauer, "Filozofia Leśmiana," in O poezji, p. 511.
- 188
Roman Jaworski, Historie maniaków (Cracow, 1910), p. 144.
- 189
Karpowicz, p. 119.
- 190
Ibid., pp. 138-9.
- 191
Ibid., pp. 129-30, 227, 237; Pankowski, p. 188.
- 192
Karpowicz, pp. 233-41, 242-44.
- 193
Teresa Skubalanka, "U źródeł erotyków Leśmiana," in Studia,
p. 125.
- 194
Krzyżanowski, p. 494.

- 195
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"Świat cały—jakże zmieścić go w źrenicy," in Głowiński, ed.,
Studia z teorii i historii poezji, pp. 327-9.
- 197
"Ubóstwo miłości," UR, pp. 29-36.
- 198
"U źródeł erotyków Leśmiana," in Studia, p. 136.
- 199
Trznadel, TL, pp. 165-9.
- 200
Karpowicz, pp. 95-105.
- 201
Nyszek, pp. 30-1.
- 202
Trznadel, TL, p. 285.
- 203
Trznadel, TL, pp. 295-6.
- 204
Karpowicz, pp. 78-90.
- 205
-Malefijt, pp. 116-17, 156-57.
- 206
Stone, p. 118 ff.
- 207
Głowiński, ZP, pp. 264-75.
- 208
Ibid., pp. 282-84.
- 209
"Poezja twórczych potęg natury," in Studia, p. 13.
- 210
"U źródeł rytmu," in Szkice, p. 74.
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- 213
Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, translated by Arthur Mitchell
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- 214
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- 215
"Z rozmyślań o Bergsonie," Szkice, p. 41.
- 216
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- 217
Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, "Gdzie umieścić Leśmiana?" in Studia, p. 36.
- 218
Papierkowski, pp. 121-2.
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Martin Heidegger, Kant et le problème de la métaphysique (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 179.
- 222
Łapiński, in Studia, p. 45.
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Miłosz, p. 348.
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Karpowicz, pp. 12, 16, 23.
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- 228
Krzyżanowski, p. 495.
- 229
Olkuśnik, in Studia, pp. 154-5.
- 230
Łapiński, in Studia, pp. 41, 48-9.

IV. The Dynamics of Leśmian's Poetic Language

Leśmian was doubtless familiar with the Greek works on language (e. g. Kratylos) because of his classical studies, and also influenced by the Russian Imagists. He meant poetic language to be magical, and this chapter is dedicated to the manner in which he accomplished his purpose.¹

As Bergson said, the ancient Greeks trusted language, and rather than "lay the blame on the attitude of thought and language toward the course of things, they preferred to pronounce the course of things itself to be wrong. . . . As becoming shocks the habits of thought and fits ill into the molds of language, they declared it unreal. In spatial movement and in change in general they saw only pure illusion."² Language can only express "forms or immutable elements" like a digital computer. The mind, however, has Gestalt-like cinematographic capabilities which fill in the gaps by intuitive transitions.³

Leśmian's linguistic Bergsonism — an attempt to integrate modern science and dynamic metaphysics into a heretofore static language — seeks to treat language like a living organism rather than a dead thing; the schematic obstacle disappears when a new order is imposed. The poet is he who creates language (an action or dynamic draft, not a thing) like a primeval man.⁴ Leśmian's linguistic creativity is particularly evident in his neologisms denoting things which are not there, which could be but are not, which once existed but no longer do. One of the ways in which he does this is by means of prefixes such as "bez-" (without) and "nie" (not), thus inventing words every bit as evocative as Tennessee Williams' "no-neck monsters." His originality lies

in his creative transformations of poetic material, an approach he preferred to the writing of treatises on versification and poetics.

According to Papierkowski, Leśmian's purposes in transforming language were as follows: (1) to enrich the artistic language, as the right word is often lacking; (2) to fulfill the poet's individual needs; (3) to express his own feelings to language, culture, and Weltanschauung; (4) to make language strange (like the Russian Formalists, who wanted to make it "new" by making a "stone really stony"); and (5) to work magic by offering words the way primitive man sacrifices things. Głowiński adds the following purposes: (1) versification (e.g. compensating for absent syllables), (2) economy (an emotional shorthand concentrating the place, manner, and allusions by means of intentional ambiguity); and (3) indication of metamorphoses on a continuum (e.g. "-ifying" rather than "being turned into"), thus blurring boundaries. Further, one could add the elements of style (e.g. making "Urszula Kochanowska" sound Baroque), surprise (metaphors uncovering unexpected correspondences), and primevalization of language, enrichment by means of wonder. Some of the categories arranged by Papierkowski and Głowiński tend to overlap, and some of the creations are already covertly or overtly present in the Polish language. Therefore, the classifications treated will be as follows:

1. the existing Polish language, i. e. Leśmian's raw material
2. the element of numinosity (word magic) for the primeval mind
3. restructuring of reality by means of tautologies, negative entities, and the blurring of semantic boundaries (including puns)
4. the creative density of poetic diction per se
5. considerations of stylistics and versification.

When Papierkowski wrote his linguistic study of Leśmian in 1964, no one else had yet effected a comprehensive analysis of Leśmian's language, not even in Polish; he correctly pointed out that such analysis was necessary. Papierkowski subdivides Leśmian's linguistic creativity into (a) archaisms, (b) dialecticisms, and (c) true neologisms, adding a fourth semi-category of phonetic, flexic, and structural changes rendered possible by the structure of the Polish language.⁸

Papierkowski laboriously counts word formations and arranges his statistics according to various classifications. For instance, on p. 177, he lists 13 participles created from potential verbs; on p. 198, he lists 747 neologisms: 309 nouns, 259 verbs, 117 adjectives, and 62 verbs. He counts 129 neologisms for 1912, 240 for 1912-1920, 319 for 1926-1936, and 59 for 1936-1937. In the absence of charts or graphs, the only useful information is that archaisms were gradually being replaced by neologisms. He seems to be attempting to write a useless and pedantic flow chart for love, counting how many times Leśmian used a certain prefix; furthermore, much of his information is incomplete and imprecise even by his own standards.⁹ However, as Głowiński mentioned, literature dies if not discussed; since it is built of words, it must call forth words to be part of culture. Paradoxically, then, even trivializing a work enriches it.¹⁰ Furthermore, Papierkowski advances a valuable caveat, namely that we are hampered in analyzing neologisms by the insufficiency of present lexicographical sources; something which sounds like the poet's own invention may in fact have been a normal word used at the time.

In discussing Leśmian's multi-prefix neologisms, which make a perfective act out of an imperfective verb (the Polish language has different verbs to indicate what French or English would denote by the imperfect tense), Papierkowski¹¹ is not sure whether this enriches the language or merely blurs semantic values, and thus opts for the feeble conclusion that it may be just a rhythmic aid to add an extra syllable. For instance, he thinks "upowicie" (p. 131) is used for an extra syllable and to avoid the common "spowicie;" "upowicie," however, is common enough to be in the Kościuszk Foundation dictionary, and the Słownik Języka Polskiego (Dictionary of the Polish Language) denotes it as an archaism meaning "wrapping."

Papierkowski also considers words such as "zgrzeb" (p. 147), "zanieśpiewanie" (p. 151), and "zawczas" (p. 124) incomprehensible, is unsure about words such as "powypełznąć" (p. 167), and lists no definition at all for "uścierwienie," except to refer to "rozścierwienie," which of course is not defined either (p. 135). (Kościuszk at least lists "ścierwo" as "carcass, carrion," thus allowing the reader to deduce the meaning.) His definitions of "dumierać" (p. 168), "powymrzeć" (p. 167), and "Istnieniowiec" (p. 132) as "to die intensively," "to die again," and "something which exists" respectively do not seem to take the context into account: these words actually appear to mean "to finish dying," "to become extinct," and—since it is capitalized—Existentialist. As for the important word "dziejba" (derived from "dzieje," acts or history, plus "-ba" meaning a group), he imparts no information whatsoever except to say that it is not in any dictionary, may be derived from Old Polish "dziejać"¹² (for "dziać," to act), and was invented by Lelewel.

Papierkowski is more interesting in his grammatical analyses, although these are unfortunately self-explanatory in most cases. On pp. 171-172, he lists several "-ać" verbs derived from "-ić" or "-yc" verbs, thus denoting a change in perfectiveness; on pp. 183-195, he shows adverbs or adjectives formed by adding suffixes to existing words (gołębny, stodołny, kurzliwie, plamiście); on p. 131, he indicates that "nozdrze" is derived from "nozdrza" (nostrils); and on pp. 191-193, he advises us that words such as "obopolny," "wszechleśny," "beztłumnie," and "pozadrzewnie" are derived from pole + oba, las + wszech, tłum + bez, and drzewo + poza--which are all obvious. On pp. 148-149, he lists further neological combinations: miodobranie, pierwosen, samoruch, samozachwył, wielozgon, włośczyzmora, złotolik, złotopani, dwutarcza, półciało, półdusza, półlas, półobłok, półskrzyniec, okamię, psiatreść, sztukapogląd, and śnigrobek.

However, Papierkowski does make a valuable contribution, namely to point out how few of Leśmian's neologisms are actually neologisms. The structure of the Polish language is the raw material for most of his creativity, and the Modernists were already famous for making adjectives into nouns (as does the French language by adding an article to an adjective); this increased the language's power of impressionism and reification.¹³ We shall deal later with Leśmian's neologisms which, according to Papierkowski, are actually dialect or archaic forms; for the moment, let us discuss the influence of two items in the Polish language upon Leśmian's poetic vocabulary, namely multiple negatives and self-reflexiveness.

Unlike modern English, double negatives do not cancel each other out in Polish, which is why Sienkiewicz was able to have Zagłoba complain that

"nobody never gives me nothing" without being ungrammatical; in fact, all those negatives combine to make his complaint all the more emphatic. This non-cancellation of negativity in Polish is a powerful, albeit unconscious, psycholinguistic tool which enables Leśmian to lend so much credence to his negations that they are accorded diplomatic immunity. After all, it could quite reasonably be argued that Goethe's entire Faust would have been impossible if the German word "wenn" did not mean both "if" and "when." God gives Mephistopheles permission to tempt Faust (Prolog im Himmel), but adds "doch steh' beschämt, wenn du bekennen musst...." God means "you will be ashamed when you realize" (that a good man cannot be led astray); Mephistopheles (much too intelligent to gamble on a foregone conclusion, after all) misunderstands the ambiguity to mean "you will be ashamed if you realize," and thus thinks he has a chance.

The second item is self-reflexive and reflexive verbs; these have even stirred violent U.N. debates between Soviet and U.S. delegates. For instance, the English term "expanding economy" is reflexive in Russian and thus connotes some measure of "self-expanding," ideologically unacceptable to a Marxist.¹⁴

In English dreaming, the dreamer ("I dreamt") is the point of reference. But Polish dreaming ("śnić się"), thanks to the reflexive, evokes a mirage of a creature which is dreaming itself to someone and becomes independent of the dreamer.¹⁵ In "Sen wiejski" (Country Dream), for instance, Leśmian's question—why did I dream a starry swirl?—connotes the factual existence of the item in question, as does the statement that he dreams about a certain village or road. This goes so far as to constitute a real obstacle: the dreamer cannot enter his own dream, he is his own hindrance.

In "Śnią się lasom las" and "Pan Błyszczącyński," nonexistent forests and gardens dream themselves and therefore exist; in "Ubóstwo" (Poverty), the poet's dead brother dreams himself "mistily and hurriedly" to the poet. Such reflexiveness can, of course, be both unethical and exhilarating in erotica: in "Zielona godzina" (The Green Hour), the beloved is reflected in the speaker's eye; in "We śnie" (Dreaming), she dreams herself "foreignly" to the dreamer (i. e. the problem is projected onto her); and in Sindbad (pp. 164 et seq.), the protagonist's wife is jealous of a nonexistent girl, Urgela, who dreams herself to Sindbad while the wife suffers from insomnia. To compound the ambiguity, the Polish word for dream, "sen," also means "sleep," and Leśmian makes full use of it to reify "sen" into an active partner which can perceive as though it were part of existing animist nature.

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Furthermore, the Polish words for "to love" and "to be created" are also reflexive ("to love oneself in someone" and "to create oneself"), as are the words for "to behave, to worry, and to decompose." Leśmian adds to the repertoire of reflexiveness by appropriating or inventing units such as "to chicken," "to bodify" (i. e. assume corporeal shape), "to become human," "to clown," "to snail," "to turkey," and "to stack up;" the latter is highly reminiscent of Goethe's "türmende Ferne" in "Auf dem See." As was the case with multiple negatives, I believe this functions to give added juicy palability to nonexistent objects; Leśmian merely intensifies a process already present in the Polish language.

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Anyone who argues that language is shaped by experience can just as easily argue the obverse: any correlation found between language and culture is usually circular and tautological, cause and effect being almost impossible

to "tease out" as independent variables in a non-laboratory situation. Any convention, including language, is necessarily tautological, being both cause and effect (or at least symptom), both expectation and fulfillment intertwined, so any interpretation is likely to contain the accumulated perspective of human experience, knowledge, and commentary. ¹⁸ Furthermore, since "reality" has been found to be a percept, any 1:1 correlation between language and reality (such as that aimed for in various artificial languages) is likely to have the irrelevant congruence of two measurements of the same phenomenon measuring each other.

This may explain why some poet-translators, such as Ezra Pound, simply explored etymologies in search of "numinous ghosts" in their translations. It has been objected that the "natives" may not be aware of their own numinous substrata; however, linguists and anthropologists know that this argument can be irrelevant. A person or group does not have to be aware of a mechanism ¹⁹ for that mechanism to work. A good deal of the primitive word-magic identification, which believes one can conjure up something's essence by naming it, ²⁰ has carried over into modern man's unconscious. We can use ostensibly identical words in various languages to illustrate the point: préjuger (Fr.) = to pre-judge; to prejudice (Eng.) = cannot fail to produce negative results; ²¹ pryedugadyvat (Rus.) = to guess before one's turn. Adultery in English is derived from the Latin: to corrupt by adding something else; "Ehebruch" in German means the breaking of a marriage; and "cudzołożyc" in Polish means "to strangebed." Papierkowski indicates that "bogaty" (rich) is derived from "enjoying God's favor" (God = Bog), whereas "ubogi" (poor) means disfavor, ²² since the prefix "u-" was negative in Old Polish.

But even if one discounts etymology, one must admit that Leśmian's poetry is epistemological, cognitive, and mythopoetic, which means that its language must be explored. He attempts to include time, metamorphosis, incomplete transformation, and fleeting stages by means of frequently antithetical prefixes, verbified nouns ("czasownik," "verb" in Polish, contains the word for "time," "czas").²³ His linguistic creativity is the key to his metaphysics, as it consists of unexpected metaphors; Przyboś quotes Peiper to the effect that a poet's metaphors (Aristotle's similarity within dissimilarity) tell us more about him than his biography does.²⁴ Leśmian himself said that a poet is someone who sees what others do not, and therefore created a timeless language geared to "approximating linguistic processes reminiscent of primordial man.... a language rooted in the past but oriented toward the future, disregarding any literary conventions in vogue."²⁵ His words are palpable, like sacrificial offerings or arrows still embedded in the victim's flesh.

Leśmian's language, like Mallarmé's, contains a "magical core of poetry.... every word is a magical formula."²⁶ We must remember that the genesis of art was magic: not esthetic contemplation is the purpose of art, but achieving a result. An image is "something powerful to use;" even today, we feel atavistic reluctance at poking out the eyes on a photograph of a person we like.²⁷ In Egyptian religion, "to know the name of a god is equivalent to obtaining a certain power over him. The magical value of names, and of words in general, was certainly known from prehistory."²⁸ (In the beginning was the Word.)

Languages are now jokes or anachronistic tools, their speakers unconscious hostages to the past, but for primitives it was quite real. Since words had sacred meaning, everything had to have a sex (the Bantus, for instance, have 24 genders).²⁹ Identification of the word with the thing is primeval meta-

phor; understanding a modern metaphor means accepting its psychological baggage or payload. ³⁰ By word-magic identification, a baby's cry ³¹ IS food; he is fed if he makes the appropriate sounds, does not have to go hunting, and easily slides into an acceptance of the magical element. ³² George Steiner mentions that language and the incest taboo are necessary concomitants of each other ("We can only prohibit that which we can name") and that women and words perform similar functions ³³ "in the grammar of social life." Even today, we would have trouble accepting "sug" as a synonym for beauty because of its associations with words like "ugly" and "suck," ³⁴ and Karl Dedecius relates a Karel Čapek story about a farm couple who could no longer slaughter their fatted pig once they had given him a name. ³⁵ Persons who can reproduce hay-fever symptoms by looking at paper roses, ³⁶ or those who believe in certain numbers, ³⁷ indicate that numinosity is still alive and well in the computer age.

Precisely because of its arbitrary character, language is able both to permit innumerable possibilities of expression ³⁸ and to work against man by permitting him to misinterpret the environment, which is probably why so many philologists have called it a "draft" or an "attempt." ³⁹ Although it offers almost limitless ways of naming activities, most such activities do not change the semantic configuration; for Leśmian, on the other hand, the names virtually call the things into existence, as shown in "The Meadow." ⁴⁰ The lack of a name means linguistic, i. e. physical, death. ⁴¹ Together with Bergson, Leśmian believed that "language based on stiff and arbitrary definitions represents an obstacle to poetic creation" and that poets share primordial man's spontaneity and creativity. ⁴²

One of the ways in which Leśmian approximates this original freshness is, paradoxically, by means of tautology. His redundant verbs made from nouns (barns barning, brooks brooking) present a creature's identity with itself; it stubbornly persists in performing the only action it knows how, thereby answering the question "what does it do?"⁴³

Leśmian is also famous for what I call his inchoate prefixes, namely those which designate an action which has begun but not quite terminated. In "Jan Tajemnik," starting (but never finishing) a sign-of-the-cross motion is enough to keep the protagonist out of hell forever;⁴⁴ words such as "niedoumianie" (in "Nocturnal Tryst") create the effect of an asymptotic, never-ending lack of satisfaction, as they designate the inability to lead the act of dying to its full conclusion.

Another famous Leśmianism is what Sandauer calls his "bylejakość," which could be translated as haphazardness or willy-nilliness. The poet intentionally manages his effects with great sophistication, deliberately cultivating blurred sloppiness by throwing in surprisingly arbitrary details. He perverts facts and debanalizes poetic language in the manner of the Cubists, who intentionally blurred limits; his oxymorons, semantic collisions (e. g. "to gild silverly"), and transformations of adjectives into abstract nouns by adding the suffix "-ość" makes for an imprecise, uncertain language in which the drunkenness of a body, not the body itself, can be an actor. Sandauer sets great store by what he calls these formal elements, as he claims to have found little in⁴⁵ the content to go by.

Part of Leśmian's so-called haphazardness is his transvestitism of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, whose purpose was apparently to exemplify

fluid, metamorphic existence by treating parts of speech like like forms. In "Ballada dziadowska," for instance, the only trace of a dead man is his wooden prosthetic device floating on the surface: what is ennobled is not the cripple, but the condition of cripplehood. In "The Cobbler" and "The Spring Ox," the poet causes animals and celestial bodies to "far" or to "distance," thereby shifting the emphasis of the action away from the perceiver and to the perceived. In English, it is now possible to -ize or -ify almost anything, and back-formations such as "to laze" or borrowings from other languages ("semi-tough" from the German "halbstark") are no longer revolutionary, but in Poland around World War I, such linguistic experimentation was usually considered arbitrary pose at best and worthless subversion at worst.

Leśmian's comparisons are, then, images to prove that nothing is simply what it is. A girl's corpse's palms turned up as if to feel for raindrops, a flying witch's shirt "tailing windily like a snowstorm," raindrops (First Rain) splashing their liquid heads onto the ground and shrieking, and a sleeping woman who "pastures dreams on rose wide-awakeness" represent a sudden amplification of dramatic time and draw unexpected but immaculate parallels.

Papierkowski believes Leśmian's purpose in inventing words is enriching the Polish language and satisfying his expressive needs. He documents adjectival verbs such as "błękitnawieć" (to bluish) in "The Tango," "bezdomnieć" (to no-home) in "The Spring Ox," "nieśmiertelnieć" (to immortalize) in "The Funeral," "puszyścieć" (to fluffify) in "The Secret," "srebrnieć" (to silver) in "Silvron," "zródkowieć" (to behave like a spring) in "The Spring Ox," and "posłusznieć" (to obedientize) in "Nocturnal Tryst." He also believes some

of Leśmian's neologisms to be recombinations with affective undertones, such as "Znikomek" (Paltry), a noun formation combining "znikomy" (ephemeral) and the affectionate diminutive suffix -ek.⁴⁸

My interpretation of the purpose of Leśmian's neologisms is as follows: like Goethe, who strove to represent truth instead of "reality" (an object, res, to be studied and used rather than a phenomenon to be experienced jointly with the observer),⁴⁹ Leśmian wished to show that nature and life admit of no separate classifications, only a collection of interrelated individuals on a vast continuum of metamorphosis and change. He suggests a relationship where others see things in isolation; for him, the most important thing is what goes on between words. In "Ballada bezludna," for instance, he has "piersi... Czerwcami gorące" (breasts... rendered hot by Junes); in "Dżananda," he makes an intransitive verb transitive and causes someone to "przybłąkać" (wander in) another person.⁵⁰ Rather than use the epithets so beloved by the Modernists, he treated characteristics and attributes as actions; dynamic movement (purpose) was more important to him than structure, and he frequently jolted his readers into otherness by effecting surprising changes in perspective. He renovated clichés in a similar manner, substituting "underhoof" for "underfoot" (The Spring Ox),⁵¹ sometimes simultaneously substituting, negating, and alluding to them. He treats time like he treats space, evidently prefiguring Korzybski's contentions in Science and Sanity that time and space are inseparable; there is no difference between time and the object within it, which is often a reification or even a materialization of time or eternity (such as the animals in "The Zoo").⁵² In his famous biography, Adam Szczerbowski says that just as nature influences

man, for Leśmian man influences nature by the magic of the creative word,
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 calling forth apparitions, demons, and spirits from the dark. Miłosz be-
 lieves that with "his images of nature, Leśmian, in fact, was weaving a seman-
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 tic web, a world of make-believe, man's only solace."

As already mentioned, many of Leśmian's word-formations involved unfinished incarnations and inchoate behavior, such as beginning (but never finish-
 ing) the sign of the cross. In other words, his predilection for representing both disappearance and nonexistence expands into the lexical layer, with elaborate compound prefixes such as "niedo-" (not-quite-finishing-) plus a verb. Papierkowski believes Leśmian's negations and antitheses (e. g. przeciwdreszcz, bezbrzask—antishiver, dawnlessness) are merely analogous derivatives from Młoda Polska, Romantic, or foreign expressions, and that the effect of all these sen-
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 sory antitheses is one of hollow dark. However, Rymkiewicz points out that Leśmian did not use negatives for vague universe-describing purposes, as the Modernists had; in "The Drowner," the "bezświat," for instance, is a very
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 concrete "bezświat zarośli" (worldlessness of thickets). The protagonist is therefore identified not with a timeless, spaceless, primeval existence of things, but with an inseparable physical-spiritual whole.

A consequence of eternal becoming à la Bergson (e. g. the mist trying to "girlify" in "Pan Błyszczącyński") is the unfinished, uneven, often unfulfilled degree of characteristics, reminiscent of the pea-pod people in the "Invasion of the Body-Snatchers." Leśmian's philosophy is closely tied to his word-formations: contradicted existences do not remain in contradiction with their reality counterparts, but rather coexist in mythematical harmony. Leśmian

therefore uses verbs which designate continuity of action and nouns designating unfinished existence or a piling up of results. He often creates surprise and deep meaning by taking advantage of the tension between the lack of completion of a task and its particular position in time; for this reason, the absence of action is perceived and treated as action. Similarly, the poet does not make a distinction between existence and nonexistence—he accepts the equal status of both their existences.

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A word with a prefix always contains the meaning of both expressions. "Bezpole" (no-field, fieldlessness) contains the "field," not only formally, but also in terms of meaning, representing a space in which there is room for many other "intermediary" terms. The continuum of a potential series of words contained between such a pair of antonyms is exemplified by the space between life and death, which can contain "niedoumieranie, umieranie, doumierać, powymrzeć," etc. (In English, such words could be rendered by etymologically often unrelated synonyms such as fainting away, dying, becoming extinct, and being mortal; however, in Polish they are related selections from the same space, and none of the parts can contain the whole.) Leśmian thus discovered a formula to verbalize tendencies either in the direction of plenty or want, so his prefixal annominations can be formless, immature, transparent, or super-intense on a continuum of namelessness which will always be wider than the space which may

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be verbalized. The resulting blurring causes the boundaries between parts of speech to become fuzzy as well; hence the tautologies in which subject and predicate "verbify" (i.e. dynamicize) nouns and paradoxical descriptions wind up containing each other in a mirror-image reflection of mutual confirmation

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of meaning. If Leśmian does not differentiate between time and space, it is only logical that his language fail to make a distinction between verbs (which segment time) and nouns (which segment space).

We have seen that Polish double negatives reinforce instead of annihilating each other and that Polish reflexive verbs give substance to chimeras. Leśmian, however, added a non-differentiation and submerging into nature which may well be related to the myth of Nirvana and the mathematics of India; if zero (nothingness) can be symbolized, it is no longer nothing, but something, and therefore exists. His formations create the impression of something produced in order to give a name to an actually existing designate, and the equality of the members causes the boundary between them to become factually insignificant. Stone points out that, by giving concreteness to the nonexistent, Leśmian indirectly expresses his philosophy through images: "abstractions are combined with verbs which, in principle, should refer to concrete concepts only." Infinity growls in "The Meadow," and the characters in "W zakątku cmentarza" (In a Graveyard Corner) are able to spend the night under Infinity; in "The Bees," one can perform an action "with all the might of one's nothingness." Finally, the poet is able to extend a metaphor to a whole sentence by means of improvised relationships between the parts thereof. Leśmian's nothingness is partial, the Bergsonian void of the thing only (as the space left over after the men's death in "Two Convicts"); absolute nothingness in the meaning of "total annihilation" does not exist for him, only "an expression of a passing phase in existence." Double negatives pile negation upon negation and therefore do not "exclude its existence."

Further instances of material behavior on the part of nonexistent abstracts (in addition to the girl-fog unsuccessfully trying to coagulate into human form in "Ballada bezludna") are as follows:

1. An abyss whines and thrashes about in a thicket in "Otchłań" (Abyss).
2. Infinity moans in "Eliasz" and stays to visit in "The Meadow."
3. Death becomes error, which becomes fate, in "Dżananda."
4. Eternity wriggles out of the grass in "Cmentarz" (The Graveyard).

Negative behavior is expressed in the following instances:

1. Ocean silence rings in Sindbad Żeglarz (p. 17): a negative thing exists and can be heard.
2. Pan Błyszczczyński creates a nonexistent garden and falls in love with a girl's sketch in her absence.
3. "Rok nieistnienia" means "The Year of Nonexistence" (Nexistence?).
4. Sindbad finds a nonexistent girl on an island.
5. "Dusza w niebiosach" (The Soul in Heaven) "non-loves" so faithfully and so truly that no one is able to stumble upon thought-pain.
6. The verb "zanieistniec" (translatable as "to nexist") occurs in "Pururawa i Urwasi" (Pururava and Urvasi).
7. Marcin Dziura (Martin Hole) is a protagonist in "Majka" (Klechdy polskie, pp. 45-94).
8. A huge, illimitable, and inhuman no-homeness (wielka nieograniczona i nieludzka bezdomność) occurs on p. 100 of "Wiedźma" (The Hag), Klechdy polskie.
9. "Eliasz" has antishivers, and "Pantera" (The Panther) antigilds herself.
10. The "Overwise Vasilissa" (Utwory rozproszone p. 77) wants to be loved for her nonexistence and refers to her "shivers of non-loving." Time does not exist within her; "I am she who does not exist," a "dream within a dream," and her nonexistence is symbolized by "ostensible shadows, non-living waves," and an "invisible sickle."
11. "Kocmołuch" features the exuberant nonexistence of clouds, behind which there is nothingness except sadness.
12. In "Niedopita czara" (a magic potion not drunk to the last drop) in Utwory rozproszone pp. 52-64, a corpse discusses nothingness with the thunderbolts, touches his beloved's absent hand, unforgets love even before they meet, and says future angels will answer questions unasked.
13. "Tę siną gwiazdę" (Utwory rozproszone p. 65) features the "shivers of the not-quite-extinguished dawn."
14. Occasionally, Leśmian also turns negatives into positives, such as making "samowitość" (canniness) out of "niesamowitość" (uncanniness) in "Jan." This activity is similar to calling someone "couth, kempt, and shevelled" in English.

Karpowicz believes that Leśmian's negative existences are "forms of zero anticipation," revealing a desire to become; existential aggressiveness must be exorcized.⁶¹ No common, anonymous words can grasp the paradoxes of reality. Leśmian's neologisms are not arbitrary (as in Dadaism), but cognitive and philosophical; they try for solution of immediate perception of a thing or state. In Hegelian terms, they constitute a triad, except that the synthesis is performed within the reader: thus, there is neither "dawn" nor "no-dawn," even in clear contradictions; the reader figures out the synthesis. In order to "nontemplate" something, you must be able to "contemplate" it first, so the negation is actually a "magnifying reduction" which raises the activity to the second or third power. Like a good Marxist, Sandauer focuses on the dialectics of Leśmian's ambivalent creatures, which are both self and antiself simultaneously, but he reaches a different conclusion: in trying to surpass boundaries in an attempt to become other, the negative prefixes become self-liquidating and self-destructive; an action barely begun, or an embryonic incarnation, thus commit "logical suicide."⁶²

⁶³ According to Głowiński, Leśmian sculpts a "zaświat przedstawiony" (presentation of an or the otherworld, which is the title of his book), which develops on its own, at least partially independent. His metaphors are not limited to lexis; they enter the realm of mythos. His negations (reifying the opposite of an abstraction) are part of his epistemological and perceptive problematics: since any creation is an act which comes from itself, no cause can possibly exist. Leśmian's oxymorons and negative juxtapositions are used to indicate dynamic metamorphosis and change of perspective, concentrate on

action rather than result, and serve as a principal agent in the creation of a reality in which the negative and positive somehow coexist. (For instance, there is a "no-world" in "The Drowner," but only the world can be deprived of the world.) His negations often approach tautology by endowing or depriving the subject of unexpected possibilities, or perform a negative juxtaposition of real space by spatializing void. In Leśmian's negative ontology, nothingness (= void) is not the opposite of something (= being), since nothingness also exists and void is always linked at least to a vision of existence. (The void can sometimes be concrete, whistling in "Pan Błyszczński" or hiding behind a bush in "Zmierzchuna.") Nothingness is death paraphrased, but since death is but a change of state for Leśmian, it is portrayed as repeatable; in "On Resurrection Day," for instance, the author feels compelled to point out that some life-experiences cannot be repeated in spite of the fact that death is only temporary.

Papierkowski quotes Leopold Staff to the effect that Leśmian's word-creations have the purpose of representing and underlining the strangeness of things and are a subtle form of humor. ⁶⁴ (This would seem to be corroborated by items such as the above negation of the negation of death.) Most of Leśmian's humor, especially in his ballads, is extremely grotesque. However, as befits a wordsmith with a sense of humor, for whom language is as resplendent and as pliable as gold, Leśmian also indulges in word-play on occasion. Rather than use puns as a tool to rail against a mendacious world, e.g. by showing ⁶⁵ that only one letter need be changed to convert a "romera" (pilgrim) into a "ramera" (whore), Leśmian seems to intend us to see hidden correspondences; in other words, the function of puns approximates that of rhythm, which is also an unexpected and joyful reclassification of stale material. In "Dzień Nazara,"

a lazy peasant likes Sunday ("my sister, or my mother"); the word is feminine in Polish and, etymologically broken down, means "no-workness." In a 1901 letter to Miriam, Leśmian writes that he is "slowly becoming a cyclist—not in order to write cycles, but.... to bicycle to Italy or Paris." A poem a few pages later is full of puns: Bavaria is transmogrified into Barbaria; "bezczelny" (impudent) is broken down into "bez czoła," i. e. "without a forehead"; and the homonyms "trzcionka" (reed) and "czcionka" (printer's type) are played with. In a 1905 letter to Miriam, Leśmian tells his friend that the only way the latter can make good an insult (you called me an "old sum" = wheatfish) is to send him a large sum, 100 rubles if possible. In "W pobliżu cmentarza" (Near the Graveyard), Leśmian refers to people as "straszni—bez strachu," horrible but without horror (= fearless), and in "Dwa krzyże" (Two crosses), he says that two girls love him: "Jedna weselem, a druga bólem," i. e. one with pain, the other with joy—but joy is also the word for wedding. Matysek the fiddler "wygrał" (fiddled, but also won) the weeping of a dead girl; in "Podlasiak" (Klechdy polskie, p. 184), a gnarled tree becomes Hamlet's "rub" because the Polish word "sęk" means both a knot (in a tree) and a catch ("where's the catch"). In "Fabryka Hjalmar Bergströma" (Szkice literackie, p. 170), he rails humorously at Western Europe, Europa zachodnia: "zachody" means pain or trouble. In "Pejzaż współczesny" (Contemporary Landscape), a robot hugs a girl who is out of work/without a robot ("robota" means "work" in Polish, whence the English word), and a comparison (porównanie) is shown to be "mere levelling" (also porównanie). In "Przyśpiew" (Song), a horse is "ksobny," which means both "harnessed from the left" and "engrossed in himself," and in some of his

night poems (Nocturnal Tryst, At Night), puns and paranomasia such as "znużyć --i zużyć" and "w tym tu rowie i parowie" abound. (I have translated the first pun "wearying and wearing out" in an attempt to keep the element of word-play.) Unlike Goethe, who in Dichtung und Wahrheit complained about a famous writer who transmogrified Goethe's name into Kot and Götter, Leśmian seems to have enjoyed playing with his own name: in "List do Miriama," he said he was "roześmian" (doubling over in fits of laughter); if he had not been indulging in word-play, he would have used the conventional full word "roześmiany." And finally, an important pun which must be included because it reflects the poet's philosophy. In Szkice literackie and a 1921 letter to the editor of Pono-
 67
wa, Leśmian makes the following statement about the interrelationship between poets and poetic language:

Nie tylko zresztą poeta nagina język do swego 'widzi mi się' --
 ale i język, pierwotniejąc -- narzuca poecie swoje zamierzenie
 'śni mi się'.

A translation which attempts to conserve the pun:

After all, not only does the poet bend the language in accordance with his 'it seems to me'; language, in primevalizing, also imposes its ancient 'it dreams to me' upon the poet.

Leśmian's neologisms had the purpose of "unusualizing" and "bestranging" language; they are one-time-only occurrences, tailored for a single time and place, and therefore cannot be repeated or become hackneyed like common
 68
 coins. His unusual words are not gratuitous, like the Symbolists' adjective heaps, but economical: like "hidden footnotes," they aim to concentrate expression and eliminate the need for description. In his introduction to Szkice (p.
 69
 8), Jacek Trznadel mentions that Leśmian made fun of gratuitous neologisms;

his own, he felt, were emotional shorthand to obviate descriptive logorrhea. For instance, he criticized some of Lelewel's neologisms as unnecessary dirt clouding clear perception.⁷⁰ Boring people, according to Leśmian, use words only for their own everyday prosaic purposes, never giving them a vacation. One should, instead, invite the prose-tired words to dance in rhythm, which gives them respite and turns any working day into a holiday.⁷¹ Such non-boring language—honestly calling things by their names—is of course often non-genteel as well, as exemplified by the malicious, earthy country bumpkin in "Dusiołek."⁷²

Neologisms, like rhythm (Leśmian faulted modern poetry for suffering from arrhythmia), have the function of dismembering and reorganizing large semantic figures in Leśmian's poetry: the pieces have full freedom, but as long as they are treated like independent values, their contact with larger complexes of meaning is ruled out. In Leśmian's chain of neological transformations, families of expression are like cooperatives of signs complementing each other in the common job of rebuilding the primeval totum of meaning. The individual word is only able to express one aspect of a wider meaning, but the more lexical units (whether derived or related) can be mobilized or called to life,⁷³ the larger the space of meaning which can be revealed. An example would be "Dusiołek," Leśmian's humorous but threatening name for an incubus which choked sleeping people (chokeubus?); the folk remedy was to wake up and pin it to the wall. A single word thus contains the entire spectrum of folklore,⁷⁴ allusiveness, danger, humor, and inventiveness.

Since the Szkice essays contain very few neologisms and stories like the various Klechdy contain many, one might even profitably speculate whether fictionality (or an attempt to create an alternative reality) induces neologisms

almost by definition. In a masterful pun Artur Sandauer says that Leśmian's neologisms are, rather, noologisms (derived from the Greek noos or nous = mind), which discover what is in the soul of language and, like natura naturans,⁷⁵ traffic in phenomenological relationships rather than static structure.

Writers usually know what they want to say, but the language they use has often lost all meaning (or at least all clarity of expression) and become⁷⁶ hackneyed and banal. Leśmian's purpose was to express the inexpressible, aim above the possibilities of language, search for the preconceptual image of⁷⁷ the word, and thereby present both the thing and the impression encasing it. He thus realized the synthetic dream of Valéry and Mallarmé, creating a new and nonexistent reality and imposing the structure of the word onto the world. If reality is a function of the word (the secret and creative power of the world),⁷⁸ the poet's role is to reconstitute what exists, not merely baptize it. He must cultivate the "enormifying treasure" of language, keeping alive the creative⁷⁹ magic of words by maintaining their function as mythopoetic images. Leśmian stated that prose, being content-oriented, is not burdened with creativity, but there are many instances of poetic neologism within his artistic prose. In "Legendy tęsknoty" (Legends of Longing) and "Białocho," structures lean out of nowhere, paleness burial-moundifies people's faces, the pupils of a pair of eyes nexistify, and darkness spatializes and stacks up.⁸⁰ The Klechdy polskie abound in evocative neologisms such as "samotnikować" (to lonify), "rusałkować" (to naiadify), "wichrzyć się ogoniasto" (to tail windily), "umrzeć po⁸¹ roślinnemu" (to die plantily), and "krawczyk-popsujko" (tailor-ruinit).

Julian Przyboś, greatly inspired by Leśmian, believes that it is a poet's responsibility to be fresh and inquisitive, never taking a word's word for anything without verification, making even ordinary dictionary words into neologisms by attacking and rediscovering them. Any poet for whom existing words are enough to express what he wants to express is merely a versifier, as poetry begins with the unappeased appetite, the unsaturated word, the determination that it is impossible to express what a poem should be in "normal" words. The poetic "thing" is not encompassed in the word, but goes beyond it,⁸² which is why anyone using metaphors must needs be a revisionist of words.

For Przyboś, great poets never become dated. Leśmian is the only one in his generation to have remained a creative force inspiring new poets, and is now being appreciated for things not even noticed during his lifetime: in the poetic density of his language (the opposite of logorrhea), any sentence could be an effective punch line; in his maximally imagistic language, the selection⁸³ of words is necessary and on target. After all, poetry expresses an image, not an idea, in words, thereby returning the referent to the sign; no poetry is possible without discovery and invention torn out of a living and unwilling language. Since conventional speech is sufficient for literati but not for poets, a good poet MUST overstep boundaries; a poetic dictionary would thus be an essential manual of psychology.⁸⁴ Poetry does not name feelings, it expresses them; nature is but an intermediary in our attempt to recreate and identify with the world, which is perceived as a projection of feeling. Poetry thereby becomes the language of language, and its purpose is to solidify and express⁸⁵ individual experience, liberating it from domination by the object.

Ludwig Wittgenstein has pointed out that language starts playing pranks on us, entangling us into unsolvable philosophical problems, when we start disregarding and forgetting about it (when our mind is "on vacation").⁸⁶ Since Leśmian's poetry is a prologue to the metaphysics of the future, his language is both dangerous and exhilarating because he exercises our feelings and new intuitional drives, forcing us to break and abuse language in order to express them, breaking the censorship contained within the categories of common speech. Since our perceptual criteria are a matter of societal agreement and there is no such thing as private language, we cut ourselves off from society when we cause the internal structure of language to crumble, resulting in autism or solipsism.⁸⁷ Leśmian created not words, but states of consciousness; every creation is a change, something which did not exist inside us before now exists.⁸⁸ For him, the poetic word is the main "hero" of poetry: language re-gains the primeval color it lost in common usage.⁸⁹ Leśmian loves what he sees and transmits his experience in language which combines childlike elements with deep prayerfulness, and he needs neologisms for this because normal language cannot adequately transmit the soul and wonder of nature.⁹⁰ His greatest revolt was not erotica or nonconformity, but a monstrous, innovative poetic language which broke all molds; for him, words are not so much immobilized thought as an exponent of the lack of emotional satisfaction and a hunger of a resilient will which has lost its way in attempting to discharge itself. We comprehend the true meaning when we watch his language work dynamically,⁹¹ such as when Leśmian says his soul is "falconated" or "suprafieldlike" (roz-sokolony, ponadpolny) or causes a spirit to "plantify" (roślinnieć) while the world as a whole "humanizes" (człowieczeje).⁹² (See also "The Zoo.")

Papierkowski believes Leśmian's language management was meant to reflect the world as he saw it (namely as monstrous), penetrating into nature's strange and myriad noises in a non-intellectual aural harmony in equivalent music, and forcing the reader to see the world the poet's way; according to him, Leśmian felt unable to understand anything about surrounding reality and went around wondering at everything, even at the fact of his own existence.⁹³ He also believes that many of Leśmian's neologisms (such as "półskrzyniec" instead of "skrzynia" in "Wrogowie," The Enemies) have the purpose of creating an uncommon, impressive effect, i. e. that their intent is solely stylistic.⁹⁴

Leśmian himself wrote that sometimes not particularly fortunate neologisms cease to be offensive when we realize that they were created not in a vain chase after originality, but rather out of disgust for outdated rot.⁹⁵ Building on linguistic innovations which preceded him (e. g. the simple, direct language of Prus, the periodized styles of Sienkiewicz, the dialecticisms and archaisms of Żeromski and Kraszewski, and the excessive love of superlatives and capital letters of Przybyszewski), Leśmian was able to impart various styles to his poetry. He inserted classical pseudo-Sarmatian archaisms or a Biblical tone if he wanted an effect of dignity, used real proverbs and invented sayings to authenticate the familiar chattiness of the "gawęda" genre, and even devised picturesque insults a la Don Quixote.⁹⁶ Sometimes it is impossible to distinguish his neologisms from words that could exist, or maybe even do, in folk parlance: in "The Spring Ox," for instance, the term "wiosnowaty" or "zwiosnowaty" is allegedly an existing adjective designating an ox fainting in springtime work.⁹⁷

Many of Leśmian's so-called neologisms were actually archaisms or dialecticisms. (Obsolete forms often carry "overtones of dignity and prestige.")⁹⁸

Leśmian was rather conservative in versification, using no inter-stanza enjambements or free verse, and usually remaining within the strictures of traditional syllabic or syllabotonic verse, whose possibilities he thought had not yet been exhausted. ⁹⁹ Many of his word formations are not new at all, though some consider them linguistic heresy: words such as "poobciosać" are actually found in the Słownik Warszawski (the standard Warsaw Dictionary), and the ¹⁰⁰ principle of adding double prefixes to verbs is common in the Polish idiom.

Although Papierkowski contends that Leśmian did not have a dictionary of Old Polish at his disposal, he nevertheless finds archaisms such as "dziewka" for "dziewczyna" (girl, as used by Kochanowski); "bezden" (abyss), an Old Polish equivalent of "otchłań"; "rąbek" for "chustka" (kerchief); "sprzęg" for "sprzęga" (link, coupling); "płoc" instead of "płotka" (a type of fish) in order to rhyme with złoć; and Romanticisms borrowed from Mickiewicz, such as "zbójca" instead of "zbój" and "pierzchota" instead of "ucieczka" (robber and flight respectively). He further resurrected archaic inflections (ogniów instead of ogni), augmentatives (jabło for jabłko, pagór for pagórek), and diminutives (śmierciuszka for ¹⁰¹ śmierć).

Leśmian was also strongly influenced by folklore, but with a difference: whereas folklore is formulaic and prefabricated, Leśmian's language is creative and poetic. ¹⁰² Papierkowski counts 330 dialecticisms in Leśmian's work and points out that many such words had heretofore mistakenly been classified as neologisms. Their purpose is stylistic (whether expressive or impressive); in ballads particularly, they aim to recreate nature as perceived by a commonsensical peasant. Furthermore, most of these dialecticisms actually invented or analogized by Leśmian need not be incorporated into common language to be

successful, only work well within the context of a particular poem. Leśmian incorporated elements of street slang (e. g. "bleed offa my foot!" in Marcin Swoboda), provincialisms, and regionalisms, whether phonetic, inflectional, or lexical. He used authentic "gwara" (common peasant language) words such as inszy, samiustek, skądesi, ino, jeno, bożysty, zaumierać, zemglic się, jaśnisty, and ospać for inny (other), sam jeden (all alone), skąd (where from), jeno (only), tylko (only), boży (divine), zapadać w śmierć (to die gradually), mglić (to become foggy), jasny (light-colored), and a Kashub dialect word meaning "to impregnate a woman."¹⁰³ His invented "gwara" words are actually constructed by analogy: "wciornaści" in "Świdryga and Midryga" comes from "wciornastki" (= wszystek, all) and "naści," a gwara verb including an emphatic pronoun to function as an exclamation; "niepodoba" is a negativization of the Rzeszów dialect's "tako podoba" (however); "do zdechu i do upaści" in "Świdryga and Midryga" are invented gwara as well; and "Znikomek" is a gwara-stylized name or nickname based on the word for "paltry" plus an affectionate diminutive.¹⁰⁴ Papierkowski further documents many other analogous formations always based on existing elements in the Polish language: increasing the "frequency" of a verb, e. g. rendering it "iterative" or "imperfective," by changing its suffix from "-ić" to "-ać" or vice versa; adding prefix participles to verbs to indicate direction or lack of control; adding suffixes such as "-ba," "-iwek," "-ista," "-ny," and "-owiec" to change nouns into adjectives (and vice versa)¹⁰⁵ in a mock-folksy manner.

Finally, some of Leśmian's linguistic innovations appear to have been motivated by considerations of versification, e. g. cutting off a syllable for purposes of rhythm or using a little-known word for purposes of rhyme.

Papierkowski, Sandauer, and Karpowicz believe such neologisms to be inde-
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 fensible. For instance, Leśmian used "będziem" instead of "będziemy"
 (we will be), "proga" instead of "progu" (of the threshold), to rhyme with Boga
 (of God), and boleśny instead of bolesny (painful) so as to palatalize (soften) the
 107
 "s" sound. Leśmian also used "szerć" instead of "sierść" (animal skin) as
 a phonetic neologism for rhyme (although it also contained a long-distance as-
 108
 similation from ancient Polish, in which the word was "szerść"), "kędzierz"
 and "kierz" (bush) to rhyme with "będziesz" and "ścież," and shortened "płó-
 109
 mień" (flame) and "jasność" (brilliant light) to "płom" and "jaśń." He also
 combined prefixes and root nouns according to Modernist tenets in order to ob-
 110
 tain the effect of something sudden, short, and violent. Papierkowski points
 out that although Leśmian considered rhyme secondary to rhythm in theory, he
 gave it considerable importance in practice, as evidenced by the frequent coin-
 111
 ages for the express purpose of rhyming. Papierkowski also makes excuses
 for what he considers a defect by saying that the poet, in his creative "lunatic
 112
 madness," had neither the time nor the energy to observe linguistic purity.

However, I believe the most important consideration in Leśmian's
 linguistic innovation was an attempt to effect a perceptual or cognitive innova-
 tion within his readers, even when using ordinary words. After all, even a
 chance repetition of an original utterance has nothing to do with the original one;
 the speaker is not remembering and quoting the original statement, but "coin-
 113
 ing it anew because the circumstances call for it."

It is true that for Leśmian, the incantation of rhyme and rhythm were
 crucial elements distinguishing poetic language from the banal positivistic
 114
 language of engineers. However, his linguistic innovations appear to have

been just as essential to his purpose; even Pankowski, who decries most of Leśmian's rebellions (e. g. against God, society, or empty poses) as not having gone beyond "épater le bourgeois," concedes that Leśmian's linguistic revolt is his essential victory.¹¹⁵ His notion of poetry is an act of creation, bringing about something that did not exist before; he makes a "magical and fantastic world existing apart yet side by side with everyday, usually base, reality."¹¹⁶ Language is not a carbon copy of reality, but has its own creative powers: it can tell you what did not happen (Leśmian's negative ontology), what no one could possibly have seen because there were no people (the myth of genesis as unfulfilled possibility), what was a shadow to the second power (such as the shadow of a nonexistent person), and what was oxymoronically both positive and negative (e. g. "spełnione nieistnienie," existence fulfilled).¹¹⁷ He manages to turn defeat into victory by acknowledging from the outset that the territory of his operations is cancelled.¹¹⁸ His verbs show specific types of existence and process, such as dying in installments, dawnifying, duskifying, etc.;¹¹⁹ in "The Stable," for instance, poplarading the poplars is almost a second act of creation, as the word itself causes the trees to soar visibly into the sky.¹²⁰ Even the Spring Ox's motionless faint in the field is laborious activity; suffering is work too. Thus, rhythm acts as poetic time, and a poem is a time-fragment stored within rhythm.¹²¹

Just as Sindbad consumes imaginary food and drink to humor a potentate, and just as Leśmian himself would force himself into merriment by extending the edges of his mouth until laughter came, Pan Błyszczński is able to create and inspect a fictitious garden which greenifies in the outmurk, checking to see whether the rustle and afterrustle were actual enough.

("Zielenieje na wymroczu... / sprawdzał, ... czy szum i poszum dość jest rzeczywiście.") Since memory and reflection are inadequate because they fade and fail to convey movement, only poetic language can do justice to fleeting reality by acting as a moving (no pun in Polish) reflection. ¹²² In a manner uncannily foreshadowing the Russian Formalists and Marshall McLuhan, Leśmian states that the very form of poetry causes reality to be perceived in a more direct, primeval manner:

.... the very process of rhyming, and the very beat of rhythm, force practically every human soul to sense within words a context other than the one imposed on them by everyday life. Even if rocked by the most banal of melodies of these words, the spirit suspects it is related to that original essence of existence which is the source of all poetry. ¹²³

Rhythm is not arbitrary decoration; it came first, and constituted a mnemonic permanence, a winged daring to outlast the content: the unconscious words gravitated toward this "melodic temptation." Leśmian even went so far as to speculate that placing the emPHAsis on the wrong sylLAbLe, i. e. changing the rhythm of a "normal" word, was creative because it made the item in question ¹²⁴ completely unique.

The theoretical portion of this paper has attempted to present Leśmian's poetic philosophy—which belongs in every modern textbook on literary criticism—and indicate the linguistic means by which he exemplified it. The second portion consists of 67 poems by Leśmian, two translations for each, and a set of footnotes documenting history, interpretation, linguistic innovation, and translation problems for each individual poem chosen. One translation is a word-for-word (almost morpheme-by-morpheme) rendition so as to enable the non-Polish-speaking reader to formulate an idea concerning the thought pattern and

sentence structure of the original Polish; hyphenated units indicate that the Polish contains all the elements of the English within a single word. The other translation aims to be a poetic rendering of the original Polish, and consequently takes more liberties (e. g. turning a wall into a door in "First Rain" for purposes of rhyme); both rhyme and rhythm have been conserved, although the rhyme schemes sometimes vary and the rhythm is usually a traditional English iambic pentameter or alexandrine rather than the thirteen-foot syllabotonic verse traditional in Polish. I have also attempted to render as many of Leśmian's linguistic innovations as possible, although sometimes not in the exact same place; these reconstitutions are more evident in the "poetic" version, as literal translations from Polish sound so exotic as to make even the most prosaic cliché (e. g. "is your father a glass-maker?" said to a person blocking one's view) look like an aching original utterance.

It is hoped that these attempts have been successful, and that they may impart to the English-speaking reader the same love, awe, and excitement which Leśmian produces within native Poles.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER IV

- 1
Papierkowski, pp. 13-14.
- 2
Bergson, Creative Evolution, p. 341.
- 3
Ibid., pp. 354-355.
- 4
Głowiński, ZP, pp. 31-2.
- 5
Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, "Leśmianowy 'czyn'," p. 272.
- 6
Papierkowski, pp. 112-14.
- 7
Głowiński, ZP, pp. 80-4.
- 8
Papierkowski, pp. 9-10.
- 9
Głowiński, ZP, p. 5 ff.
- 10
Papierkowski, p. 115.
- 11
Ibid., p. 131.
- 12
Ibid., p. 39.
- 13
Papierkowski, pp. 171-2, 183-95, 131, 148-9; Głowiński, ZP,
p. 299.
- 14
Edmund S. Glenn, "Semantic Difficulties in International Communica-
tion," in S. I. Hayakawa, ed., The Use and Misuse of Language, pp. 47-51.
- 15
Sandauer, "Poezja twórczych potęg natury," in Studia, p. 12.
- 16
Głowiński, ZP, pp. 205-13.
- 17
Goethe rarely invented neologisms: "stängeln" (derived from the
French "percher") is one of the few I have found.
- 18
Steiner, After Babel, pp. 93, 158, 301, 30, 248-9, 426-7.
- 19
Jack Mathews, "Third Thoughts on Translating Poetry," in Brower,
ed., On Translation (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959),
p. 69.
- 20
Korzybski, pp. 260, 478-9; Chase, p. 210.

- 21
Glenn, see fn. 14 above, pp. 62-3, 66-7.
- 22
Papierkowski, p. 109.
- 23
Głowiński, ZP, p. 314; Stone, pp. 214-8.
- 24
Julian Przyboś, "O metaforze," in Sens poetycki (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1963), pp. 38-9.
- 25
Stone, pp. 24-5.
- 26
Julian Przyboś, "Granice Poezji, in Nowa kultura, No. 24, June 15, 1958; Sandler, p. 53.
- 27
Gombrich, p. 20.
- 28
Eliade, A History of Religious Ideas, Vol. I, p. 111.
- 29
José Ortega y Gasset, "Glanz und Elend der Übersetzung," translated by Gustav Kilpper, in Hans Joachim Störig, ed., Das Problem des Übersetzens (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973), pp. 313-16.
- 30
Przyboś, "O metaforze," pp. 40-2.
- 31
Korzybski, pp. 201, 260, 401, 513, 755.
- 32
Hockett, pp. 356-60.
- 33
Steiner, After Babel, pp. 38-45.
- 34
Hockett, p. 298.
- 35
Karl Dedecius, Zur Literatur und Kultur Polens (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), p. 46.
- 36
Korzybski, pp. 12, 41, 198, 220, 331.
- 37
Steiner, After Babel, pp. 150-1; Chase, p. 158.
- 38
Hockett, pp. 540-1, 577-8, 354; F. de Saussure, "Immutability and Mutability," in Hayden et al., eds., Classics in Linguistics (New York: Philosophical Library, 1967), p. 243.
- 39
Steiner, After Babel, pp. 82-3; Chase, pp. 26, 51.
- 40
Głowiński, "Słowo i pieśń," in Studia, pp. 184-5.

41

Karpowicz, p. 252.

42

Stone, pp. 64-5.

43

Impatient and exasperated as usual, Sandauer calls this the "dynamics of a vicious circle" possibly motivated by the desire to create artificial action in the absence of a deuteragonist. (Karpowicz, p. 211; Sandauer, "Poezja twdrczych potęg przyrody," in Zebrane pisma krytyczne, pp. 529-30; Papierkowski, pp. 70-1.) (The same Sandauer essay is in Studia, pp. 9-11.) Skeletons which are white because they are white, and a God who does not exist because he does not exist ("Jadwiga") are further reminiscent of the logic used with children: "Because I said so!" usually settles any family argument.

44

Klechdy polskie, p. 44.

45

Sandauer, "Filozofia Leśmiana," in O poezji, pp. 508-19; Pankowski, pp. 194-9.

46

Pankowski, pp. 190-206.

47

Papierkowski, pp. 164-5, 143, 173-7.

48

Ibid., p. 152.

49

Lama Govinda, p. 159.

50

Głowiński, ZP, pp. 76-7, 87-8.

51

Ibid., pp. 76-9, 89-91.

52

Ibid., pp. 41-2.

53

Adam Szczerbowski, Bolesław Leśmian (Zamość: 1938), p. 24.

54

Miłosz, p. 349.

55

Papierkowski, pp. 119, 199-200.

56

Rymkiewicz, in Studia, pp. 224-5.

57

Olkuśnik, in Studia, pp. 157-67.

58

Sławiński, in Studia, pp. 113-7.

59

Ibid., pp. 103-9.

60

Stone, pp. 201-2, 221-2.

- 61
Karpowicz, pp. 26, 256, 262-5.
- 62
Sandauer, "Poezja twórczych potęg natury" in Studia, pp. 11-12; Samobójstwo, pp. 21-31; "Filozofia Leśmiana" in Moje Odchylenia (Cracow: 1956), pp. 87-8; quoted in Głowiński, ZP, pp. 102-3.
- 63
Głowiński, ZP, pp. 95-6, 106-7, 116-8, 121-2, 130-9.
- 64
Papierkowski, pp. 16-7, quoting Leopold Staff, Wybór poezji (Warsaw: 1955).
- 65
Sandra Celt, "Word-Work in the Picaresque," The Incorporated Linguist, Vol. 22, No. 1, Winter 1983, pp. 9-13.
- 66
UR, pp. 146, 258, 260-1, 292, 97, 94-5.
- 67
Szkice literackie, pp. 389, 394; UR, p. 346.
- 68
Trznadel, BL/LMP, p. 843, quoting K. Irzykowski, "Dobre wiersze," in Kurier Lwowski no. 191, 1921.
- 69
Głowiński, ZP, p. 69.
- 70
Papierkowski, p. 14.
- 71
Leśmian, review of "Jadwiga Lipińska: 'Pierścien'," Szkice, p. 362.
- 72
Ireneusz Opacki, "Pośmiertna w głębi jezior maska," in Studia, pp. 307-8.
- 73
Sławiński, in Studia, pp. 114-20.
- 74
Trznadel, TL, pp. 160-1.
- 75
Sandauer, "Poezja twórczych potęg przyrody," in Zebrane pisma krytyczne, pp. 522-3, 531-2.
- 76
Błóński, "Bergson a program poetyczny Leśmiana," in Studia, p. 67.
- 77
Karpowicz, pp. 254-66.
- 78
Biedkowski, "Szczyty symbolizmu," p. 54.
- 79
Szkice, pp. 88, 377.
- 80
UR, pp. 139, 163-5.

- 81
Klechdy polskie, pp. 13, 47, 96, 180, 52.
- 82
 Przyboś, "O metaforze," Sens poetycki, pp. 39, 49.
- 83
 Przyboś, "Nieprzestarzałość Leśmiana," pp. 150-7.
- 84
 Przyboś, "Granice poezji."
- 85
 Przyboś, paraphrased in Łapiński, in "Świat cały--jakże zmieścić go w żrenicy," in Głowiński, ed., Studia z teorii i historii poezji, pp. 279-315.
- 86
Philosophical Investigations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 19.
- 87
 Łapiński, in Studia, pp. 50-1.
- 88
 Mariàn Jachimowicz, Mowy leśmianowskie, pp. 20-2.
- 89
 Sławiński, review of Szkice, p. 227.
- 90
 Stefan Brykczyński, "Powrót do Łąki," Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza, London, October 21, 1983, p. 3.
- 91
 Pankowski, pp. 115-6; Miller, p. 338.
- 92
UR, pp. 80-1, 105.
- 93
 Papierkowski, pp. 179-80, 199, 207-9.
- 94
Ibid., p. 201.
- 95
 Review of "Henryk Wroński, 'Pobudki,'" Szkice, p. 282.
- 96
 Pankowski, pp. 30-3, 211-7, 198-203.
- 97
 Anna Kamińska, "Metafizyczny wół," in Od Leśmiana (Warsaw: Iskry, 1974).
- 98
 Malefijt, pp. 204-5.
- 99
 Trznadel, BL/LMP; p. 844; Głowiński, ZP, pp. 65-6; Przyboś, "Nieprzestarzałość Leśmiana," pp. 153-4.
- 100
 Olkuśnik, in Studia, p. 166.
- 101
 Papierkowski, pp. 38-9, 42-63, 155.

- 102 Głowiński, ZP, p. 90.
- 103 Papierkowski, pp. 65, 92-111, 179.
- 104 Ibid., pp. 81, 96, 103, 134.
- 105 Ibid., pp. 143, 151, 153, 156-7, 164, 168-71, 173, 178.
- 106 Karpowicz, p. 261; Papierkowski, pp. 150, 209.
- 107 Papierkowski, pp. 105-6, 203-4.
- 108 Ibid., p. 48.
- 109 Ibid., p. 149.
- 110 Ibid., p. 200.
- 111 Ibid., p. 31.
- 112 Ibid., p. 25.
113. Hockett, p. 304.
- 114 Miłosz, p. 348; Pankowski, pp. 32-3.
- 115 Pankowski, pp. 220-2.
- 116 Sandler, pp. 54-5.
- 117 Głowiński, "Ballada bezludna," Nurt, no. 6, June 1970, pp. 35-8.
- 118 Sandauer, Samobójstwo, p. 36.
- 119 Ibid., p. 22.
- 120 Jastrun, "Pierwsze spotkanie z Leśmianem," in Poezja i rzeczywistość.
- 121 Kamińska, "Metafizyczny wół," in Od Leśmiana.
- 122 Opacki, in Studia, pp. 331-49.
- 123 "Z rozmyślań o poezji," Szkice, pp. 83-4.
- 124 "Rytm jako światopogląd," in Szkice, p. 66 ff.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that the foregoing information about Leśmian's poetic philosophy and language will enable the English-speaking reader to understand the style and substance of the poet's innovations in Polish. The translator has endeavored to maintain the style of each individual poem; her work was made easier by the fact that the English language allows "verbification" of nouns which would be unusual in Polish (e.g. "to rosify") and has amassed a vocabulary of appropriate neologisms during the past fifteen years (e.g. "see-through," "self-contained," "high"), and by her occasional simplification of rhyme schemes (e.g. allowing "abab" to become "abcb" for ease of rhyming).

Since Leśmian wrote no free verse, and since most of his poems were composed in the 13-syllable verse traditional in Polish, the translations were rendered into the rhymed alexandrines or iambic pentameter equally traditional in English. As a result, of course, almost all the Polish feminine rhymes became English masculine rhymes, and the English version was deprived of between one and three syllables per line, requiring "densification" of the meaning. Rhythm was accentuated in the translation on occasion: for instance, the English version of "The Windmill" was lined in such a way as to produce a jerky Knittelvers effect. Enjambments were avoided in the translation if they were absent in the original: "Urszula Kochanowska," for instance, was written in the Baroque style of Jan Kochanowski, Urszula's father, so the English version contains no enjambments either. However, in more modern poems such as "To My Sister" and "The Spring Ox," en-

jamments were used intentionally in order to accentuate the effect of disorganization and decomposition. Instance of pseudo-dialecticisms, folklore, and archaisms (as in "Swidryga and Midryga"), legalistic inserts ("Silvron"), and neologisms were followed as closely as possible, although this sometimes required minor liberties such as reversing the content of two lines or neologizing a different word.

It will be noted that the translator made no attempt to periodize Leśmian: her purpose was to translate and explicate, not to classify. Michał Głowiński and Rochelle Heller Stone believe Leśmian to be a Symbolist, although he used folklore in an almost Romantic manner, was not arbitrary in his mythopoeitics, and differed greatly from the Symbolists in his interpretations (see Głowiński, "Otchłań," a comparison between Leśmian's and Baudelaire's treatments of the abyss motif). Marian Pankowski believes Leśmian to be Baroque with Romanticism on the ascendant because of his preoccupation with death, decomposition, and luxury; however, he does not understand that Leśmian's oxymorons are not religious or seductive manipulative conceits, but rather attempts to present an alternative reality (e.g. the commonplace of a "silent scream" in "Transformations"). Jacek Trznadel considers him an Existentialist, although this designation is complicated by the fact that it is usually a philosophical, not a literary, term, and other writers have mentioned in passing that he also has Absurdist and Futurist traits.

It would probably be more apropos to consider him in the same light as Goethe: a creationist classic too varied to be pigeonholed into categories designed for less imaginative poets. These translations have thus been made with no attempt whatsoever to superimpose conscious interpretations filtered

through Symbolist, Baroque, Existentialist, or Romantic prisms; it is hoped that such deliberate non-classification may neutralize the unavoidable effects of unconscious subjectivity, thus leaving as much scope as possible for reinterpretation on the part of future scholars.

APPENDIX

A brief comparison of Leśmian's treatment of the 1001 Nights stories as compared with the Burton translation. Leśmian's version was an adaptation; if there are discrepancies between Klechdy sezamowe/Przygody Sindbada żeglarza and the Burton translation, Burton tends to be more reliable in terms of fidelity. On p. 594, for instance, he includes a footnote explaining the gesture accompanying the Arab word "Tamannā" and criticizing the Galland translation for having misclarified it; on p. 598, he explains what "Aghas" means (a eunuch officer) and presents another translator's version of Aladdin's response to the information that princess Badr-al-Budur was to marry the Wazir's son. Leśmian, in Klechdy sezamowe (pp. 141-194) gives Aladdin's mother a name (she is nameless in Burton 549 ff.), Maruda, which is obviously in no other version simply because it means "Dilly-Dally" in Polish. Leśmian also causes her to shrug her shoulders all the time, something not present in Burton.

Pankowski (p. 152) also indicates that in the 1001 Nights, merchants left meat as bait for an eagle so as to steal its diamonds. Leśmian, on the other hand, converts the eagle into a diamond-eater which collects the precious stones for a diamond-eating princess. According to Pankowski, decoration becomes action. Pankowski also repeatedly states that Leśmian added scenes and images not to be found in either Galland and Mardrus, and which are not present in Burton either.

A representative list of differences between Leśmian and Burton follows. A more detailed analysis could easily be the subject of a doctoral dissertation in comparative literature or Polish studies. Leśmian is on the left side, Burton on the right; Klechdy sezamowe is abbreviated KS, and Przygody Sindbada żeglarza PS.

KS 84:

Morgana explains why a guest will eat no salt: he is in his enemy's house.

Burton 761:

Morgana marvels at the strange request for saltless food, but complies without requesting or giving an explanation.

KS 101:

The cook tells the sultan, "panuje teraz chwilowe bezrybie" (temporary fishlessness is currently in effect), which is a neologism.

Burton 62-3:

No neologism—in fact, no dearth of fish at all; the sultan is merely intrigued by multicolored fish.

KS 94-5:

The genie rescued by the fisherman had existed before King Solomon and his magic, and, like Milton's Satan, had refused to obey him.

Burton 42:

The jinni sinned against Sulayman and refused to be converted to Mohammedanism.

1001 Nights Appendix p. 2

P: 46:

Ali Baba prays for an interesting and lovely fairy-tale, and has no objection to its being threatening and horrible.

No mention in Burton

P: 122 ff, 94 ff:

Two women—Armina and Sermina—die by being exponentially themselves. Armina is killed by becoming white again, Sermina after having converted herself into a flame so as to fight for Sindbad's life.

No mention in Burton

P: 34-6:

The music-monster Degial punishes Sindbad's hubris by creating a Doppelgänger, the eerie and dangerous Hindbad. Unfortunately, since Hindbad is also the manner in which the king and the princess mispronounce Sindbad's name, Sindbad loses his royal wife and property to Hindbad.

A few brief references to Sindbad the Seaman and Sindbad the Landsman, without any antagonism.

KS 124 ff:

The King of the Ebony Islands slays a monster, but his witch-wife resuscitates it by means of a magic unguent. However, it is neither dead nor alive—it cannot talk, and artificial movement wears it out.

Burton 69 ff:

The monster of the Black Islands is a leprous black slave with whom the princess has committed adultery. The avenging prince does not quite kill the slave; the prince, not the slave, is converted to half-stone, neither dead nor alive.

KS 68, 77:

Tailor Baba Mustafa speaks in verse to a disguised bandit asking for information; a bandit disguised as a traveller does the same with Ali Baba.

Burton 748-9:

No verse, just information, even though Burton contains a good deal of verse.

KS 48 ff:

Open Sesame resembles artistic creation: The outline of a doorway appears on a previously featureless cliff, becomes more distinct, and finally turns into a doorway. A four-line poem is needed to open it. The treasure inside is alive and moving: diamonds dance, and the treasures become insulted when the greedy Kassim merely wants to possess them.

Burton 738-9:

Open Sesame is straightforward: "... forthwith appeared a wide doorway." "Open, O Simsim!" is sufficient.

The treasure is merely piled into static heaps.

1001 Nights Appendix p. 3

PS 16-18:

The sailors hate Sindbad and want to drown him; only the sensible captain saves him.

No mention in Burton.

PS 31:

The island of the music-monster must be visited alone (not in crowds).

No mention in Burton.

PS 56:

Sindbad doubted the stories about Rok (a huge bird which laid eggs as big as a room) and was thereupon ashamed to find himself inside such an egg.

Burton 401 ff:

The Rukh bird carries Sindbad off on its egg (Sindbad has tied himself to it) and steals diamonds to feed its young.

PS 23-6:

King Mirage has horses trained in dance by a green Sea-horse who is, however, dangerous: he tries to eat the other horses after intoxicating them with rhythm.

Burton 392:

King Mihrjan's mares are intentionally impregnated by sea-stallions; the colts fetch a good price.

PS 112 (see also Szkice literackie):

A certain sawfish does not care what it sees —anytime, anywhere. No one knows if it is because it wants to or because it is instinct —the only thing it knows how to do.

No mention in Burton.

PS 58:

Airborne within the egg of a monstrous bird flying toward Diamond Dell, Sindbad says: "At the moment, I felt the way only a person can feel who is stuck inside an egg looking out the opening upon a gigantic bird laboriously beating its wings at the earth of Diamond Dell." (Translation mine.) Cf. Henri Bergson and Leśmian's beloved "unrepeatability" and tautologous identity.

No mention in Burton.

KS 48-50, 72, paraphrased on p. 61:

While Ali-Baba waits for the 40 bandits to leave: "Then time passed, neither little nor much, but just exactly the amount of time which did in fact pass." (Translation mine.)

Burton 738:

No mention of time, merely: "Ali Baba had determined to mount one of the horses" and leave.

PS 132-6:

Sindbad marries Kaskada (Cascade), who loves to jump down waterfalls; one such cascade kills Cascade (word magic).

Burton 426:

A no-name wife simply dies of sickness.

1001 Nights Appendix p. 4

PS 117 ff:

Intoxicated by cannibals, the crew fantasizes as to how they would prepare parts of their own bodies for eating. (They are all eaten, except for Sindbad, who did not drink the potion and gave no culinary instructions.) They do not mind being eaten, but would have objected if they had been, say, roasted instead of fried as per instructions.

Burton 409 ff:

A cyclops-type cannibal giant eats the crew; no menu dissertations.

KS 82:

The slave Morgana is set free; the mere word "free" changes her so that the slave-boy Abdalla notices she has become beautiful, sparkling, radiant, and melodious.

Burton 762-4:

Ali Baba sets the slave-girl Morgiana free (she has saved his life with her cleverness) and weds her to his nephew.

KS 185:

Aladdin is changed by princely clothing and frequent conversations with the spirit in the lamp: he becomes handsome and princely.

Burton 611-12:

No reason given for the change.

Furthermore, Leśmian added a few details to Sindbad which can only be termed outgrowths of his poetics: on page 89, writing the name "Sermina" with a rose causes a secret door to open (word magic); on pp. 41-2, an island tyrant imprisons all the fauna, flora, and people into a two-dimensional miniature book (a satire on static hostility to life); and on pp. 156-62, a fat host invites Sindbad to an imaginary meal served by a nonexistent servant as a prank because he is angry at his own inability to eat any more. (Pankowski adds that the two become drunk on imaginary wine, but a close reading did not corroborate this contention.) And finally, the entire book deals with the problem of how to make poetry last. Writing is not ideal because a washerwoman bleaches and irons the manuscript (p. 72 ff); memory is deficient as well, because the slaves who memorized the poems elope with their suitors (142 ff); and tattooing the verse onto the poet's own skin proves unsatisfactory as well, as the poems die with their maker unless he can find another guinea pig to carry on (Sindbad refuses this "reprint right"), and are furthermore damaged by whipping (166 ff). As we have seen, these details are quite consistent with Leśmian's poetic philosophy; the element of rhythm is also treated on pp. 205-7, where a spell is cast on Sindbad and his two companions: like Świdryga and Midryga, they cannot stop dancing to the rhythm of a magic music.

As seen already, Leśmian's totemic magic of personifying nature causes a problematic identity between self and adversary to emerge. Karpowicz (pp. 231-3) mentions a death-curse put on an unwilling girl; a fiddler magically invokes a dead girl's weeping, laughter, and dream, but the girl herself does not materialize (music is only a partial resurrection). In KS (p. 165), Aladdin observes the reflection of himself and the princess tearing into two or three reflections, wondering whether the portrait may contain some prophesy about the two "models."

SAD ROZSTAJNY (1912)

THE CROSSROADS ORCHARD

ORCHARD AT-THE-PARTING-
OF-THE-WAYS

NOTES

According to Jacek Trznadel's postscript to his edition of Leśmian's poetry (Poezje, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1965, hereinafter abbreviated as Trznadel Postscript), p. 495, this collection was published entirely in italics by Jakub Morkowicz in late 1912. Leśmian disliked italics and later specifically requested they not be used for his poetry.

According to Leśmian's letter to Zenon ("Miriam") Przesmycki published on p. 311 of Utwory rozproszone - Listy, compiled and edited by Jacek Trznadel and published in 1962 by the Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy in Warsaw (hereinafter abbreviated as UR), the original title of this collection was "Kwiaty widzące," i. e. "Flowers That Can See."

Mrok się gęstwi po sadzie, ziemny powiał chłód,
 Zda się, iż dal zblakana podchodzi do wrót...
 Wiatr się zsunął ze strzechy na gałęzie drzew—
 Czy on we mnie tak śpiewa? Widzę poprzez śpiew,
 Jak księżyc wschodzi nad borem!

W podwórzu, dokąd zajrzał spoza ciemnych brzoź,
 Rozwidniła się studnia i samotny wóz,
 Miedzy szprychy zniecka oświetlonych kół
 Duch, drogi nie znający, na nocleg się wsnuł
 Wieczorem, późnym wieczorem.

Przez szyby moich okien, zapatrzonych w staw,
 Blask upada i tli się wśród wilgotnych traw.
 W dłoni mojej zerwany doumiera wrzos.
 Jakże dziwno wymówić własne imię w głos
 Wieczorem, późnym wieczorem!

Cień mój, co we dnie kładł się na złocisty łan,
 Nocą pragnie zapełnić pustkę moich scian.
 Do szyb, znikąd zjawione, lgną puszyste ćmy—
 Staw posrebrniał i widzi inaczej niż my,
 Jak księżyc wschodzi nad borem...

IN THE EVENING

Dusk congeals in the orchard, stonelike chill swept in,
 Wayward, lost farawayness has come home again.
 Is the wind which has shifted—I can see right through!—
 To the trees from the thatches singing in me too?
 Moonrise over the forest!

Moonlight peeking through the birches in the dell
 Highlights a lonely carriage and a darkened well.
 In the wheelspokes bathed in unexpected light,
 A ghost that lost its way decides to spend the night
 Late in the evening.

Twilight falls and glistens on the dewy grass,
 And the pond lies mirrored in the window-glass.
 The heather's plucked and wilting, my hands serve as its shroud.
 How strange it sounds to hear your name pronounced out loud
 Late in the evening!

My shadow, which caressed the golden stalks by day,
 Now tries to fill my walls and chase the stark away,
 With fuzzy moths from nowhere clinging to the pane.
 The meadow pond has silvered, our views are not the same.
 Moonrise over the forest...

1 Dusk itself-thickens about orchard, earth-y blew chill,
 2 It seems that farawayness lost is returning...
 3 Wind has-shifted-down from thatch to branches of-trees—
 4 Is-it in me so singing? I see through song,
 5 How moon rises over forest!
 6 In yard, into-which he-looked from behind dark birches,
 7 Dawned-itself well and lonely cart,
 8 Between spokes unexpectedly lighted of-wheels,
 9 Ghost, way not knowing, for night-lodging himself in-spun.
 10 In-evening, late in-evening.
 11 Through panes my of-windows, staring in pond,
 12 Light falls and glimmers among moist grasses.
 13 In my palm picked ends-dying heather.
 14 How strange to say own name aloud
 15 In evening, late in-evening!
 16 Shadow mine, which in day laid himself on golden stand of-grain,
 17 At-night thirsts to fill emptiness of-my walls.
 18 To panes, from-nowhere appeared, stick fuzzy moths—
 19 Pond has-silvered and sees otherwise than we,
 20 How moon rises over forest.

NOTES

- 1 Polish lacks articles, so any noun can be "this," "a/an," or "the."
 "Ziemny" was translated as "stonelike" ("earth-y" herein) because the latter better transmits the effect of coolness. Marchesani et al. used a similar word in their Italian translation, which is very apropos because Italian tends to associate the earth with heat and dust. Finally, "earthy" in English has overwhelming secondary connotations inappropriate here.
- 4 According to Michał Głowiński, "Słowo i pieśń," in *Studia* (p. 188), song is used herein as a utensil for familiarization with the world. Cf. also "Zamyślenie," wherein the protagonist does not sing, but merely looks out the window.
- 8 "Bathed in unexpected light" was used to duplicate Leśmian's intended effect of almost cinematic surprise.
- 11 The power of perception is herein conferred upon windowpanes. As in "Etherealness," disparate items acquire sequential validity by means of humanizing observation (Jacek Trznadel, *Twórczość Leśmiana*, p. 345).
- 15 Repetition of "Late in the evening" is reminiscent of Goethe's poem "Um Mitternacht" (Reclam pp. 191-2), wherein three rhymed five-line stanzas end with the short, unrhymed line "Um Mitternacht" ("At Midnight").
- 16-19 The pond is able to see, and the shadow has desires. Unfortunately, the rhymed English version ("our views are not the same") was unable to crystallize this attribution and had to settle for an ambiguity which implies that the speaker and his interlocutor have different views. In "Bolesław Leśmian: Otchłań," pp. 239-241, Michał Głowiński stated that the poet broke down the hierarchy between man and nature; he was fascinated by the possibility that everything observed everything else and that reality was a percept because perceptions cannot be verified.

Gdybym spotkał ciebie znowu pierwszy raz,
 Ale w innym sadzie, w innym lesie—
 Może by inaczej zaszumił nam las
 Wydłużony mgłami na bezkresie...
 Może innych kwiatów wśród zieleni brzd
 Jełyby się dłonie dreszczem czynne—
 Może by upadły z niedożyłnych ust
 Jakieś inne słowa—jakiś inne...
 Może by i słońce zniewolilo nas
 Do spłynięcia duchem w róż kaskadzie,
 Gdybym spotkał ciebie znowu pierwszy raz,
 Ale w innym lesie, w innym sadzie...

If I were to meet you for the first time now,
 But in a different orchard, under different trees—
 The rustling might be different in these other boughs,
 The forest stretching misty into infinity.
 Maybe the flowers nestled in the other green
 Would thrill our palms to shudder at their tickle-touch—
 Different words perhaps would grace this other scene,
 An unperceptive mouth would likely talk too much.
 The sun might once again enthrall us and coerce
 Our souls to flush and flounder in a rose cascade,
 If this time I met you were to be the first,
 But in a different orchard, in another glade.

Line

- 1 If I-met you again first time,
 2 But in different orchard, different forest—
 3 Maybe would otherwise rustle to-us forest
 4 Lengthened with-mist on infinity-horizon...
 5 Perhaps other flowers amidst greenery furrows
 6 Would be-taken-by palms shudder-active—
 7 Perhaps would fall from slow-of-understanding lips
 8 Some other words—some others...
 9 Perhaps also sun enthrall us would
 10 To flow-down in-spirit in rose cascade,
 11 If I-met you again first time,
 12 But in different forest, different orchard....

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 497, this poem was originally published under the title "Żal" ("Regret") in Bluszcz, Warsaw 1912. A handwritten notation in the reprint dedicated to Zuzanna Rabska mentions a 1911 declamation of this poem during a February gathering at the home of Savitri. The reprint made slight changes in punctuation and séquence of words.

- 4 "Bezkres" (lit. "absence-of-bounds"), while not a neologism, is symptomatic of Leśmian's predilection for negative words.
 6 In Leśmian's "Majka" (Klechdy polskie, p. 46), Marcin Dziura runs his palm over obediently billowing stalks of wheat.
 7-8 Reversed in the rhymed English for purposes of rhyme.
 8 "Slow-of-understanding lips" became "an unperceptive mouth," one which "would likely talk too much," in an instance of poetic license for translators.

USTA I OCZY

Znam tyle twoich pieścizot! Lecz gdy dzień na zmroczu
 Błyśnie gwiazdą, wspominam tę jedną—bez słów,
 Co każe ci ustami szukać moich oczu...

Tak mnie żegnasz zazwyczaj, nim powrócę znów.

Czemu właśnie w tej chwili, gdy odejść mi pora,
 Pieścisz oczy, nim spojrzą w czar lasów i łąk?...

Bywa tak: świt się budzi od strony jeziora
 Nagląc nas do rozplotu snem zagrzanych rąk...

O szyby—jeszcze chłodne—uderza pożłota
 Nagły z nieba na ziemię światła zlot i spust—
 Usta twe—na mych oczach! Co chcesz tą pieścizotą
 Powiedzieć? Mów—lecz zmyślnych nie odrywaj ust!

LIPS AND EYES

Your hugs are so familiar! When stars adorn the sky
 At dusk, I am reminded of my favorite kiss,
 The mute caress which causes your lips to find my eyes—
 You always say goodbye and so long to me like this.

Why do you pick that moment, when I must go away,
 Before my eyes succumb to woody-grassy charms?
 Each time the lake glows dawnly at the break of day,
 We're forced to disentangle our slumber-heated arms.

A sudden conflagration splatters gold onto
 The still-cool windowpanes. What do you mean to say
 By kissing both my eyes like this? Give me a clue,
 Explain, but please don't tear those clever lips away!

Line LIPS AND EYES

- 1 I-know so-many of-your caresses! But when day on dusk
- 2 Gleams with-star, I-remember that one—without words,
- 3 Which orders you with-lips to-search-for my eyes...
- 4 Thus to-me you-say-goodbye normally, before I-return again.
- 5 Why exactly in that moment, when to-go-me is-time,
- 6 You-caress eyes, before they-look into magic of-forests and meadows?
- 7 It-is-always thus: dawn itself awakens from side-of like
- 8 Forcing us to disentangling by-sleep warmed arms-or-hands...
- 9 To panes—still chilly—will-hit with-gold
- 10 Sudden from heaven to earth of-light gilding and falling—
- 11 Lips yours—on my eyes! What you-want with-this caress
- 12 To-say? Speak—but clever not off-tear lips!

According to Miłosz, p. 405, another poet named Adam Ważyk produced a volume of poetry in 1926 titled "Oczy i usta" (Eyes and Lips).

ŁAKA (1920)

THE MEADOW

MEADOW

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript pp. 507-8, this collection had a press run of 2,200 and was printed on yellowish paper of very poor quality. The edition was evidently not sold out, as many years later it was still possible to buy copies for pennies.

A second edition was announced while the poet was still alive, and appeared in 1937 or 1938 (there is some controversy). The second edition corrected some of the typographical errors of the first, but contained so many new mistakes and uncorrected old ones that Trznadel believes the poet did not proofread the galleys.

A third edition appeared in London in 1947, which was merely a photographic reproduction of the first edition prefaced by the poet's essay "Traktat o poezji" ("Treatise on Poetry"). This essay was to be Leśmian's acceptance speech for membership in the Polish Academy of Literature and is included in the Szkice literackie (hereinafter SL), compiled and edited by Jacek Trznadel (Warsaw 1959).

W zwiewnych nurtach kostrzewy, na leśnej polanie,
 Gdzie się las upodabnia łące niespodzianie,
 Leżą zwłoki wędrowca, zbędne sobie zwłoki.
 Przewędrował świat cały z obłoków w obłoki,
 Aż nagle w niecierpliwej zapragnął żalobie
 Zwiedzić duchem na przełaj zieleni samą w sobie.
 Wówczas demon zieleni wszechleśnym powiewem
 Ogarnął go, gdy w drodze przystanął pod drzewem,
 I wabił nieustannych rozkwitów pośpiechem,
 I necił ust zdyszanych tajemnym bezśmiechem,
 I czarował zniszczoną wonnych niedowcieleń,
 I kusił coraz głębiej—w tę zieleni, w tę zieleni!
 A on biegł wybrzeżami coraz innych światów,
 Odczłowieczając duszę i oddech wśród kwiatów,
 Aż zabrnął w takich jagód rozdzwonione dzbany,
 W taką zamroczył paproci, w takich cisz kurby,
 W taki bezświt zarośli, w taki bezbrzask głuchy,
 W takich szumów ostatnie kędyś zawieruchy,
 Że leży oto martwy w stu wiosen bezdeni,
 Cienisty, jak bór w borze—topielec zieleni.

THE DROWNER

In a woody glen, among air-current fescue,
 Where the forest looks like unexpected lawn,
 Lies a stranger's body, expendable, unrescued.
 He'd seen the world from cloud to cloud and yet beyond;
 In his impatient sorrow, he thirsted suddenly
 To take the tourist short-cut into the per-se green.
 And then the omniwoodent demon greenery
 Caught him in the tree-shade and zephyr-kidnapped him.
 He hustled him with hurry and constant everbloom,
 Enticed his breathless mouth with laughless mystery,
 And juggled fragrant incarnations fraught with doom
 To tempt him ever further into that greenery!
 Soon he had him chasing otherworldly shores,
 Leaking what was human from his breath and soul,
 Till he flower-floundered in the ferns and thorns,
 In that moundy stillness where the berries toll.
 No-dawn vegetation damply dulls the day,
 Flurries spin and spiral and then swirl away,
 Leaving but that corpse in a century ravine,
 Shady as a forest, the drowner in the green.

Line DROWNER

- 1 In windy furrows of fescue, on forest clearing,
 2 Where itself forest similarizes to meadow unexpectedly,
 3 Lie remains of-wanderer, expendable some remains.
 4 He-wandered through entire world from clouds to clouds,
 5 Until suddenly in impatient he thirsted mourning
 6 To-visit in-spirit on shortcut greenery herself in himself.
 7 Then demon of-greenery omniforesty breeze-with
 8 Gathered him, as in way he stood under tree,
 9 And tempted never-ending blooming hurry-with,
 10 And enticed lips breathless mysterious no-laughness with,
 11 And enthralled with-destructionness-of-fragrant not-quite
 incarnatednesses,
 12 And tempted ever further—into this greenery, into this greenery!
 13 And he ran along-shores of ever other worlds,
 14 Unhumanizing soul and breath among flowers,
 15 Until floundered in such berries' belled-apart pitchers,
 16 In such dusk of-fern, in such quiet of-mound,
 17 In such dawnless growthness, in such daybreakless dull,
 18 In such roar last whence stormwinds,
 19 That lies here died in hundred springs' abyss,
 20 Shadowy, like forest in forest—drowner of-greenery.

NOTES

- 1 According to Papierkowski, p. 41, "kostrzewa" is an archaic word for grass, or wheat weeds from the grass family. He believes the poet used this word to give the forest a primeval feeling with more expressive power than that associated with simple grass or weeds.
- 6 See interpretations below of Kantian "Ding an sich."
- 7 According to Papierkowski, p. 191, "omniforesty" is a neologism.
- 9- The Modernists favored the prefix "bez-" for negative epithets to describe the universe. However, according to J. M. Rymkiewicz, "Odczłowieczając duszę" in Głowiński's *Studia*, Leśmian's "no-world" is a very concrete "no-world of thickets," identifying the drowner not with timeless, spaceless, primeval essence of things, but with an inseparable physical-spiritual whole: in order to become one with Nature, the drowner must get rid of his humanity.
- 11 "Niedowcielenie" is an aborted incarnation, a neologism also used in "Eliasz." Similar negative words are also used in "Kocmołuch," "Zielona godzina," "Pururawa i Urwasi," "Dżananda," "Jadwiga," "Kopciuszek," "W chmur odbiciu," "Rok nieistnienia," "Wiersz księżycowy" (translated herein as "Moon Poem"), "Pan Błyszczczyński," and "Miłość stroskana."

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 509, "Topielec" was translated into French ("Le Noyé" by Lucien Roquigny, Pologne littéraire, Warsaw, 1927) and into German ("Ertrunkener," Karl Dedecius, Polnische Poesie, Munich, 1964).

In his 1939 necrologue ("Mowa o Bolesławie Leśmianie," Wiadomości literackie), Kazimierz Wierzyński indicates that for the poet, nature and poetry were the same thing, namely the actual truth of existence, and works like "Topielec" represent an attempt to retrogress to the point in time and space where there was already an independent nature, but no humanity yet.

In "Pośmiertna... maska" in Studia, p. 230 ff., Ireneusz Opacki indicates that poems like this one were partially derived from the Romantic tradition, e.g. Mickiewicz's "poetry of the tomb," populated with oxymorons and iconography. The Romantic lyrical situation wherein the self is separated repeats itself in other Leśmian poems such as "Ballada dziadowska" and the "jastrząb" verse about falcons.

In his biography of Leśmian (p. 19), Adam Szczerbowski indicated that he considered the "per-se green" to be a synonym of primeval existence, and the wanderer in search of the Kantian "Ding an sich." J. M. Rymkiewicz ("odczłowieczając..." pp. 201-227 in Studia) adds that the drowner yearns for identity with Sister Nature as a participant, not just an observer; furthermore, throwing off humanity does not mean death, as the demon tempted him simultaneously with existence and nonexistence.

In his History of Religious Ideas, I, p. 196 ff., Mircea Eliade refers to the Orphic/Pythagorean/Platonic idea of transmigration of souls; drinking from Lethe causes the soul to forget previous wisdom, and philosophy helps it recover this knowledge by "anamnesis." "Death is therefore the return to a primordial and perfect state, periodically lost during the soul's reincarnation." In his "Niepochwyćieł..." (Studia, p. 6 ff., pp. 56-61), Jan Prokop adds that the unchanging rhythm of life is basic to the agrarian myth: not a linear process of unique occurrences, but a cyclical return to primeval undifferentiated magma, an amorphous maternal womb. The death instinct is thus coupled with eroticism and a desire for losing individual form: the demon tempts like a primeval chaos beckoning with unconscious formlessness. In "Do śpiewaka" ("To the Singer"), Leśmian calls the human and the divine "two brotherly mists" which are related to each other and formerly did not know the difference. Since death is not a one-time occurrence, Leśmian's neologisms indicate qualitative changes and transitions, especially in verbs.

In Kwestia gustu (pp. 159-160), Adam Ważyk states "Topielec" is an example of Leśmian's outdated Victorian neurosis which coupled freedom with original sin and death; only one kind of cognition can do this, namely the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He considers the demon a Biblical Paradise to which intellectuals long to return. To him, the poem is thus an allegory of a mythical heaven to which intellectuals long to return.

Karpowicz (Poezja niemożliwa) proposes several interesting arguments, as follows. Lesmian chased himself within the partner, i. e. chased the humanness he questioned by the chase. The tragic thicket of egocentrism thus exhausted him more than the greenery exhausted the drowner. (P. 108) The poem represents an attempt to reach consciousness from inside out, from the inside of the first protein cell: a zero existence safe because of the absence of knowledge, a "faithful ontological dog" attempting to stumble upon its own secret. (210-11, 196) For him, "Topielec" is "almost anonymous penetration:" Nature opens, and the attacker gets stuck inside, confirming the myth of eternal return, Einstein's rondo of linear movement, which is also a model of hell, like Dante's complicated sociological inferno. For Karpowicz, the "per-se green" is not the "Ding an sich," but a flight forward into paradoxical thinking which encompasses both being and non-being. The drowner thus not only penetrates Nature, but also shows her the way to herself (cf. "Łąka"). However, since penetration of the green changes a man, he is different at the end of the poem; Nature has attacked him with her allegedly defenseless boundlessness, like the water mass of quiet oceans swallowing powerful flotillas. (37-49)

In Samobójstwo... (pp. 23-5), Artur Sandauer indicates that Lesmian breaks down the hierarchy of man and nature; man becomes object, not subject, as Nature observes him! For instance, the poet elevates animals and things to human status: a bee washes herself "like a cat," something only humans can do; or a man stands with his back "to the forest."

In Literatura okresu Młodej Polski (hereinafter LMP), Trznadel states that the drowner represents intuitive unity with nature, a nostalgia for a golden paradise in which there was no division between the thing and the concept, before modern civilization became automatized and schematized. The thinking, perceiving subject is totally submerged and lost. (pp. 837 ff) Since God symbolizes human nostalgia for paradise, the poem also includes the problem of theism by implication. An interesting parallel could be drawn between this opinion and the Zen Buddhist striving for knowledge "upstream of all conceptualization." In Twórczość Lesmiana, p. 115 ff, the same author indicates that death (the end of selfhood) is pessimism for Westerners but optimism for Hindus. In order to perceive and intuit, the drowner must lose consciousness, i. e. knowledge about his knowledge. (In "Z rozmyślań o Bergsonie," pp. 37-40 of SL, Lesmian had mentioned that total knowledge would be identification with the life being studied; the intellect can only know what it tests experimentally, i. e. what is dead.)

Rochelle Heller Stone's synthesis (pp. 116-17) appears quite apropos: Topielec is "an apotheosis of Bergsonism and a poetic extension of Lesmian's philosophical discourse with Kant... alienation from nature... can be overcome only by intuitive cognition, exploration 'in spirit'." Language with prefixes such as "bez-" allows depiction "in concrete images" of "both existing and nonexisting phenomena."

ODJAZD

Gdym odjeżdżał na zawsze znajomym gościńcem,
 Patrzyły na mnie bratków wielkie, złote oczy,
 Podkute szafirowym dookoła sińcem.
 Był klomb i rój motyli, i błękit przezroczy,
 I rdzawienie się w słońcu dojrzałej rezedy.
 A gdy byłem już w drodze, sam nie wiedząc kiedy
 I czemu—przypomniałem te oczy, przyziemne
 Śledzące mą zadumę i wpatrzone we mnie
 Tym wszystkim, czym się można wpatrzeć w świat i dalej.
 Co widziały te oczy, nim w tysiącu alej
 Zginałem, jedną chatę rzucając za sobą?
 I czemu z szafirową zawczasu żalobą
 Patrzyły w ten mój odjazd poprzez zieleń rdzawą
 Rezedy, co pachniała, przytłumiona trawą?
 I dlaczego te oczy były coraz łzawsze?
 Czy nie wolno nic nigdy porzucić na zawsze
 I zostawiać samopas kędyś—na uboczu?
 Czy nie wolno odjeżdżać znajomym gościńcem
 I oddalać się zbyt od tych złotych oczu,
 Podkuty dookoła szafirowym sińcem?

DEPARTURE

As I departed by that chummy highway,
 The pansies' eyes were staring great and golden,
 With horseshoe rings of sapphire bruises underground.
 In limpid azure milled a butterflyway,
 And ripe reseda rusted, to the sun beholden.
 I later would recall those earthy eyes profound
 When I was on my way, I don't know why or how—
 They tailed my reverie and stare-endowed
 Whatever's stareable in this world and beyond.
 These eyes, what would they see before I would abscond,
 Abandoning one hut, into a thousand streets?
 Why were they wearing sapphire widow's weeds
 While watching my departure through the rust and jade,
 Reseda fragrant almost drowned in grassy blades?
 Why did they grow more maudlin every time, these eyes?
 Why can't you ever leave a thing and say goodbye
 Forever, and abandon it to fate somewhere?
 Is it against the law to take this road to town?
 Why can't you stray too far from yonder golden stare
 With horseshoe rings of sapphire bruises underground?

Line DEPARTURE

- 1 When I-went away for-or-on ever known road,
 2 Looked at me pansies' great, gold eyes,
 3 Horseshoed with-sapphire around bruise.
 4 There-was flowerbed and row of-butterflies, and sky-blue transparent,
 5 And rusting itself in sun of-ripe reseda.
 6 And when I-wás already on road, myself not knowing when
 7 And why-I-remembered those eyes, earth-ily
 8 Pursued my reverie and staring-ed into me
 9 With everything, with-which oneself can stare into world and further.
 10 What saw these eyes, before in a-thousand alleys
 11 I-disappeared, one hut throwing behind me?
 12 And why with sapphire betimes mourning
 13 They-looked in that my departure through green rusty
 14 Reseda which fragranced, squashed by grass?
 15 And why those eyes were ever more teary?
 16 Is-it not allowed nothing never to abandon for ever
 17 And leave alone-at-large whence-out of the way?
 18 Is-it not allowed to-depart-on well-known road
 19 And distance oneself overly from these golden eyes,
 20 Horseshoed with-sapphire around bruise?

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 509, this poem was originally published in "Myśl Polska" (Polish Thought), Warsaw, 1918. Artur Sandauer (Samobójstwo... pp. 24-5) indicates that Lesmian elevates things to human status and dehumanizes people; nature watches man, not just vice versa. (It may be useful to repeat that the original title of the Crossroads Orchard was "Seeing Flowers," i. e. flowers that can see.) Karpowicz (pp. 147-8) adds that the poet's concentration of the weight of the entire world on a single item (here, the pansies' eyes, or the camel's hump in "The Zoo") makes that item an Archimedean support point of "zero action."

- 3, 20 The poet gives a novel "twist" to the Polish expression "podbite sińcem," i. e. "hit-under with bruise" (= with a black eye). He calls it "podkute sińcem," i. e. "horseshoed-under with bruise." I rendered this as "with sapphire rings of horseshoe bruises underground."
 7 The "earthiness" of the pansies' eyes was kept here (unlike changeover into "stonelike" in "In the Evening," supra) because temperature was not an issue in this poem.

W PCLU

Dwoje nas w ciszy polnego zakątka.
 Strumień na oślepie ku słońcu się pali,
 W liściu, co trafił na krzywy prąd fali,
 Wirując płynie szafirowa łątka.

Nadbrzeżna trawa zwisając potrąca
 O swe odbicie zsiwiałą kończyną,
 Do której ślimak, pęczniąc z gorąca,
 Przysklepił muszlę swym ciałem i śliną.

W przerzutnym płasie znikliwsza od strzały
 Płotka się czasem zasrebrzy na mgnienie.
 Pod wodą—spojrzyj!—prześwieca piach biały
 I mchem ruchliwym brodate kamienie.

Czemu ci głowa na dłonie opadła?
 To—pachnie trawa i ten piach pod wodą—
 To—wód polśnione smugami zwierciadła
 Parują ciszą, blaskiem i ochłodą.

Tych kilku dębów ponad brzegiem liście,
 Podziurawione i przeżarte chciwie
 Przez gasienice, trwają tak przejrzyście
 Nad własnym cieniem, co utkwil w pokrzywie.

Z tej tu pokrzywy czar dębowych cieni
 Zgarnę ku piersiom, co na słońce dyszą,
 Ustami dotknę bezmiernej zieleni,
 Stęsknionej do mnie swym sokiem i ciszą.

Do kwiatów przywrę rozpalone czoło,
 Wsłucham się w bąki grające i brzmiki,
 I będę patrzył, jak lepkie gwoździki
 Wśród jaskrów lśniąca ociekają smołą.

I będę patrzył, jak maki i szczawie
 Mdleją, ciał naszych odurzone wonią,
 I będę wodził twoją białą dłońią
 Po wielkiej trawie, nie znanej nam trawie.

IN THE FIELD

We two are in a quiet meadow-nook,
 Atop a leaf, a sapphire dragonfly
 Cascades to wavy streams and eddy-glides
 As sunward blindly torrifies the brook.

The offshore grasses' graying bladetips meet
 Their own reflections in a downward climb;
 A snail has vaulted them, obese with heat,
 And glued his shell to them with slug and slime.

More fleeting than an arrow's playful curve,
 A minnow sometimes silvers swift and hides.
 The pristine sand within the brook observe,
 And stones with mossy-mobile beards disguised.

Why did your forehead drop onto your hand?
 The fragrant grass and underwater sand,
 The mirrored surface of the gleaming pool
 Are steaming with a radiant, peaceful cool.

The leaves of those few oaks beside the brook,
 Which caterpillar gluttons gnawed to net,
 Persist transparently and overlook
 Their own caught-in-the-nettles silhouette.

Unto my sunward-panting breast I'll press
 The magic of that nettle-shadow tree,
 My lips will touch that verdure limitless,
 That green whose peaceful juice yearns unto me.

My overheated forehead flower-cooled,
 I'll eavesdrop on the tiny insect-cries
 And watch the sticky wild carnations drool
 With shiny tar beneath the dazzling skies.

I'll watch the poppies and the sorrel faint,
 Intoxicated with our bodies' scent,
 And with your lily hand I'll sweep-acquaint
 Us both with unknown grassy-great events.

Line IN FIELD

1 Two of-us in quiet o'-field of-corner.
 2 Brook in blindness toward sun itself burns,
 3 In leaf, which hit upon crooked current of-waves,
 4 Swirlingly swims sa-phire dragonfly.
 5 Above-shore-ey grass hangingly knocks-at
 6 Onto its reflection with-grayed limb,
 7 To which snail, bulging from heat,
 8 Has-vaulted shell with-its body and saliva.
 9 In throw-over gambol fleetinger than arrow
 10 Minnow itself sometimes silvers for wink.
 11 Under water—look!—throughlights sand white
 12 And with-moss mobile bearded stones.
 13 Why to-you head to palms fell?
 14 That—fragrances grass and that sand under water—
 15 That—of-waters beglistened with-streaks of-mirror
 16 Steam-with quiet, brilliance and cool.
 17 Of-those few oaks above shore leaves,
 18 Filled-with-holes and eaten-through-by-animals greedily
 19 By caterpillars, endure so transparently
 20 Above own shadow, which got-stuck in stinging-nettle.
 21 From this here stinging-nettle magic of-oak shadows
 22 I-will-gather to breasts, which onto sun pant,
 23 With-lips I-will-touch immeasurable greenery,
 24 Longing to me with-its juice and with-quiet.
 25 To flowers I-will-fasten up-heated forehead,
 26 I-will-listen-into myself into gadflies playing and soundeys,
 27 And I-will look, how viscous wild-carnations
 28 Among crowfeet with-glistening are-dripping tar.
 29 And I-will look, how poppies and sorrels
 30 Faint, bodies ours intoxicated fragrance-with,
 31 And I-will sweep with-your white hand,
 32 Upon great grass, not known to-us grass.

NOTES

- 2 "To burn toward" in Polish also has the meaning "to be in a hurry."
 11 "Piach" is a common augmentative dialect form for "piasek," sand.
 18 Polish has separate words for "to eat" depending on whether the eating entity is human or animal.
 21-4 In a 1912 letter to Miriam (UR p. 312) and in an interview with Edward Boyé (SL p. 498), Lesmian indicated that he yearned for Nature just as much as she for him. It is really an amorous relationship: in "Wisnie" (Wild Cherries), a king falls in love with a wild cherry. (This is not a double-entendre in Polish.) Similarly, in "Białocha" (UR, p. 166), the protagonist and sleep have been yearning for each other for a long time.
 28 "Skies" were substituted for "crowfeet" in the versified English for purposes of rhythm.

STODOLA

Tyś całował dziewczynę, lecz kto biel jej ciała
 Poróżowił na wargach, by cię całowała?
 Tyś topolom na drogę cień rzucać pozwolił,
 Ale kto je tak bardzo w niebo roztopolił?
 Tyś pociosał stodołę w cztery dni bez mała,
 Ale kto ją stodolił, by—czym jest—wiedziała?
 Stodoliła ją pewno ta Majka stodalna,
 Do połowy—przydrożna, od połowy—polna.
 Ze stu światów na przedświat wyszła sama jedna
 I patrzyła w to zboże, co szumi ode dna.

THE STABLE

You kissed the white-skinned maiden, yes, but who
 Made her lips coral so that she kissed you?
 You let the poplars throw the road their shade,
 But who allowed them thus to poplarade?
 You hewed that stable half a week, I know,
 But who endowed it with that stable role?
 I think that stable Maika stabled it,
 Part meadow-blades and partly roadside grit.
 She entered our pre-world quite long ago
 And stared at wheat-fields rustling from below.

Line BARN

- 1 You kissed-man girl, but who white of-her body
 2 Berosed on lips, so-that you she-kissed?
 3 You to-poplars onto road shadow to-throw allowed,
 4 But who them so much into heaven poplared-up?
 5 You hewed-man barn for four days without little,
 6 But who her barned, in-order-that-what she is-she-should-know?
 7 Barned her probably that Maika barn-ey,
 8 To half-roadside, to half-fieldy.
 9 From hundred worlds to pre-world she-came-out herself one
 10 And would-look in that grain, which roars from bottom.

NOTES

According to Stone (p. 274), a puzzle is the "decisive structural feature" of this poem. The introductory three stanzas are questions, and the fourth an answer.

In "Niepochwycień złoty," p. 6 ff, Jan Prokop indicates that the poet has created a masterless "pre-world" in contradistinction to the orderly, hierarchical human world; the former tempts but also frightens with its formlessness.

"Maika" is pronounced "Mye-kuh," and may thus be derived from the Hindu root "may," to change, which can refer to magical or demonic transformation, cosmic illusion, demonic alteration of the cosmic order, illusory transformation, divine creativity, and alternation between night and day. (Mircea Eliade, *History of Religious Ideas*, I, pp. 201-2.) In *Twórczość Leśmiana*, Trznadel states that this poem is out of the mouth of a stylized "primeval man" reflecting on the world, asking ontological questions (poetry having been the first cosmogony). (Pp. 260-2) In Polish folklore, a "Majka" is a naked naiad who tickles passersby until they die laughing, and in the story "Majka" in *Klechdy polskie*, pp. 45-94, Leśmian tells us about a wheat-field mermaid who entices human men to drowning but is stood up every Sunday by an unwilling lover. She then visits his house by "goldifying" on the floor each Sunday night. In "Białocha" (UR 157-8), an ancient, independent barn without a master, ingrown into its surroundings, exists in and of and for itself. The rain comes, looking like a "three-dayer," but turning into a "week without little."

The barn barning (or stabling stable) is thus not a mere linguistic tautology, but an existential ontology as well: when the stable is identical with itself, *natura naturata* becomes *natura naturans*. A naiad is thus the prime mover of a humorously tautological vicious circle. (Artur Sandauer, *Zebrane pisma krytyczne* 533-4, *Samobójstwo...* 33.) Karpowicz (15, 263-4) adds that anamnesis becomes pro-creation, as the subject changes object and becomes both creator and created. The impression of passivity turns out to be mere appearance, as it refers to a process of becoming what was not there before. (On p. 47 of *Sindbad*, Uncle Tarabuk composes a tautological poem: "Topola wśród pola," poplar amid fields (the two nouns rhyme in Polish).

Wśród georginij—brzęczenie os.
Twojeż to kroki? Twójże to głos?
To—koniec lata, jeden z tych dni,
Gdy słońce blednie, a ogród lśni.

To chory półsen znużonych drzew.
Odwroć swe oczy, ucisz swój śpiew.
To—spija rosę ostatni znój,
To—w cieniu twoim cień spoczął mój.

AMONG DAHLIAS

Wasps among the dahlias buzz.
Are that voice, those footsteps yours?
On such end-of-summer days,
Gardens glisten, sunlight fades.

Sickly doze the worn-out trees;
Lower your eyes and voices, please!
While the drained are draining dew,
Our two shadows rendezvous.

Line AMONG DAHLIAS

- 1 Among dahlias—buzzing of-wasps.
- 2 Yours those steps? Yours that voice?
- 3 That—end of-summer, one of those days
- 4 When sun pales, and garden glistens.
- 5 That sick halfsleep worn-out trees-of.
- 6 Avert your eyes, quiet your song.
- 7 That—drinks dew last toil,
- 8 That—in shadow yours shadow rested mine.

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 510, this poem first appeared in Bluszcz, Warsaw 1916, in the jubilee number, i. e. anniversary issue.

The rhymes are masculine, which is very difficult in Polish. I was helped by the English affinity for masculine rhymes and by the space program's "rendezvous" methods. "... those footsteps yours" in line 2 should, for best effect, be read with a New York accept to rhyme with "buzz."

According to Karpowicz (193-6), the intertwining shadows represent the possibility of the interpenetration desired by the lover (cf. Znikomek, who mixes his shadow with that of the birches). Leśmian's shadow is what is primeval in man, the "most faithful ontological dog."

PIERWSZY DESZCZ

Pierwsza z brzękiem zbudziła się mucha,
 Pierwsze liście powypełzły z drzew
 I deszcz pierwszy wdudnia mi do ucha
 Rozegrzmiały w błyskawicach śpiew.

Tego śpiewu zgruch i rozgruch długi
 Któż by pojął, któż pochwyciłby?
 Rozbrykane, rozwierzgane strugi
 Miażdżą o ziem pluskające łby.

Już przy ziemi wrzask ich zaumiera,
 A po niebie jeszcze dalej gna!
 Chmura oścież w wszechświat się rozdziera,
 Nie ma za nią kresu ani dna!

Słońce w szyby izawiejąc odżdzone
 Po podłodze złoty wzburza łan
 I odbicia okien rozmnożone
 Wprawia w kurze zrucho miałych ścian.

Któs rozepchnął furtę w mym ogrodzie,
 Aż z odwrzaskiem runęła na błoń!
 Nie wiem, kto to—lecz w porannym chłodzie
 Błogosławie niewiadomą dłoń.

FIRST RAIN

Firstfly buzzed herself awake right here,
 Firstleaves hurried crawling growth along;
 Now the Firststrain's droning in my ear,
 Lightning-bolt motet and thunder-song.

Who could grasp, or even comprehend,
 All the shatter-structures of that sound?
 Feral and rambunctious streams descend,
 Splashing liquid heads onto the ground.

Now their shrieks die down upon the soil,
 Though the driving heaven-chase persists;
 Cleaving cloud explosions moil and roil
 In a top- and bottomless abyss.

Sunlight in the window streaked with rain
 Stirs a golden wheat-field on the floor,
 Mirror-multiplies the windowpanes
 Undulating on the dusty door.

Someone pushed my garden gate apart
 Till it groaned, collapsing on the lawn.
 I don't know who did it, bless his heart,
 But I'm grateful in the cool of dawn.

Line FIRST RAIN

- 1 First-she with buzzing woke-herself fly,
 2 First-they leaves crawled-out-around from trees
 3 And rain first drones me to ear.
 4 Thundered-out in lightnings song.
 5 Of-that song out-shatter and off-shatter long
 6 Who could comprehend, who could grasp?
 7 Run-riot, flung-out streams
 8 Crush to grounds splashing-around heads.
 9 Already by ground shout theirs is-dying,
 10 And on heaven still further chases!
 11 Cloud wide-open to allworld itself tears-apart,
 12 Not is after her end or bottom!
 13 Sun in windowpanes maudlinly be-rained,
 14 On floor golden storms-up grain,
 15 And reflections of-windows multiplied
 16 Sets in dusts of-moving walls.
 17 Someone pushed-open gate in my garden,
 18 Until with back-yell it tumbled onto green!
 19 Don't know, who that—but in morning chill
 20 I-bless unknown hand.

NOTES

- 3 "Wdudnia" (drones into) is a neologism in Polish according to Papierkowski, p. 173
- 5 "Rozgruch" is, according to Papierkowski p. 123, a very loud noise, but on p. 84, the same author says that the word is dialect for sudden, noisy news and "zgruch" an invented antithesis.
- 8 According to Papierkowski p. 97, "o ziem" is invented dialect, similar to "do dom" (also eliminating the last syllable) and is used for style. According to Pankowski, pp. 204-6, the liquid heads are an example of Leśmian's contention that images prove nothing is ever simply what it is. For instance, a girl's corpse's palms are turned up as though to feel for raindrops, and a flying witch's shirt "tails windily, like a snowstorm;" finally, a sleeping woman "pastures dreams on rose wide-awakeness."
- 16 In the verse version, a door was used instead of a wall for purposes of rhyme.
- 18 "Odwrzask," lit. "back-yell," is a Leśmian neologism according to Papierkowski p. 122. It means a loud reverberating noise. It could conceivably join the procession of animizations of inanimate objects in Leśmian: only an anthropomorphized gate can scream, after all.

WIATRAK

Piętrząc się nad ugorów chętną mu równią,
 Wiatrak, na wszystkie wokół odsłonięty światy,
 Poskrzypuje drewnianą w tańcu krynoliną,
 A na trawę, jak diabeł, miota cień rogaty.
 Wędrowcze, w jednym miejscu zatkwiony kosturem,
 Co znaczą twoje wstrząsy i nagłe podrygi?
 Komu kłaniasz się wokół dębowym kapturem?
 Z kim tak trafnie rozmawiasz na migi i śmigi?
 W co wierzysz? Kogo widzisz nad sobą w lazurze?
 Gdybyś się uczłowieczył—jaki miałbyś lica?
 Co za stwór się zataił w twojej sękatej skórze?
 Czym jesteś, oglądany przez duchy z księżyca?

THE WINDMILL

Towering over
 the obliging fallow heath,
 Dances the windmill,
 creaking wooden petticoats
 Towards the world re-
 vealed around, while underneath
 Flagellate shadows,
 horned like devils or like goats.

Riveted nomad,
 flailing rigid on the ground,
 What do your sudden
 jerky movements signify?
 Whom are you greeting
 in your oak-cape wraparound?
 Who is your partner
 in this blade charade up high?

What is your credo?
 What's above you in your world?
 If you were human,
 what would your complexion be?
 What sort of creature's
 hiding in the crusty burl?
 What would you look like
 if the lunar ghosts could see?

Line WINDMILL

- 1 Piling up over fallows of liking-him plain,
 2 Windmill, on all around uncovered worlds,
 3 Creaks with-wooden in dance crinoline,
 4 And onto grass, like devil, sweeps shadow horn-y.
 5 Wanderer, in one place stuck with-bone-stick,
 6 What mean your jerks and sudden throes?
 7 To-whom bow-you yourself around with-oak cape?
 8 With whom so accurately you-speak in signs and blade-glints?
 9 In what believe-you? Whom see-you above in azure?
 10 If-you yourself humanized, how would-you-have cheeks?
 11 What that creature itself concealed in your gnarled skin?
 12 What are-you, looked-at by spirits from moon?

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript, this poem was published in the "Słowo Polskie" (Polish Word), Lwów, 1920 (morning edition, October 25). Since an accurate publication date for the Waka volume is unavailable, it is unclear where "Windmill" first appeared.

- 1- "Goats" were added to the verse version for purposes of rhyme, and the entire version was re-lined in English to convey the impression of jerky, creaky movement: '--'- '--'-'
 8 "Smigi" is neither in the Kościuszko dictionary nor in Papierkowski. It appears to be a neologism combining "migi" (in sign language) and "śmigła" (blades).
 The "you" with which the author addresses the anthropomorphized windmill is the familiar, not the formal, and could be interpreted as a further example of Leśmian's breaking down of the hierarchy among humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects.

According to Głowiński's Zaswiat przedstawiony, 170-2, 181, this is a riddle or question poem. In contradistinction to folk songs and ballads, however, it starts with the description and goes into the questions. (For Leśmian, questions are more important, and less enigmatic, than answers.) The first part looks like a straightforward description; only later do we find oxymorons and questions which introduce new perspectives. These questions indicate a relationship between the windmill and the traveler, and therefore lead into a metaphor which the reader fills in. A similar mechanism is used in "The Snow Idol."

Tej nocy mrok był duszny i od żądzy parny,
 I chabry, rozwidnione suchą błyskawicą,
 Przedostały się nagle do oczu tej sarny,
 Co biegła w las, spłoszona obcą jej źrenicą—
 A one, łeb jej modrząc, mknęły po sarniemu,
 I chciwie zagłądały w świat po chabrowemu.

Mak, sam siebie w śródpolnym wykrywszy bezbrzeżu,
 Z wrzaskiem, który dla ucha nie był żadnym brzmieniem,
 Przekrwawił się w koguta w purpurowym pierzu,
 I aż do krwi potrząsał szkarłatnym grzebieniem,
 I piał w mrok, rozdzierając dziób, trwogą zatruty,
 Aż mu zinał prawdziwe odpiąły koguty.

A jęczmień, kłos pragnieniem zaziłociwszy gęstem,
 Nasrożył nagle złością zjatrzone ościory
 I w złotego się jeża przemiazdżył ze chrzęstem,
 I biegł, kłując po drodze ziół nikle zapory,
 I skomlał, i na kwiaty boczył się i jeżył,
 A nikt nigdy nie zgadnie, co czuł i co przeżył?

A ja—w jakiej swą duszę sparzyłem pokrzywie,
 Że pomykam ukradkiem i na przełaj miedzą?
 I czemu kwiaty na mnie patrzą podejrzliwie?
 Czy coś o mnie nocnego wbrew mej wiedzy—wiedzą?
 Com czynił, że skroń dłońmi uciskam obiema?
 Czym byłem owej nocy, której dziś już nie ma?

TRANSFORMATIONS

That night the dark was muggy, with desire aglow;
 Blue-bottle blooms, bedazzled by arid lightning glare,
 Alighted on the eyes of a forest-bounding doe,
 Who panicked when she saw this foreign floral stare.
 They indigoed her head and, travelling by deer,
 They watched the world go by with a greedy flower-leer.
 The poppy spied himself in endless-field midbloom
 And, with a screech that ears could not perceive as sound,
 Transmogrified into a rooster purple-plumed,
 Then shook his scarlet comb in fearful bloody frown.
 He crowed into the darkness, envenomed by his fright;
 Real roosters answered his full-throated cry that night.

The barley was consumed with golden-dense desire
 And crunch-transformed into a gilded porcupine;
 Then suddenly he bristled, festering with ire,
 And ran aground and quilled the ill-defended thyme.
 He threatened all the flowers, that whining porcupout,
 Yet what he saw and felt—nobody will find out.

What sort of stinging-nettle burned my soul, tell me?
 Why do I skulk nocturnal, fearful and in doubt?
 Why are the flowers staring so suspiciously?
 Are they aware of something I don't know about?
 What did I do that evening, what did I become?
 Why is my head still aching? Why am I so glum?

Line TRANSFORMATIONS

- 1 That night dusk was muggy and of desire steaming,
 2 And blue-bottles, lighted by dry lightning,
 3 Got-through themselves suddenly to eyes of-this deer,
 4 Which ran to forest, scared by unknown to-her pupil.
 5 And they, head her bluing, fleeted in deer-fashion,
 6 And greedily looked into world in bluebottle-fashion.
 7 Poppy, himself himself in midfield discovering boundless,
 8 With squawk, which to ear not was any sound,
 9 Throughblooded himself to rooster in purple down,
 10 And until to blood shook with-scarlet comb.
 11 And crowed in dusk, tearing-open beak, with-fear poisoned,
 12 Until to-him from-somewhere re-crowed real roosters.
 13 And barley, ear with-thirst gilding thick,
 14 Bristled suddenly with-anger chafing festers,
 15 And to golden himself porcupine crunched with clatter,
 16 And ran, pricking on way herbs' scanty barriers,
 17 And whined, and to flowers pouted himself and bristled,
 18 And nobody never not will-guess, what felt and lived?
 19 And I—in what my soul burned stinging-nettle,
 20 That I-skulk hidingly and on short-cut by-ground?
 21 And why flowers on me look suspiciously?
 22 Do something of me nocturnal against my knowledge know?
 23 What-did I-do, that head with-hands grab-I both?
 24 What was-I that night, which today already not is?

NOTES

According to Ewa Bułhak, "Noc spragniona przemian," pp. 25-33, this work is a poetic vision of unity. A night steaming with desire, containing unexpected correspondences and similarities, indicates an enclosed world governed by its own laws. Blue-bottle flowers, for instance, are the eyes of female specters in Slavic folklore, and the bloody, noisy effort involved in metamorphoses between states (usually by means of verbs) denotes self-creation devoid of any cause except itself, indicates the poet's longing for immersion into nature, and constitutes an orgiastic Nature Mass. In Slavic folklore, St. John's Night and Christmas Eve (summer and winter solstice) are associated with miracles: animals talk, and the fabled Fern Flower (which confers riches upon the finder alone) is available for picking. Lightning further symbolizes transcendental revelation, poppies are magical antidotes to ghosts, and roosters announce the departure of demons.

The poem is an example of eternal becoming à la Bergson: X becomes Y by Y-ifying. The analogy works both ways, since semantic units can be associated with either one or the other of the directions, according to Jan Sławiński, "Semantyka poetycka Leśmiana," in *Studia* pp. 121-22. According to Pankowski (188, 213), the laborious sibilants in line 15 (rendered here by crunching and clattering) are reminiscent of childbirth and express a thirst for another form of existence. He considers this exploration of limits and subsequent annihilation to be an example of Leśmian's "Baroque instability." N. B. "Don Kichot" (Quixote) suspects the flowers of being magicians.

Szła z mlekiem w piersi w zielony sad,
 / z ją w ólszynie zaskoczył gad.
 Skrętami dławił ujawszy wpoł,
 Od stóp do głowy pieścił i truł.
 / czył ją wspólnym namdlewać snem,
 Pierś głaskać w dłonie porwanym łbem
 I od rozkoszy trwalszej nad zgon
 Syczeć i wić się, i drgać jak on.
 Już me zwyczaje miłosne znasz,
 Zwól, że przybiorę krolewską twarz.
 Skarby dam tobie z podmorskich den,
 Zacznie się jawa—skończy się sen!
 Nie rzucaj łuski, nie zmieniaj lic!
 Nic mi nie trzeba i nie brak nic.
 Lubię, gdy żądłem równasz mi brwi
 I z wargi nadmiar wysysasz krwi,
 I gdy się wijesz wzdłuż moich nóg,
 Łbem uderzając o łoża próg.
 Piersi ci chylę jak z mlekiem dzban!
 Nie żądam skarbów, nie pragnę zmian.
 Słodka mi śliny wężowej treść—
 Bądź nadal gadem i truj, i pieść!

THE SNAKE

As she was orchard-strolling, her breasts replete with milk,
 She was accosted by a thing of reptile ilk.
 He choked her with his curving, cutting her in two,
 He petted and he poisoned like a spiral screw.
 He taught her how to faint into a dual doze,
 And while he'd pet her breasts, his head to guide-enclose,
 And how to wax ecstatic in death-defying bliss,
 And how to throb with pleasure, and thrash about and hiss.
 You know my loving-habits, so will you please allow
 My countenance to change, becoming regal now.
 I'll shower you with treasures from ocean-coffers deep;
 That shall become your waking, forever end your sleep.
 It isn't necessary to change or shed your skin,
 For I am self-contained, not lacking anything.
 I like it when your tongue corrects my eyebrow-line
 And sucks the excess moisture from these lips of mine,
 And how you writhe along my legs, and when your head
 Just slithers and collides with the edges of the bed.
 Like pitchers full of milk I'll offer you my breasts,
 For I desire no changes and want no treasure-chest.
 The poison of your snake-saliva is so nice;
 Continue, please, to hold me in your caressing vise!

1 She-walked with milk in breasts in green orchard,
 2 Until her in alderwood surprised reptile.
 3 With-curves choked taking in-half
 4 From feet to head caressed and poisoned.
 5 He-taught her common to-faint with-sleep,
 6 Breast to-pet with in-hands grabbed head,
 7 And from pleasure more lasting than death
 8 To-hiss and thrash-oneself, and to-throb like he.
 9 Now my habits loving you know,
 10 Permit, that I-take kingly face.
 11 Treasures I-will give-you from undersea floors,
 12 Will-begin itself waking--will-finish itself sleep-or-dream!
 13 Do-not throw scale, do-not change complexion!
 14 Nothing to-me is-not needed and not lacks nothing.
 15 I-like, when with-tongue you-even me eyebrows
 16 And from lip excess suck-out blood,
 17 And when yourself wind along my feet-or-legs,
 18 With-animal-head hitting on of-bed edge.
 19 Breasts to-you I-tilt like with milk pitcher!
 20 Not demand-I treasures, not thirst-I changes.
 21 Sweet to-me saliva of-snake contents--
 22 Be further reptile and poison, and caress!

NOTES

According to Porębowicz, Pieśni ludowe... pp. 96-7, this poem was inspired by a Scandinavian ballad, "The Dragon," wherein a princess accepts a monster's love in spite of her disgust and is rewarded by having it turn into a handsome young prince by morning. Adam Szczerbowski's biography of Leśmian (p. 23) indicates that Porębowicz translated the ballad into Polish: the princess' name is Ingelill, and she kisses the dragon through a handkerchief.

Pankowski (186-7) and Trznadel (Twórczość Lesmiana 156-7), however, indicate that Leśmian transformed the Nordic fairy-tale into something perverse: love is shown as sensual, blind, and destructive, hooking a person with the dark forces of nature. The woman refuses to let the serpent resume a human face and prefers his reptilian existence.

Interesting comparisons could be made to "Mak" (Poppy), wherein a satyr-god lies in wait for a girl and squeezes her, and to "Jadwiga," in which an unloved girl is loved to death (= eaten) by a worm. Her skeleton asks if God has witnessed her agony; the worm counters that there is no God. This may be the closest Leśmian ever approached Przybyszewski's Sanatic depravation and decadence.

Note: "Permit" (line 10) is a literal translation of a very archaic form for "please allow" or "grant" (zwoł).

ŚWIDRYGA I MIDRYGA.

To nie konie tak cwałują i uszami strzygą
 Jeno tańczą dwaj opoje — Świdryga z Midrygą.
 A nie stęka tak stodoła pod cepów bijakiem
 Jak ta łąka, zganę stopą srożej niż kułakiem.
 Zaskoczyła ich na słońcu Południca blada
 I Świdrydze, i Midrydze, i tańcowi rada.
 Zaglądała im do oczu chciwie jak do żłobu.
 "Który w tańcu nnie wyhula — bom jedna dla obu?"
 "Moja będzie — rzekł Świdryga — ta pierś i ta szyja!"
 A Midryga pięścią przeczy: "Moja lub niczyja!"
 Ten ją porwał za dłoń jedną, a tamten za wtórą,
 "Musisz obu nam nastarczyć, skąpico — dziewczuro!"
 A ona im prosto w usta dyszy bez oddechu,
 A ona im prosto w oczy śmieje się bez śmiechu.
 I rozdwa ją się po równu, rozszczepia się żwawo
 Na dwie dziewczki, na siostrzane — na lewą i prawą.
 "Dosyć ciała dwoistego mamy tu na łące!
 Tańczcie z nami południami, dopóki jarzące!
 Jedna dziewczka rąk ma czworo i cztery ma łydy!
 Niech upoją nas do reszty twe słodkie bezwstydy!"
 Nasrożyli się do tańca, jak gdyby do boju —
 Przysporzyli kwiatom zgiełku, łące — niepokoju.
 Więc Świdryga płaśał z prawą, wiec Midryga — z lewą,
 Ten obcasem kurz zamiatał, a tamten — cholewą.
 Na odsiebkę, na odkrętkę i znów na odwrotkę —
 Podeptali macierzankę, błyszczkę i tymotkę!
 Jeden wrzeszczał: "Konaj żywcem!", a drugi: "Wciornaści!"
 Tańcowali aż do zdechu i aż do upaści!
 Aż poczuli, że dziewczyna życie w tańcu traci,
 I umarła jednocześnie we dwojej postaci.
 "Pochowajmy owo ciało nie bardzo samotne,
 Bo podwójne w tańcowaniu, a w śmierci dwukrotne.
 Pochowajmy na cmentarzu, gdzie za drzewem — drzewo,
 Zmówmy pacierz obópolny — za prawą i lewą".
 W dwóch ja trumnach ułożyli, ale w jednym grobie —
 A już huczy echo ziemne — tańczą trumny obie!
 Tańczą, ciałem nakarmione, syte i hulaszczce,
 Ukazując co raz w tańcu nie domkniętą paszczę.
 Tańczą, skaczą i wirują, klepką dzwonią w klepkę,
 Na odkrętkę, na odwrotkę i znów na odsiebkę!
 Aż się kręci razem z nimi śmierć w skocznych lamentach,
 Aż się wzdryga wnętrzościami przerażony cmentach!
 Aż się w sobie zatraciło błędne tańca koło,
 Aż się stało popod ziemią huczno i wesoło!

Aż zmałyły się rozumy Świdrydze—Midrydze,
 Jakby wichur je rozhułał na wiatraka śmidze!
 I rozwiała się w ich głowach ta wiedza pomglona,
 Gdzie jest prawa strona świata, a gdzie lewa strona?
 W jakiej trumnie lewa dziewczka, w jakiej prawa leży?
 I która z nich i do kogo po śmierci należy?
 Tak im w oczach opętanych świat się cały miga,
 Że nie wiedza, kto Świdryga, a kto z nich Midryga?
 Jeno ujrzą otchłań śmierci czarną od ogromu:
 "A bądźcie tu, ludzie dobrzy, jak u siebie w domu!
 Jedna trumna dla jednego, dla drugiego—druga,
 W jednej wieczność prawym okiem, w drugiej lewym mruga!"
 Obłąkani nad przepaścią poklękali wzajem
 I na klęczkach zatańczyli tuż, tuż nad jej skrajem.
 Tańcowali na czworakach, tańcowali piazem,
 Tak i nie tak—i na opak—razem i nie razem!
 Aż wwichrzeni w mrok dwóch trumien, jak dwa błędne wióry,
 Powpadali w otchłań śmierci nogami do góry!

SWIDRYGA AND MIDRYGA

Those aren't cantering horses pricking up their ears,
 But dancing drunks—Swidryga and Midryga—here.
 And beaten barns don't ever groan as much as this
 Poor meadow, stomped by feet much worse than just by
 fists.

A chalky vampire-nymph surprised them in the sun,
 So glad to see them and to dance and have some fun.
 She peered into their eyes with greedy manger-stare.
 "I'll take on both of you in dancing, if you dare."
 "She's mine," Swidryga yelled, "that neck, that breast below!"
 Midryga countered with his fist: "Oh, is that so?"
 Swidryga took one hand, Midryga grabbed the other;
 "You'll have to take us both, you goddamned miser-
 mother!"

She panted airless breath directly at their mouths
 And laughed straight in their faces with no-laugh cacklerouse,
 Then briskly teemed in two, dividing evenly,
 Becoming sister-girls, both left and right was she.
 "There's double-body quite sufficient for you here;
 Come now and dance with us in spectral noontime sear.
 One single girl's four-handed and she's got four legs.
 Your shameless sweetness better glut us to the dregs."
 They bristled to the dance as if it were a war,
 Tumulted all the flowers, fields were in uproar.
 Swidryga and Midryga gamboled with the girls,
 Their boot-shafts and their heels inducing dust to swirl.

They trampled herbs and grasses as they curled and twirled,
The butterflies were dazed and flattened as they whirled.

They hollered, "Croak alive, doggone you," at each other,
And danced till they were ready to collapse and smother,
Till they perceived the girl was leaking life away,
She double-died while dancing simultaneously.

"This corpse is hardly lonely. Let's bury it, I say!
She was a double dancer, and twice she passed away.
So in the treeful graveyard bearing double palls,
Let's say a two-field prayer for this two-fold doll."

A subterranean rumble from the single vault
In which two biers were placed: a casket somersault.
The coffins, gorged on flesh, decided to carouse
And finish off their gorgy displaying open maws.

Nuts and bolts were ringing as they danced and twirled,
Sashayed, gamboled, confined, swirled and curled and
whirled;

Till Death joined them with her clever lamentations
And the graveyard's guts convulsed in trepidation.

Till the vicious-circle dancing got confused
And the underworld turned merry, loud, and loose.
Swidryga and Midryga were flustered and dismayed,
As if a gale had scattered their brains on windmill-blades.

The murky knowledge in their heads was thus dispersed:
What's left or right on earth, what's second and what's
first?

Which coffin holds the right girl? Which contains the left?
To whom do they belong now, even after death?

The world is just a flicker in their eyes acraze,
They even have forgotten their own given names.

Now all they see is Death's black-awful catacomb:
"Swidryga and Midryga, make yourselves at home.

For each I've got a coffin, and Eternity
Will wink at each of you with different eyes, you'll see."

Swidryga and Midryga both knelt at the abyss
And in their crazed obsession, danced there on their knees.

They toddled on all fours, then belly-flopped around,
Still dancing without method, still nearly tumbling down,
Till they were galed like driftwood into Death's ravine
And into murky coffins headfirst they did careen.

1 Those not horses thus gallop and with-ears prick,
2 But dance two drunks, Swidryga and Midryga.
3 And not groans thus barn under flail-beatings
4 As this meadow, prodded with foot more severely than fist.
5 Surprised them on sun She-ghost pale,
6 Both to-Swidryga and to-Midryga and to-dance happy.
7 She-looked them to eyes greedily like to manger.
8 "Which in dance will outdance me—for-am I one for both?"
9 "Mine-she will-be," said Swidryga, "that breast and that neck!"
10 And Midryga with-fist contradicts: "Mine or nobody's!"
11 That-one her grabbed by palm one, and this-one by the-other,
12 "You-must both of-us suffice, miseress—horrible-girl!"
13 And she them straight into lips breathes without breath,
14 And she them straight into eyes laughs without laugh.
15 And she halves herself by even, calves herself swiftly
16 Into two girls, into sisters—into left-one and right-one.
17 "Enough of-body double have-we here on meadow!
18 Dance with us at-noons as-long-as boiling!
19 One girl hands-or-arms has four and four has legs!
20 May inebriate us to end your sweet shamelessnesses!"
21 They-fierced themselves to dance as though to battle—
22 Brought to flowers breaking, to meadow unpeace.
23 So Swidryga gamboled with right-one, so Midryga with left,
24 That-one with-heel dust swept, and this-one—with shaft.
25 In sashay, in twirl, and again in returning—
26 They-trampled phytanetra gamma moth and wild thyme and timothy-grass!
27 One screamed, "Die alive!", and other-one "Doggone it!"
28 They-danced until death and up to falling.
29 Till they-felt that girl life in dance loses,
30 And she-died simultaneously in two forms.
31 "Let-us-bury that body not very lonely,
32 Because double in dancing, and in death duplicate.
33 Let-us-bury in cemetery, where after tree—tree,
34 Let-us-pray prayer double-fielded—for right-one and left-one."
35 In two her coffins they-laid, but in one grave—
36 And already roars echo earth-y—are-dancing coffins both!
37 Are-dancing, with-body fed, satiated and carousing,
38 Showing often in dance not quite-closed maw.
39 They-dance, they-jump and they-twirl, with-hinges belling in-hinges,
40 In sashay, in twirl and again in return!
41 Until twirls together with them death in clever laments,
42 Until self convulses with-insides terrified cemeter!
43 Until in itself lost erroneous of-dance circle,
44 Until became under ground loud and merry!
45 Until perturbed themselves senses of-Swidryga and of-Midryga,
46 As-though wind them caroused-around on of-windmill blades!
47 And flew-apart itself in their heads that knowledge misty,
48 Where is right side of-world, and where left side?

49 In which coffin left girl, in which right lies?
 50 And which of them and to whom after death belongs?
 51 Thus them in eyes maddened world itself complete flickers,
 52 That not know-they who Swidryga and who of them Midryga?
 53 Only shall-they-see abyss of-death black from hugeness:
 54 "And be here, people good, as at yourselves in house!
 55 One coffin for one, for other—the-other,
 56 In one eternity with-right eye, with other with-left winks!"
 57 Maddened above abyss they-knelt together
 58 And on kneelings danced close, close above its border.
 59 They-danced on all-fours, they-danced on-belly,
 60 Thus and not thus—and so too—together and not together!
 61 Until winded into murk of-both coffins, like two erroneous shavings,
 62 They-fell into abyss of-death legs-or-feet to top!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 512, this poem was published in "Słowo Polskie," Lwów 1920; as in "Windmill," determining whether this publication antedated Laka is problematic. It has been translated into Russian by S. Gorodetsky (Moscow 1935) and is loosely based on a German folk-song about an innkeeper's daughter (translated by Porębowicz) and a Polish folk-song included in Kolberg's Lublin collection (Part II, p. 58, no. 177). In Twórczość Leśmiana, Trznadel adds that the story line of the innkeeper's daughter is as follows: Three soldiers fight over a girl and cut her into pieces. R. Zmorski and Z. Gloger also document folk-songs in which two people are buried in the same grave. The poem is thus a variation on Leśmian's beloved "danse macabre" motif, much like Goethe's "Totentanz."

Further, I have found similarities to two other folk-songs: one deals with two mountaineers fighting over a girl; the narrator advises them to settle for a braid each, since the girl has two braids. Another song relates the "story" of a dead man named Maciek (Matt), who would get up and dance if the right music were played for him.

According to Papierkowski p. 86, the name Swidryga comes from a dialect form "Swidrygal," an agile prankster. In LMP, Trznadel mentions (pp. 841-2) that the grotesque humor testifying to horror, attempting stoicism, and reaching for humanism is an example of Leśmian's folk-poetry motifs. In Twórczość Leśmiana, the same author indicates that the beginning is the second half of a standard early-Slavic formula: a statement or question plus a negation ("contradicting comparisons"). What follows is a trichotomy: a magical folk form of tripartite repetitions (dance of the specters, coffins, and protagonists) comparable to the complicated, strophic musical structure of a crazed mazurka. (211-218) Karpowicz (p. 230) interprets the last two lines as delicious humor and self-putdown. In "Niepochwycień" (in Studia), Jan Prokop terms the poem a clouding of an ordered view of the world, with no time for consciousness.

Leśmian used similar motifs in other poems, particularly ballads. In "Piła" (The Saw), a saw falls in love with a country-boy and cuts him into pieces; in "Migoł and Jawrzon," two rivals, one of them invisible, fight over the shadow of a girl hiding in a beehive, indicating the absurd and irrelevant nature of human endeavor. In "Róże" (The Roses), a knight's wife kills her rival, who made love to her husband's dream, and buries her in a double coffin: body and dream separately. In "Two Matthews," the plot is based on a Russian folk-tale about two giants who "walked forward, across, and diagonally" (bragging, repetition, and rivalry), and in "Matysek," the eponymous fiddler magically invokes a dead girl's weeping, then laughter, then dream, although the girl herself does not materialize. "Dzananda" aims to kill a god disguised as a peacock but kills his beloved instead, finally not knowing who had killed whom, whose breast had been pierced by an arrow. Finally, in the fairy-tale of Sindbad the sailor as interpreted by Leśmian (pp. 44-6, 156, and 205-7), Sindbad is punished by the creation of a double, Hindbad, who becomes his rival. Sindbad is particularly horrified by the thought of a dual death of original and duplicate: who would pray at the horrible grave of two such corpses? A spell is cast on the doubles, who cannot stop dancing to the rhythm of the magic melody of the music-monster Degial, who wants to kill them both and bury them in a single coffin.

Line

- 3 "Bijak" (flail-beating) is dialect for "beater" or "swingle" as per the Kościuszko dictionary. Papierkowski (p. 68) lists "cech" as a synonym, but that is only marginally applicable, meaning either a medieval guild or an instrument guilds used for grading merchandise. Papierkowski's voluminous explanations were more confusing than helpful; I knew all along that "bijak" had something to do with "bić," to beat, and Kościuszko was more than adequate for this allegedly recondite word.
- 5 Południca refers etymologically to noontime or the southerly direction, but indicates a female ghost.
- 12 "Dziewczura" is, according to Papierkowski (147, 156-7), a neologism containing the word "dziewczyna" (girl) plus a derogative suffix.
- 25 "Odwrotka" means "in the opposite direction" (a noun plus adjective, according to Papierkowski, p. 154).
- 26 "Tymotka" and "błyszczka" are plants, lolium perenne and timothy-grass. Papierkowski (p. 68) attributes such dialectical forms to stylization attempting to confer a folksy atmosphere.
- 27-8 "Do upaści" is also invented dialect for stylistic purposes, whereas "wciornaści" is an invented dialect word composed of "naści" (a dialect verb imperative for "to accept") plus "-stki" or "-ści" exclamations.
- 34 "obopólny" is a neological composition containing "both" and "field." Cf. "wszechleśny" (omniforestry) in "The Drowner." In Klechy polskie ("Podlasiak," p. 173), Leśmian incorporated this neologism into "obopólna bezdomność" (lit. "both-field no-houseness").
- 42 "Cmentach" is pseudo-dialect: cemetery plus the dialect suffix -ach, which is of course also useful to rhyme with "lamentach."

Cnoczą Śmiercie po słonecznej stronie,
Trzymając się wzajem za dłonie.

Którą z naszej wybierzesz gromady,
By w cmentarne uprowadzić sady?

Nie chciał pierwszej, że nazbyt miniasta,
Grób, gdy hardy, pokrzywą porasta.

Nie chciał drugiej, że nadmiernie złota;
Nie zna ciszy, kto się tak migota.

Wybrał trzecią, co choć bogulicha,
Lecz tak cicha, że wszystko nacicha.

"Coś za jedna, że podobasz mi się
W swym bożystym na ziemi zarysie?

Żal mi, przeżal ptaka, co odlata,
Dla cię umre z nieżalu do świata.

Błada jesteś, jak to słońce w zimie—
Kędy dom twój i jak ci na imię?"

"Dom mój stoi na ziemi uboczny,
A na imię nic nie mam prócz oczu.

Nic w tych oczach nie mam prócz wieczoru,
Pewna byłam twojego wyboru.

Jeden zowąd śmierć sobie wybiera,
Ale drugi tą śmiercią umiera.

Choć wybrałeś nie wiedząc, dla kogo,
Zawsze będę pamiętną i drogą.

Jestem śmiercią twej matki, co w chacie
Uśmiechnięta czeka teraz na cię."

Here come Death's a-walking, holding hands,
On the sunny side of fortune-chance.

Whom among us will you pick and lead
Into graveyard orchards, pray tell me?

Doesn't want the first one, she's too stern;
Stinging-nettles blanket haughty urns.

Nor the second either, much too gold;
She can't fathom stillness, she's so bold.

So he chooses the lackluster third,
Who's so still she stills the spryest stir.

"Who are you, o femiform divine?
Why does your earth-being capture mine?

I'm so-sorry for departing birds,
But I'll die no-sorry for the world.

Who are you? Where's your home? I'll die for you.
You're pale as sunlight of a winter-hue."

"My home is at the byways of the world;
I have no name but what my eyes unfurl.

I have nothing in these eyes but night,
I knew you'd choose me, and I was right.

Somebody picks a death out of the blue,
But someone else must die the death he drew.

Though you chose me, didn't know for whom,
I'll be dear and mindful unto you.

I'm your mother's death; she's in the shack,
Smiling, waiting, knowing you'll come back."

Line DEATHS

- 1-2 Walk Deaths on sunny side, holding each other by palms.
 3-4 Whom from us will-you choose group, for in cemetery to tend orchards?
 5-6 He-not wanted first, for too grave, grave, when haughty, with-nettles grows.
 7-8 He-not wanted second, for too golden, not knows quiet who so self-twinkles.
 9-10 He-chose third, for though godpoor, but so quiet that everything bequiets.
 11-12 "What-you for one, that please me you with your divine on earth form?
 12-14 Regret me, overregret ne of-bird that flies-off, for you will-I-die from nonregret to world.
 15-16 Pale-girl you-are, thus as sun in winter—where house your and how to-you name?"
 17-18 "House my stands on earth's aside, and for name nothing not have I but eyes.
 19-20 Nothing in these eyes not have-I but evening, certain was-I of-your choice.
 21-22 One somewhere death h mself chooses, but second with-this-death dies.
 23-4 Though you-chose not knowing, for whom, always will-I-be remembering and dear.
 25-6 I-am death of-your mother, who in hut smiling waits now for you."

NOTES

Death is feminine in Polish, and Lesmian once wrote that she was quiet and gentle like a girlfriend; one can trust her to come at the right time. (UR, p. 39, "O umówionej godzinie," i. e. "At the Appointed Hour"). He wrote this in 1900; by the end of his life he had become more pessimistic.

According to Karpowicz (pp. 80-93), death is like Rilke's disease: it looks like the person it is feeding on, has the shape of the poet himself. The poet chooses his own death like a farmhand selecting a girlfriend at a country fair. Deaths are different, like women: some quiet, some talkative; hence the plural title. (Death is being everywhere and nowhere, surrounded by collective rather than individual consciousness; therefore, Karpowicz considers it synonymous with God and love.) In this case, the poet chooses a death which looks like the mother he loves, as it will make death easier for him; but that very similarity betrays and kills his mother. Stone, on the other hand (p. 191), believes there is no cause-and-effect relation or plot in the poem: Lesmian's "lack of concern for causality allows him to present things in motion and in a state of change without logical order."

- 9 "Bogulicha" (godpoor) is an existing dialect word for a pitiable pauper.
 12 "Przezał" (overregret) and "odlata" instead of "odlatuje" (flies away) are dialect words whose purpose is to intensify the folksy element.
 18-19 Double, triple, and quadruple negatives do not cancel each other out in Polish; rather, they intensify the negation.

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 513 ff., this cycle is linked to the poet's own life: while vacationing at his aunt's house in Iłża, where his family had a porcelain factory, he met Dr. Dora Lebental-Speer, a dermatologist. The beautifully situated house appears chiselled from the mountain and the fourteenth-century castle ruins, and the ancient garden leads into a castle park; it is here that the presently neglected raspberry brushwood is located. Although both Catholic and Jewish cemeteries are nearby, Trznadel was unable to find the grave of Dr. Lebental, who escaped the Warsaw Ghetto and died in Iłża in 1942 of typhus contracted while caring for ghetto patients. (N.B.: Another source claimed she committed suicide in Iłża.)

According to Pankowski (88-92), Polish erotic poetry began with Jan Kochanowski (1537-1584) and soon incorporated Italiante influences, Latin erotica, medieval misogynistic obscenities, and the like. There were problems with the Church: Cracow's Bishop Szyszkowski put Twardowski's 1617 Cupid's Lessons on the Index; it was reissued in 1628 as the Torch of Divine Love, with Venus becoming the Virgin and Cupid Jesus.

Early seventeenth-century erotica were mostly crude epigrams (Karmowski, Danięcki, Naborowski, Potocki, Kochowski, Morsztyn). Mariolatry and religion nourished sublimated eroticism. During the eighteenth century, lighthearted Rococo gallantry at the Warsaw court produced erotic poets such as Książnin, Trembecki, and Węgierski.

With the exception of Słowacki and Mickiewicz, very little was produced in the genre during the nineteenth century: for political reasons, women were regarded as matrons guarding the angelic virtues of a brave nation, and the result was excessive religiousness and tearful patriotism removed from any political risk. The Młoda Polska movement rebelled against this attitude in erotica which were grave, sometimes macabre, and often mixed with the sacred. Tetmajer, for instance, introduced everyday familiar language, no offense taken; Pankowski believes Leśmian's "Sometimes my blind caprices" to be an almost clinical description of the sex act.

According to Teresa Skubalanka, "U źródeł stylu erotyków Leśmiana," pp. 145-9, the Raspberry Brushwood cycle is connected to Mickiewicz's style of love poetry, especially the Odessa sonnets. It is definitely realistic: lips touch a sweaty brow, bodies lie on cold sheets, and the intimacy appears so nearly exhibitionistic that publication seems not to have been considered. Comparing the lover to a child (Leśmian called Dora "dziecinko," "child" in his letters) is one of the authentic details which, according to Skubalanka, save Leśmian from the "intolerable affectation" of other erotica written by men during that time, such as Przybyszewski.

Perhaps the most interesting notes are connected to a poem from this cycle, namely no. 10, which has not been translated herein. It enumerates the parts of the beloved's body: eyes, breasts, hands, hips, lips, feet, like a rosary or body alphabet. In his review of "Song of Songs" (SL, p. 440), Leśmian indicated that some analysts liken the attributes of the beloved to a rosary or alphabet (the so-called alphabet songs), but that he himself does not agree with this view. In his history of Polish literature, Krzyżanowski (p. 18) mentions an anonymous 15th-century hymn or carol, "Augustus kiedy królował" (When Augustus reigned), in which the stanzas open in alphabetical order.

Eugeniusz Czuplejewicz, in "Gra miłości i śmierci w liryce Leśmiana" (The Interplay of Love and Death in Leśmian's Lyrics), pp. 229-64, acknowledges that the enumeration device is common in the Polish Baroque, but adds that whereas the Baroque is famous for external portraits, often with humorous punch lines, Leśmian recreates the rhythm of an amorous encounter and the female body. The lovers are anonymous and secondary: the real hero of the cycle is love itself, magical and blind. The pronoun "we" (both lovers together) is frequent, and reminiscent of Goethe's love poem to Charlotte von Stein. We are not even informed of the color of the woman's hair, although Artur Sandauer frequently insisted Dora was dark-haired and that this explained the light girl/dark girl dichotomy of "Paltry."

Czuplejewicz believes that the last poem in the cycle ("Has Separation Changed You?") is actually temporally outside the cycle. Minute physical changes (which only a lover would notice) document the passage of time and the fear of death. Mortality gives love a deep, transcendental importance, representing a rebellion against fate and enthronement of the body: the lover prays for the immortality of his beloved's body, not of her soul.

In this cycle, love becomes familiarization with the secrets of existence, a safe vehicle for "temporary," i. e. "tamed," death; by the end of the cycle, however, the desire for the memory of past lovemaking interferes with experiencing it in the present.

Leśmian built the cycle on a folk version of the Song of Songs, wherein the girl shows parts of her body to the "hero" and becomes his wife. The heroine also behaves like a fairy-tale princess: tests and dangerous labors abound, as do rivals and Hades-like enchanted houses. Karpowicz (p. 105) believes that some of Leśmian's erotica, particularly "Sometimes my blind caprices," contain an aftertaste of necrophilia, narcissism, and megalomania: the subject wants to love his object to death, as the desire to possess brings love closer to death: ruling totally over another life, depriving love of all defenses. Love thus opens the door to death, which is another form of immobility.

W MALINOWYM CHRUSŃNIAKU

W malinowym chruśniaku, przed ciekawym wzrokiem,
Zapodziani po głowy, przez długie godziny
Zrywaliśmy przybyłe tej nocy maliny.

Palce miałas na oślep skrwawione ich sokiem.

Bąk złośnik huczał basem, jakby straszył kwiaty,

Rdzawe guzy na słońcu wygrzewał liść chory,

Złachmaniałych pajęczyn skrzyły się wisiory,

I szedł tyłem na grzbiecie jakiś żuk kosmaty.

Dusžno było od malin, któreś, szepcząc, rwała,

A szept nasz tylko wówczas nacichał w ich woni,

Gdym wargami wygarniał z podanej mi dłoni

Owoce, przepojone wonią twego ciała.

I stały się maliny narzędziem pieśczoży

Tej pierwszej, tej zdziwionej, która w całym niebie

Nie zna innych upojeń, oprócz samej siebie,

I chce się wciąż powtarzać dla własnej dziwoty.

I nie wiem, jak się stało, w którym okamgnieniu,

Ześ dotknęła mi wargą spoconego czoła,

Porwałem twoje dłonie—oddalaś w skupieniu,

A chruśniak malinowy trwał wciąż dookoła.

IN RASPBERRY BRUSHWOOD

Lost in berry brushwood higher than our heads,

We spent many hours under curious stares

Picking fruits that just a day ago weren't there,

While your fingers blind with berry-juices bled.

Bumblebee came rumbling like a flower-terror,

Sickly leaves went warming rust-nodes in the sun,

Cobwebs sparkled tassel-froth at everyone,

Upside-down and backwards marched some beetle hairy.

With murmurs and with fruit the air was redolent,

But our whispers only hushed into perfume

When from proffered palms raspberries I'd consume;

They were drenched and fragrant with your body's scent.

Berries then became a tool of that caress

Which in all the heavens knows no other highs

Than itself, primeval, self-contained, surprised,

Thirsting for an encore, dazzled nonetheless.

When did all this happen? Suddenly you kissed

My perspiring forehead, then I grabbed your hands.

You replied with silent concentration, and

Berry brushwood somehow continued to exist.

Line IN RASPBERRY BRUSHWOOD

- 1 In raspberry brushwood, under curious look,
 2 Lost until heads, for long hours
 3 We-tore arrived that night raspberries.
 4 Fingers had-you in blindness bleeding-with their juice.
 5 Bumblebee nasty roared with-bass, as-though he-frightened flowers,
 6 Rusty bumps in sun heated leaf sick,
 7 Of-tasselled cobwebs glittered themselves hanglings,
 8 And walked backwards on back some beetle hairy.
 9 Muggy was-it from raspberries which you, whispering, tore
 10 And whisper our only then quieted in their fragrance
 11 When-I with-lips gathered from offered me palm
 12 Fruits, saturated with-fragrance of-your body.
 13 And became themselves raspberries tool of-caress
 14 That first-one, that surprised-one, which in all heavens
 15 Not knows other drunkennesses aside-from it's self,
 16 And wants itself always to-repeat for own surprise.
 17 And not know-I, how it happened, in which wink-of-eye,
 18 That-you touched me with-lips sweaty forehead,
 19 I-grabbed your palms—you returned-them in concentration,
 20 And brushwood of-raspberry continued always around.

NOTES

Głowiński (Zaświat p. 245) calls the Raspberry Brushwood erotic cycle "erotic elegies," although the first in particular might be considered an idyll instead. According to Friedrich Schiller, Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung, idylls are unlike satires and elegies because the ideal in the idyll is actually achieved. Its calm is one of fulfillment, not of inertia; however, it is difficult to bring movement into it. Notes on the cycle as a whole are contained on a separate page.

According to Artur Sandauer, Samobójstwo... p. 15, Leśmian's erotic method is imagination, and his space nothingness. Karpowicz (pp. 221-4) believes the poet tried to determine the existence of nonexistence, to be completely certain that the paradise of the raspberry brushwood is in fact the only paradise for human existence. (Parenthetically, it may be pointed out that an enclosed garden was a symbol of virginity in medieval and Baroque times.) The only concrete proof of the purpose of existence is individual freedom, as recreating a simple copy of reality would be senseless.

- 2 The past participle "zapodziani" (lost) makes palpable the process duration.
 7 "Wisior" (lit. "hanging") is a pseudo-dialect augmentative of "wisiorek."
 10 "Nacichać" (to hush) is dialect for "nacichnąć" and is also used in "Deaths."
 16 "Dziwota" (surprise) is normally used only in the negative, "nie dziwota."
 Leśmian's positivization could be likened to calling a person "couth, kempt, and shevelled."

Śledzą nas... Okracają z ścieżek i ustroni,
 Z trudem przez nas wykrytych. Gniew nasz w słońcu pała!
 Spieszno nam do łez szczęścia, do tchów naszych woni,
 Chcemy pieśzczot próbować, poznawać swe ciała.

Więc na przekór przeszkodom źrenicą bezradną
 Chłoniemy się nawzajem, niby dwa bezdroża,
 A, gdy powiek znużonych kotary opadną,
 Czujemy, żeśmy wyszli z uścisków i z łoża.

Nikt tak nigdy nie patrzył, nie bywał tak blady
 I nikt do dna rozkoszy ciałem tak nie dotarł,
 I nie nurzał swych pieśzczot bezdomnej gromady
 W takim łożu, pod srazą takich czujnych kotar!

They're tracking us and lying in wait in hideaways
 That we'd unearthed with trouble. Our rage is blazing. Yes,
 We're in a rush to savor our bodies in embrace,
 Replete with tears ecstatic and with our scented breath.

Defying all the roadblocks, our helpless eyes consume
 Each other like two trackless trains in parallel;
 When exhausted eyelids drop their curtain-swoon,
 We feel we've left the bed and our embrace as well.

Nobody's ever been as super-pale as we,
 Nor seen so much, submerging his homeless hugs galore,
 Nobody's ever touched the depths of ecstasy
 In such a bed, so guarded by such drapes before.

They-follow us... Steal from paths and byways
 With difficulty by us found. Anger our in sun blazes.
 Hurrying to-us to tears of-happiness, to breaths of-our fragrances,
 We-want caresses to-try, to-get-to-know our bodies.

So in spite of-obstacles with-pupil helpless
 We-devour ourselves reciprocally, as-though two pathlessnesses,
 And, when of-lids exhausted curtains fall,
 We-feel, that-we came out of-hugs and of-bed.

No-one thus never not would-look, not would-be so pale,
 And no-one to bottom of-pleasure with-body thus not arrived-with-difficulty,
 And not sank his caresses of-houseless horde
 In such bed, under guard of-such alert curtains.

Zazdrość moja bezsilnie po łożu się miota:
 Kto całował twe piersi, jak ja, po kryjomu?
 Czy jest wśród twoich pieśczoł choć jedna pieśczoła,
 Której, prócz mnie, nie dałaś nigdy i nikomu?
 Gniewu mego łza twoja wówczas nie ostudzi!
 Poniżam dumę ciała i uczuć przepychy,
 A ty mi odpowiadasz, żem marny i lichy,
 Podobny do tysiąca obrzydłych ci ludzi.

I wymykasz się naga. W przyległym pokoju
 We własnym się po chwili zaprzepaszczasz łkaniu,
 I wiem, że na skleconym bezładnie posłaniu
 Leżysz jak topielica na twardym dnie zdroju.
 Biegnę tam. Łkania milkną. Cisza niby w grobie.
 Zwinięta, na kształt węża, z bólu i rozpaczy
 Nie dajesz znaku życia—jeno konasz raczej,
 Aż zniecka za dłoń mie pociągasz ku sobie.

Jakże łzami przemokła, znużoną po walce
 Dźwigam z nurtów pościeli w ramiona obłędne,
 A nóg twych rozemknione pieśczołami palce
 Jakże drogie mym ustom i jakże niezbędne!

My jealousy is thrashing helpless in the bed:
 Who else has kissed your nipples like this, secretly?
 Is there a single type of hug, I brood and fret,
 That you have never given anyone but me?
 Your tears can't cool my anger; I humiliate
 The pride of body plus the pomp of feeling so.
 You tell me that I'm vile and nasty, then berate
 My similarity to other creeps you know.

You slip into the next room naked, and I hear
 You erring in your sob-ravine; I know that you're
 Reclining, like a tired drowner, on some bier
 You improvised to mute the hardness of the floor.
 I come to you. The sobbing stops. A gravelike calm.
 Despair and pain have coiled you to a snakelike band
 Which gives no sign of life, till suddenly your palm
 Shows that you haven't died by reaching for my hand.

I drag you to my crazy arms from bedsheets floes;
 You're drenched in tears, exhausted by the ugly fight,
 And I remember that your pleasure-parted toes
 Are dear and necessary to my lips. That's right.

Jealousy my helplessly on bed itself thrashes:
Who kissed your breasts, like I, in hiding'
Is there among your caresses at-least one caress
Which, besides me, not gave-you never and nobody?

Of-rage mine tear yours thus will-not cool.
I-humiliate pride of-body and of-feelings pomp,
And you me answer, that-I-am low and vile,
Similar to thousand awful to-you people.

And you-slip-out naked. In next room
In your-own yourself after a-while you-ravine sobbing,
And I-know that on put-together haphazardly bedding
You-lie like drowneress on hard floor of-source.

I-run there. Sobblings quiet. Still as-though in grave.
Coiled, in form of-snake, from pain and despair
Not give-you sign of-life—but are-dying rather,
Until unexpectedly by palm me pull-you to yourself.

How with-tears drenched, exhausted after battle,
I-drag from maelstroms of-sheets into shoulders maddened,
And of-feet your parted with-caresses fingers
How dear to-my lips and also indispensable.

Czasami mojej ślepej posłuszny ochocie
 Pragnę w tobie mieć czujną na byle skinienie
 Sługę, co pieśzcotami gasi me pragnienie,
 A ty jesteś tak zmyślna i zwinna w pieśzczocie!
 Gdy twój warkocz jak w słońcu wybujate ziele
 Tchem rozwartych ogrodów mą duszę owionie,
 Głowę twą niby puchar ujmuję w swe dłonie
 I wargami w ślad dreszczu prowadzę po ciele.
 I raduję się śledząc tę wargę, jak zmierza
 Do mej piersi kosmatej, widnej w niedomroczu,
 W której marzę pierś w lesie ryczącego zwierza
 I staram się, gdy pieścisz, nie tracić go z oczu.

Sometimes my blind caprices I obey, and feel
 A yen to have you serve me at my beck and call,
 A waitress whose caresses quench my thirstings all,
 And you have such imagination and such zeal!
 Like rampant sun-rich vegetation are your braids,
 They're wafting open-garden perfume at my soul;
 I take your head into my hands just like a bowl
 And guide your lips to trail my body's shiver-waves.
 I watch in jubilation as your mouth is drawn,
 In the misty murk, onto my furry chest—
 Which I daydream is a roaring lion's breast,
 And try to trap the image as you nuzzle on.

Sometimes to-my blind obedient desire
 I-thirst in you to-have alert to any-old gesture
 Servant, that with-hugs quenches my thirst
 And you are so clever and agile in hug!
 When your braid as in sun luxurious greenery
 With-breath opened-of gardens my soul envelops,
 Head your as-though beaker I-take in my hands
 And with-lips in path of-shudder lead on body.
 And I-rejoice myself following that lip, as it-intends
 To my breast hairy, visible in not-quite-darkness,
 In which I-dream breast in woods roaring animal
 And try myself, while you-caress, not to-lose it from eyes.

Zmienionaż po rozjące? O, nie, niezmieniona!
 Lecz jakiś kwiat z twych włosów zbiegł do stóp ołtarzy,
 A choć brak tego zbiega nie skalał twej twarzy,
 Serce me w tajemnicy przed twym sercem kona...
 Dusza twoja śmie marzyć, że, w gwiazdne zamiecie
 Wdumana, będzie trwała raz jeszcze i jeszcze—
 Lecz ciało? Któż pomyśli o nim we wszechświecie
 Prócz mnie, co tak w nie wierzę i kocham, i pieczę?
 I gdy ty, szepcząc słowa, z ust zrodzone znoju,
 Dajesz pieśczętom ujście w tym szepcie, co pała,
 Ja, zamilkly wargami u piersi twych zdroju,
 Modłę się o twojego nieśmiertelność ciała.

Has separation changed you? No, you're still the same!
 A flower-fugitive has left your head divine,
 And now lies at your feet as though upon a shrine;
 Before your heart, my own is secretly aflame.
 Your soul presumptuous, lost deep in starry storms,
 Dares dream itself to be an oft-recurring thing—
 Yet what about your body? Who but me would think
 Of saving that believed-in and beloved form?
 You're working, words awhisper, allowing your caress
 To cloak itself in burning murmurs; mute am I,
 Still praying that your body may never, never die
 With lips that linger at the well-spring of your breast.

Are-you(female) changed after separation? Oh, no, not-changed!
 But some flower from your hairs ran-down to feet's altars,
 And although lack of-that runaway not bedirtied your face,
 Heart my in secret before your heart is-dying...
 Soul your dares to-dream, that, in starry blizzard
 Mused-in, it-will last once again and again—
 But body? Who will-think of it in allworld
 Besides me, who so in it believe and love, and caress?
 And when you, whispering words, from lips born of-toil,
 You-give to-caresses exit in this whisper, which blazes,
 I, bemuted with-lips at of-breasts your source,
 Pray myself for your immortality of-body.

Note: In "Ubóstwo miłości" (The Poverty of Love), UR 29-36, the poet considers the beloved woman immortal because, by continuous metamorphoses, she escapes the love-death linkage usually attributed to the grotesque.

SZEWCZYK

W mgłach daleczeje sierp księżycy,
 Zatkwiom ostrzem w czub komina,
 Latarnia się na palcach wspina
 W mrok, gdzie już kończy się ulica.
 Obłądny szewczyk—kuternoga
 Szyje, wpatrzony w zmór odmęty,
 Buty na miarę stopy Boga,
 Co mu na imię—Nieobjęty!
 Błogosławiony trud,
 Z którego twórczej mocy
 Powstaje taki but
 Wśród takiej srebrnej nocy!

Boże obłąków, Boże rosy,
 Naści z mej dłoni dar obfity,
 Abyś nie chadzał w niebie bosy
 I stóp nie ranił o błękity!
 Niech duchy, pałac gwiazd pochodnie,
 Powiedzą kiedyś w chmur powodzi,
 Że tam, gdzie na świat szewc przychodzi,
 Bóg przyobuty bywa godnie!

Błogosławiony trud,
 Z którego twórczej mocy
 Powstaje taki but
 Wśród takiej srebrnej nocy!

Dałeś mi, Boże, kes istnienia,
 Co mi na całą starczy droge—
 Przebacz, że wpośród nędzy cienia
 Nic ci, prócz butów, dać nie mogę.
 W szyciu nic nie ma, oprócz szycia,
 Więc szyjmy, póki starczy siły!
 W życiu nic nie ma, oprócz życia,
 Więc żyjmy aż po kres mogiły!

Błogosławiony trud,
 Z którego twórczej mocy
 Powstaje taki but
 Wśród takiej srebrnej nocy!

THE LITTLE COBBLER

The moon-hook is receding through the air,
 Impaled upon a chimney in the mist;
 A lantern tiptoes up the darkness, where
 The street dissolves in murky with a twist.
 A crippled, crazy little cobbler stares
 Into the nightmare maelstrom while he sews
 A pair of shoes to fit the Lord up there;
 His name is Boundless, if you want to know.

Blessed be the trade
 Whose creative power
 Such a shoe hath made
 At this silver hour!

O God of clouds, o God of morning dew,
 An ample hand-made gift for you have I;
 You shall not stub your toes against the blue,
 Nor need to wander barefoot in the sky.
 May spirits burning starry flares presage,
 Sometime within the flood of mist, that God
 Will always conscientiously be shod
 As soon as Cobbler enters on the stage.

Blessed be the trade
 Whose creative power
 Such a shoe hath made
 At this silver hour!

O God, you've given me a taste of living
 Which is enough to last me for the road;
 Forgive me, I'm incapable of giving
 You anything but shoes—I'm poor, you know.
 But even in the gloom of misery,
 I know that life is really nothing but
 The act of living, just like stitchery
 Is merely stitching—so let's live it up!

Blessed be the trade
 Whose creative power
 Such a shoe hath made
 At this silver hour!

Line LITTLE-SHOEMAKER

1 In fogs distances sickle of-moon,
 2 Stuck with-point in crest of-chimney,
 3 Lantern itself on fingers-or-toes climbs
 4 Into darkness, where already ends itself street.
 5 Crazed little-shoemaker, cripple-footed
 6 Sews, stared into of-incubus depths,
 7 Shoes to size of-foot of-God,
 8 What him for name—Uncontained!
 9-10 Blessed toil, from whose creative power
 11-12 Is-born such a-shoe within such silver night!
 13 God of-clouds, God of-dew,
 14 Here-take from my palm gift generous,
 15 So-that not walk-you in sky barefoot
 16 And feet not wound on blues!
 17 May ghosts, burning of-stars torches,
 18 Say sometime in of-clouds flood,
 19 That there, where onto world shoemaker comes,
 20 God beshod usually is dignifiedly!
 21-4 Blessed toil... night!
 25 You-gave me, God, bite of-existence,
 26 Which to-me for entire will-be-enough way—
 27 Forgive, that from-within of-misery shadow
 28 Nothing to-you, besides shoes, give not can-I.
 29 In sewing nothing not there-is, except sewing,
 30 So let-us-sew, as-long-as suffices strength!
 31 In life nothing not there-is, except life,
 32 So let-us live up-to beyond boundary of-mound-of-burial!
 33-4 Blessed toil... night!

NOTES

The common folksy nature of the language of this monologue is contrasted with Romantic addresses to God, which were full of pathos. The surprising tautologies (life nothing but life, etc.) are echoed in other poems ("The Stable," or in the unnamed poem which asks what sails do in the fog: "nothing, except sail"). In *Twórczość Leśmiana*, (pp. 312-14, 338 ff, and 356), Trznadel calls this poem a hymn to activity in spite of quietism and despair in the face of the void. The cobbler performs an unverifiable act: what counts here is the striving, the human effort. Human activity is ethically superior to God's: shoes are doubtless greater than any gift God has to offer. (Cf. "Two Matthews.") Trznadel further considers Leśmian's cripples to represent basic, unadorned humanity irrespective of accidents of birth.

- 1 As in the "Spring Ox," what distances is the item, not the perception.
 5 "Kuternoga," cripple-footed, is a neologism
 8 Religious and Modernist poetry gives God negative attributes.
 14 "Našci," here-take, is an archaic verb of ritual presentation, and has been incorporated into dialect forms.

GARBUS

Mrze garbus dosyć korzystnie:
 W pogodę i w babie lato.
 Garbaty żywot miał istnie,
 I śmierć ma istnie garbatą.

Mrze w drodze, w mgieł upowiciu,
 Jakby baśń trudną rozstrzygał,
 A nic nie robił w tym życiu,
 Jenó garb dźwigał i dźwigał.

Tym garbem zebrał i tańczył,
 Tym garbem dumał i roił,
 Do snu na plecach go niańczył,
 Krwią własną karmił i poił.

A teraz śmierć sobie skarbi,
 W jej mrok wydłużył już szyję,
 Jenó garb jeszcze się garbi,
 Pokątnie żyje i tyje.

Przeżył swojego wielbłąda
 O równą swej tuszy chwilę,
 Nieboszczyk ciemność ogląda,
 A on—te w słońcu motyle.

I do zmarłego dźwigacza
 Powiada, grożąc swą kłódą:
 "Co ten twój upór oznacza,
 Żeś w poprzek legł mi przegrodą?"

Czyś w mgle potracił kolana?
 Czyś snem pomiażdżył swe nogi?
 Po coś mię brał na barana,
 By zgubić drogę w pół drogi?

Czemuś łbem utkwiał na cieniu?
 Z trudem w twych barach się mieszczę!
 Ciekawym, wieczysty leniu,
 Dokąd poniesiesz mnie jeszcze?"

THE HUNCHBACK

In sunshine and Indian summer
 He's dying, expediently—
 His total existence was hunchbacked,
 And so is his death, verily.

As though solving difficult fables,
 Enveloped in fog on the road,
 He's dying—he's always done nothing
 But drag 'round his hunchbacky load.

He'd dance and he'd beg with his back-hump,
 He used it to daydream and brood;
 He'd nurse it to sleep on his shoulders,
 He gave it his own blood for food.

He's treasuring Death, who is murky,
 He's now rubbernecking her way;
 His hump is still hunching, however,
 Still living it up, fat and gay.

Surviving its camel by seconds
 Just fitting its fat to a T,
 The hump eyes the butterfly sunlight
 The hunchback is too dead to see.

It uses its fat as a weapon
 And jeers at the bearer deceased:
 "You're stubborn, man, you're worse than
 useless!"

What is the meaning of this?

Did sleep crush your legs, no-neck idler?
 You lost both your knees in the fog?
 You're taking your hump for a ride here,
 Get moving, you bump on a log!

Your stupid bean's stuck in the shadows;
 So now we have both lost our way?
 And just how much farther exactly
 You planning to take me today?"

- 1-2 Is-dying hunchback rather advantageously: in good-weather and in old-wives' summer.
- 3-4 Humped life he-had verily, and death has verily humped.
- 5-6 Is-dying in road, in of-fog swaddling, as-if fairy-tale difficult judging,
- 7-8 And nothing not did-he in this life, except hump dragged and dragged.
- 9-10 With-this hump he-begged and danced, with-this hump he-pondered and mused,
- 11-12 To sleep on back he-nursed it, with-blood own fed and gave-drink.
- 13-14 And now death to-himself is-gaining, in her murk has-lengthened already his-neck,
- 15-16 But hump still self humps, corneredly lives and fattens.
- 17-18 It-survived its-camel by even to-its fatness while,
- 19-20 Dead-man darkness looks-at, but it—those in sun butterflies.
- 21-2 And to deceased dragger says, threatening with-its log:
- 23-4 "What that your resistance signifies that-you in-across lay down to-me septum?
- 25-6 Did-you in-fog lose knees? Did-you with-sleep-or-dream crush your legs-or-feet?
- 27-8 For what-you me took for ram (= piggyback), in-order-to lose way in halfway?
- 29-30 Why-did-you with-animal-head stick onto shadow? With difficulty in your shoulders I-myself fit!
- 31-2 I-am-curious, forever lazy-one, to-where you-will-carry me still?"

NOTES

Leśmian appears to be anthropomorphizing a universal symbol: we all have a hump which jeers at us and becomes fat at our expense. In a letter to Miriam (UR 239), Leśmian describes Cezary Popławski's life as being "somewhat sprained (people have invented various ways of spraining the various joints of their lives)...." In the Sindbad stories (176-83), the hero graciously carries a thirsty old man piggyback to water, only to find he is a vicious exploiter who has ridden many a man to death. Sindbad escapes death by intoxicating him. The original 1001 Nights story (Burton 434-6) has Sindbad kill the old man, and a footnote on p. 437 refers to a Koranic story: after a person's death, his evil deeds ride him in the form of an ugly old man. In *Twórczość Leśmiana*, p. 178, Trznadel mentions the Eastern topos of a blind man carrying a cripple, a symbol of the symbiosis of body and soul in Eastern philosophy.

Stone (196-9, 203-4) indicates that such anthropomorphization—even the motives of the hump are depicted, it "wants to assert its autonomous existence"—is more than "a poetic device—it has philosophical connotations." Another Leśmian poem, "Ręka" (Hand or Arm, there is no distinction in Polish) symbolizes all human greed and vices, while growing to enormous proportions and assuming an independent existence." Karpowicz 50-1, 119, 130) shows that in hoping to surpass its host, the hump is only one step away from being reincarnated as a demon-ghost, that symbol of dualism and suppressed sincerity.

WIECZOREM

Wieczorem było, wieczorem,
 Gdy zorza gościła nad borem.
 Dzienny ulatniał się skwar.
 Rosa nam spadła na głowy
 I zmierzchem dymił się jar,
 Jar kalinowy.

Z daleka idzie, z daleka
 Ten mrok, co kwiatów się zrzeka.
 Gdy, płosząc ospałą woń,
 Chłód powiał nad pola zżęte,
 O moją zagrzałaś skroń
 Dłonie zziębnięte.

Nie wolno patrzeć, nie wolno
 Bez piesszczot w ciemność dokolną!
 Zbłąkanych w obszarach pól
 Nie złączy żaden sen złoty,
 Ni lęk, ni zgroza, ni ból,
 Nic—prócz piesszczoty!

IN THE EVENING

Twilight, yes, it was twilight,
 Dying sunset-grove highlight,
 Daytime scorching wore doen.
 Dew was sprinkling our brows,
 Canyon steamed dusky brown,
 Guelder-rose boughs.

In the distance, the distance,
 Dusky flowerless mist-dance,
 Wind-cooled crewcut terrain.
 Startled drowsified fragrance;
 And on my forehead inflamed
 You warmed your hands.

Darkness, darkness befuddles
 Starers if they don't cuddle!
 Those who are lost in the plain
 Won't be united by dreaming,
 Nor by their fear, horror, pain—
 Only by clinging.

Line IN-EVENING

- 1 In-evening was-it, in-evening,
 2 When aurora extinguished above forest.
 3 Daily evaporated-self sear,
 4 Dew to-us fell on heads
 5 And with-dusk steamed self ravine,
 6 Ravine of guelder-roses.
 7 From faraway comes, from faraway
 8 That dusk, which of-flowers itself renounces.
 9 When, scaring beslept fragrance,
 10 Coolness winded above fields cut-down,
 11 Against my you heated forehead
 12 Palms bechilled.
 13 Not is-allowed to look, not-allowed
 14 Without caress into darkness around!
 15 Lost in expanse of-fields
 16 Not will-unite any dream golden,
 17 Nor fear, nor horror, nor pain,
 18 Nothing—except caress!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 517, this was first published in "Myśl Polska," Warsaw, 1918. I believe it also inspired Julian Tuwim's "Śłopiewnie," op. 46b, set to music by Szymanowski, a melodious nonsense rhyme I have translated as follows (SR-160, Spectrum-Uni/Pro, Harriman, New York): "Creeping guelder-roses, / Minions in the maples, / Service-tree severest, / Redden as you're able! // Blush, my dear blueberries, / Mulling over mullein, / Forests are a fiasco, / Maidens oh so sullen! // Skulking comes a stranger, / Darting glancing glozes, / Flawless flame the gorgeous / Creeping guelder-roses! Hey!"

I also consider it an example of Leśmian's waxing pessimism and ethical humanism: he realizes that the only thing making life bearable is a loving relationship with another person. In "Oczy w niebiosach," closed eyes are exhorted to help each other, much as caresses are considered the redeemers in this poem.

- 4-6 In the original, dew falls on the people's heads, and the guelder-roses are a canyonfull, not just boughs. Rhyme and metrics caused the translator to take poetic license in changing heads and canyons to brows and boughs.
 12 Polish does not distinguish between hands and arms, but has a separate word, "palms," for the inside of a person's hands.
 13-4 Polish double negatives do not cancel each other.

SCHADZKA I POZNIONA

Pójdziemy śladem cienia i szelestu
 Po ścieżce, która wzdłuż rosą połyska.
 Popód krzewami sztywnego agrestu
 Pachną na skńcu świeże kretowiska.

W powiędłych liściach, pokurczonych chłodem,
 Lśnią srebrne resztki wczorajszej ulewy,
 Nad zapuszczonym od dawna ogrodem
 Słychać gawronów trzepoty i śpiewy.

Obok jabłoni—przypadkowa sosna
 Swe igły w bładym zanurza błękicie.
 O, jakże prętko przeminęła wiosna
 Pozostawiając przelęknione życie!

Coraz to mocniej otulasz się w chustce,
 W której pierś twoja jak w gnieździe się chowa,
 Trzeba nam było rzec dawniej te słowa,
 Co dzisiaj zabrzmia—spóźnione i puste!

Trzeba nam było spleść dłonie uparte
 I z zamkniętymi iść w słońce oczyma!
 Dzisiaj te oczy zostaną—otwarte,
 Dzisiaj się warga w pół drogi zatrzyma....

LATE DATE

Along the footpath lined in glitter-dew,
 We'll follow trails of rustle and of shade;
 Beneath the stiff and spiny shrubs exudes
 The fragrance of fresh molehills in the glade.
 The silver relics of a yestern rain
 Gleam inside leaves that shrivelled in the chill,
 And somewhere in the derelict terrain
 The rooks are all aflutter and atrill.
 Near apple-trees, an incidental pine
 Immerses needles in the pale-blue air.
 Oh, Spring has quickly fled and left behind
 A new, bewildered life that's very scared.
 You keep swaddling deeper in your shawl
 Nesting round your breast. We should have said
 Long ago the words that now sound small,
 Speechified and empty, late and dead.
 We should have braided stubborn hands together
 And closed our eyes and marched into the sun!
 Today our eyes are open wide, however,
 And lips go mute before their work is done.

- 1 We-will-go on-trail of-shadow and of-rustle
 2 Along path, which lengthwise with-dew glitters.
 3 Under bushes of-stiff gooseberry
 4 Smell in sun fresh molehills.
 5 In withered leaves, cramped-up by coolness,
 6 Glisten silver leftovers of-yesterday's downpour,
 7 Above abandoned from long-time garden
 8 Can be heard rooks' flutters and singings.
 9 Next-to apple-tree—fortuitous pine
 10 Her needles in pale submerges blue.
 11 Oh, how quickly passed-by spring
 12 Leaving-behind frightened life!
 13 Ever more strongly you-swathe yourself in kerchief,
 14 In which breast your as in nest itself hides,
 15 Was-necessary for-us to-have-said earlier these words,
 16 Which today will-resound—belated and empty!
 17 Was-necessary for-us to braid palms stubborn
 18 And with closed go in sun eyes!
 19 Today these eyes will-remain—open,
 20 Today itself lip in half of-way will-stop.

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript, p. 517, this poem was originally published in "Myśl Polska," Warsaw, 1918. The two versions are identical except for one slight variation in punctuation.

Intimations of Leśmian's pessimism already abound: frightened regret is beginning to replace the relatively insouciant sensuality of "In the Field" or the "Raspberry Brushwood" cycle. In his Russian cycle "Moon Intoxication" (UR 83-93, 1907), Leśmian indicated that the lovers' hands tremble as though they belonged to someone else; they feel as if others had also had a date at the same nightly window, but that it is too late for worry now. Similarly, in "Spowiedź" (Confession, UR p. 106, 1915), Leśmian indicates that he misses his beloved's hands in his dreams.

- 4 Molehills are pleasantly fragrant in this poem, which shows a departure from convention, wherein molehills are distasteful.
 10 The pine immerses her branches upward, which sounds like a contradiction in terms that, like many of Leśmian's unexpected images and comparisons, turns out to be quite logical when viewed from the angle of childlike, impressionistic wonder.
 17- See the notes on "Oczy w niebiosach" and the Polish word for palms (as distinct from hands/arms) in "In the Evening," supra.

Dziś w naszego spotkania rocznicę
 Pozawrzemy szczelnie okiennice,
 By powtórzyć wśród nocnej ciemnoty
 Dawne nasze, najpierwsze pieszczoty.
 Dawne słowa z dni pierwszych kochania,
 Chociaż każde dziś ustom się wzbrania,
 Każde snem się nieśmiałym kolebie,
 Nas niepewne i niepewne siebie.
 Lecz, stłumiwszy nieufność rozsądku,
 Powtórzymy wszystkie od początku.

Today's the anniversary of the day we met,
 So we're reverting to the way we used to pet—
 Early former hugs beneath the cloak of night,
 We shall soon be closing all the shutters tight.
 Former words from early loving-days, although
 Now they never pass our lips—but even so,
 Each is dozing shyly in its cradle-dream,
 Not quite trusting us—nor even itself, it seems.
 But all suspiciousness of reason let's suppress
 And start anew with every word and each caress.

Today in of-our meeting anniversary
 We-will-close tightly shutters,
 In-order-to repeat within nightly darkness
 Former our, very-first caresses.
 Former words from days of-first loving,
 Although each-one today to-lips itself forbids,
 Each-one with-sleep-or-dream itself shy rocks,
 Of-us unsure and unsure of-self.
 But, repressing, untrustingness of-reason,
 We-will-repeat all from beginning.

WYZNANIE

Nie rań pogardą tej obcej dziewczyny,
 Jej czar jest inny niżeli twój czar.
 Tyś memu ciału dreszcz w świecie jedyny,
 A ona ust mi chce oddać maliny—
 Czyżaj dłoń zdoła odtrącić ten dar?

Wszak tobie pierwszej tę miłość wyznaję—

Ona nic nie wie, choć czeka i śni.

Szedłbym tak do niej, jak w lasy i w gaje,

A odkąd znam ją, wciąż mi się wydaje,

Że policzone są wiosny mej dni!

Wargi ma falą w uśmiechu ozdobne,

Jaśnistym włosom polśnioną ma skroń,

Spojrzenia—pilne i z lekka żałobne,

Dłonie do twoich niechający podobne—

Pieszcząc, pomyślę, że pieszczę twą dłoń...

Jej zakłęb szeptu nie zmieniają mnie wcale,
 Jej pocałunek nie rozłączy nas!
 Pozwól mi odejść w ust tamtych korale,
 Bym lkał przez chwilę, bym kochał niestale
 Raz jeszcze jeden, ach, tylko ten raz!

CONFESSION

Don't wound yonder stranger with scornful lip-quiver,
 Her charms are quite different from yours, but don't jeer;
 My body knows you as the world's only shiver,
 But she's got red lips, is a generous giver—
 And who could refuse such a gift with a sneer?

My love I confess to you first, but refusing

To tell her, though she waits and dreams about me.

She doesn't know that I would follow her, cruising;

Since meeting her, I simply cannot stop musing

About how my youth-days are numbered indeed.

Her smile is a wave ornamental, ethereal,

Her forehead is glistening with light golden bangs,

Her gaze is attentive and slightly funereal,

The shape of her hands to your own is so near, I'll

Keep thinking, caressing, I'm holding your hands...

Her low incantations can't change me a line,

She can't disengage me from you with her kiss;

I shed short-term sobs at her corals, and I'm

Athirst for a trifle-flirt, just one more time;

So grant me a detour to those other lips.

Line CONFESSIO

1 Not wound with-scorn that unknown girl,
 2 Her spell is other than your spell.
 3 You to-my body shudder in world only,
 4 And she lips to-me wants to-give-back raspberries—
 5 Whose palm can repudiate that gift?
 6 Truly to-you first that love I-confess—
 7 She nothing not knows, though waits and dreams.
 8 I-would-go thus to her, as in forests and in groves,
 9 And since I-know her, always to-me it seems,
 10 That counted are spring's my days!
 11 Lips has-she with-wave in smile ornamental,
 12 With-light hair beglistened has-she forehead,
 13 Glances—diligent and of lightly mournful,
 14 Palms to yours without-meaning-to similar—
 15 Caressing, I-will-think, that I-caress your palm...
 16 Of-her conjurations whispers not will-change me at-all,
 17 Her kiss not will-separate us!
 18 Allow me to-go in of-lips those corals,
 19 So-I-would sob for moment, so-I-would love inconstantly,
 20 Time one more, oh, just this one!

NOTES

The original alternates between feminine and masculine rhymes, and I tried to keep this alternation until the last stanza, at which time I used masculine rhymes throughout because the initial playfulness had been replaced by outright insistence. M. Jastrun, in "Pierwsze spotkanie z Leśmianem," Poezja i rzeczywistość p. 231, points out that the innocence and simplicity of this poem are a sham; it is actually perversely erotic, presenting the rival with all the charms of the poet's art.

Pankowski (110-15) considers this poem an example of the link between cruelty and erotica in Leśmian, and cites further examples. In "Pragnienie" (The Wish), the hero wants to live amorally and unconsciously, biting his lover's breasts; in "Róże" (The Roses), a knight makes his wife witness his spectral adultery with sadistic pleasure; and in Sindbad, there are several scenes of cruelty and sadism not present in the 1001 Nights, e.g. Amina's punishment by her husband is rendered erotic and sadistic.

In Samobójstwo..., p. 19, Artur Sandauer indicates that the interlocutor represents Dora (the dark-haired girl from "Paltry") and an imaginary lover (as the nonexistent blonde girl in "Pan Błyszczyski"). He also considers this a reversal of "Migoń and Jawrzon," rivals with the sex-roles reversed: in both cases, a real person must compete with a spirit.

Często w duszy mi dzwoni pieśń, wyłkana w żałobie,
 O tych dwojgu ludzieńkach, co kochał się w sobie,
 Lecz w ogrodzie szept pierwszy miłosnego wyznania
 Stał się dla nich przymusem do na głego rozstania.
 Nie widzieli się długo z czyjejs woli i winy,
 A czas ciągle upływał—bezpowrotny, jedyny.
 A gdy zeszedli się, dłonie wyciągają: po kwiecie,
 Zachorowali tak bardzo, jak nikt do ąd na świecie!
 Pod jaworem—dwa łóżka, pod jaworem—dwa cienie,
 Pod jaworem ostatnie, beznadziejne spojrzenie.
 I pomarli oboje bez pieszczoty, bez grzechu,
 Bez lzy szczęścia na oczach, bez jednego uśmiechu.
 Ust ich czerwien zagasiła w zimnym śniegierci fiolecie,
 I pobledli tak bardzo, jak nikt dotąd na świecie!
 Chcieli jeszcze się kochać poza własną mogiłą,
 Ale miłość umarła, już miłości nie było.
 I poklękli spóźnieni u niedoli swej proga,
 By się modlić o wszystko, lecz nie było już Boga.
 Więc się resztą dotrwali aż do wiosny, do lata,
 By powrócić na ziemię—lecz nie było już świata.

TWO HUMBLE HUMANS

My soul is oft a-sobbing with a song of sorrow smothered
 About two humble humans in love with one another.

Their amorous confession first whispered in the garden
 Turned out to be the factor that forced their sudden parting.

They pined alone for ages, for other people's reasons;
 Time trickled on relentless, immutable the seasons.

When they were wrenched asunder, their fingers touching flora,
 They sickened both so badly as none had done before them.

And there beneath the maple, two shadows and two beds;
 And there beneath the maple, despairing glances met.

Without embracing ever, sinless they expired,
 Without a tear of joy, and without a single smile.

Their ruby lips paled purple in death's all-quenching cold,
 Nobody's been that ashen before or since, I'm told.

They longed to linger loving beyond their own demise;
 There was no love to love with, for love had also died.

They knelt down at their threshold of overdue despair,
 But God was also gone, and no one heard their prayer.

They managed to endure until summer had arrived,
 And tried to visit earth, but the world had not survived.

Line TWO INSIGNIFICANT-PEOPLE (TWO HUMBLE HUMANS)

1 Often in soul to-me rings song, sobbed-out in sorrow,
 2 About those two insignificant-people, who loved themselves in themselves.
 3 But in garden whisper first of-amorous confession
 4 Became itself for them compulsion of sudden separation.
 5 Not saw-they themselves long for someone's will and fault,
 6 And time constantly flowed-off—unreturning, unique.
 7 And when walked-apart they, palms reaching-out after flower,
 8 They-became-ill so very-much, like no-one so-far in world!
 9 Under maple—two beds, under maple—two shadows,
 10 Under maple last, without-hope glance.
 11 And died-away both without caress, without sin,
 12 Without tear of-happiness on eyes, without one smile.
 13 Lips theirs redness extinguished in cold of-death violet,
 14 And they-paled so much, as no-one till-then on world!
 15 They-wanted still to love beyond their-own mound (= burial mound),
 16 But love died, already love not was.
 17 And they-knelt late at of-adversity their threshold,
 18 In-order-to themselves to-pray for everything, but not was already God.
 19 So with-strength leftover they-survived until to spring, to summer,
 20 In-order-to return onto earth—but not was already world.

NOTES

According to Szczerbowski's biography, p. 23 ff., this was based on an old folk-song reprinted in O. Kolberg's 1857 collection of Polish folk songs, p. 148 (Pieśni ludu polskiego, Warsaw); two people fall in love and sicken when they cannot see each other. "Under maple" is similar to a folk song documented by Z. Gloger in Starodawne dumy i pieśni, p. 52 (Ancient Dumas and Songs). I personally think it sounds like an uncomfortably eerie premonition of the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust.

Pankowski (74-5) calls this the "structure of annihilation"—no matter what man tries to do, it is too late. A similar situation is present in "Puru-rawa and Urwasi," wherein love is defined as a series of exclusions and negations culminating in supreme nothingness. Karpowicz (172, 181, 79-91) states that one by one, the Archimedean support point eludes the lover's feet until they reach the point of departure, i. e. zero existence; however, he blames the sequential disappearances upon amorous desire, which wants to possess and thus kills. Unfortunately, however, death does not kill the longing; it does not abolish the feeling, only the partner, and is thus a state of consciousness known as disappointment. Eugeniusz Czaplejewicz, in "Gra miłości..." 248-9 (Głowiński, ed., Studia z teorii i historii poezji), indicates that these lovers are losers even after death, consumed by unfulfilled longing; the poem is thus not about love, but about the impossibility of love. "Niedopita czara" (UR 54) also relates the story of a knight and his lady separated by nasty people but united by death, who now haunt a castle with their belated love, as they did not even have time to kiss.

ŚNIEG

Pamiętam ów ruchliwie rozbiyskany szron
 I śniegu ociążałe w gałęziach nawiesie,
 I jego nieustanny z drzew na ziemię zron,
 I uczucie, że w słońcu razem z śniegiem skrzę się.

A on ciągle narastał tu w kopiec, tam — w stos,
 I drzewom białych czupryn co raz to dokładał,
 Ślepił oczy i lechtał podbródek i nos,
 I fruwał — i tkwił w próżni — i bujał, i padał.

I pamiętam ów niski, wpółzapadły dom,
 I za szybami włóczek różnobarwne wzory.
 Kto tam mieszkał? Pytanie — czy człowiek, czy gnom?
 Byłem dzieckiem, Śnieg bielą zasnuwał przestwory.

Dotknąłem dłonią szyby, mimo strachu mąk,
 I uczułem ślad hojny, niby czarów zbytek.
 Tą dłonią dotykałem mych sprzętów i ksiąg,
 I niańki, by ją oddać na baśni użytek...

Serce marło, gdym w dłoni unosił ten ślad
 W ciszę śniegu, co, prosząc, weselił się w niebie.
 Śnieg ustał — i minęło odtąd tyle lat,
 Ile trzeba, by ślady zatracić do siebie.

Jakże pragnąłbym dzisiaj, gdy swe bóle znam,
 Stać, jak wówczas, przed domu wpółzapadłą bramą
 I widzieć, jak śnieg ziemię obielea ten sam,
 Śnieg, co fruwa i buja, i pada tak samo.

Z jakimż płaczem bym zajrzał — niepoprawny śniarz —
 Do szyby, by swą młodość odgrzebać w jej szronie —
 Z jakąż mocą bym tulił uznojoną twarz
 W te dawne, com je stracił, w te dziecięce dłonie!

THE SNOW

I recollect the glitter-shifting frost, the snow
That always seemed to trickle down the trunks of trees,
And which would heavify the branches long ago;
I'd feel that it and I were sparkling in the breeze.

And then the white would grow to mounds, and hills would rise,
And bulk was added to the maples hoary hair;
It tickled chins and noses and it blinded eyes;
It flutter-fell abundant, then halted in mid-air.

I now recall a certain low, ramshackle home,
The multicolor crewel patterns in the place.
Who used to live there? Question—human being or gnome?
I was a child, and snow could cover boundless space.

In spite of suffer-fear, my palms would touch the glass;
I'd feel a generous track, an excess of some spell,
Then touch my books and furniture so as to pass
The magic on, and then I'd touch my nurse as well.

My heart would stop whenever I took my mark outside
Into the silent white joy-sifting in the sky,
Until the snowflakes stopped—for just sufficient time
To lose track of one's self, for now I can't find mine.

I'm well acquainted with my pain today, and wish
I could return to that ramshackle gate again,
And watch the snowflakes dancing in an ample swish
Before they blanket earth as white as they did then.

And how this silly dreamer would cry while peering in,
Attempting to re-scrape his youth from frosty panes—
How fiercely would I bury my weary face again
Into my childish hands—if they could be regained!

Line SNOW

1 I-remember that mobilely glittered-up hoarfrost
 2 And of-snow beweighted in branches hangings,
 3 And its unceasing from trees to earth running-down,
 4 And feeling, that in sun together with snow I-sparkle.
 5 And it continuously grew here to mound, there—to pile,
 6 And of-trees white tops-of-heads from time to-time added,
 7 Blinded eyes and tickled chin and nose,
 8 And flew-about—and stuck in void—and rioted, and fell.
 9 And I-remember that low, half-fallen-together house,
 10 And beyond panes wollen-yarn's many-colored patterns.
 11 Who there lived? Question—whether human, whether gnome?
 12 I-was child, Snow with-white covered infinities.
 13 I-touched with-palm panes, in-spite-of fear of sufferings,
 14 And felt trace abundant, as-though of-spells excess.
 15 With-that palm I-touched my furniture and books,
 16 And nurse, to her return for fairy-tales' use.
 17 Heart died, when-I in-palm would-carry-away this mark
 18 Into silence of-snow which, sifting, rejoiced itself in sky.
 19 Snow stopped—and passed since-then so-many years
 20 As is-necessary, in-order-to trace lose of oneself.
 21 How I-would-thirst today, when my pains I-know,
 22 To-stand, like formerly, before of-house half-fallen-together gate
 23 And see, how snow earth whitens the same,
 24 Snow, which flutters and riots, and falls just the-same.
 25 With what weeping I-would look—incorrigible dreamer—
 26 Into windowpane, in-order-to my youth dig-back-out in its hoarfrost—
 27 With what power I-would snuggle toilsweated face
 28 Into those former, which I have-lost, into those childish palms!

NOTES

The child feels he is glittering along with the snow. In "Wiedźma" (The Hag, Klechdy polskie 95), the snow "glittered ethereally and elusively" in "starry diamonds." In "Pośmiertna w głębi jezior maska" (Studia, p. 328), Ireneusz Opacki indicates that reflections in windows are where the former, lost "dead state" can be found, as they are an attempt to eternalize, like reflections of clouds in puddles in "Po deszczu" (After the Rain).

Papierkowski (125-131) indicates that "nawiesie" and "zron" (hangings and running-down) are neologisms.

The final stanza can be compared to Leśmian's "Mroźny ranek" (1902) (Chilly Morning), wherein the protagonist presses his forehead to a transparent windowpane and watches a disappearing sled leaving behind its track, i. e. "half its dream."

DWAJ SKAZAŃCY

Widziałem dwóch skazańców, co na swym uboczu
 Wysłuchali wyroku pod bagnatów strażą
 I na tłum zgromadzony patrzyli bez oczu,
 Jak ślepiec, kiedy zmierzchu wypatruje twarzą.

Jeden z nich, licząc jakieś ubiegłe godziny,
 O widzenie się z ojcem poprosił nieśmiało.
 A drugi wnet zawołał: "Ja nie mam rodziny!"
 A miał ją, lecz mieć nie chciał... Tak mu się zdawało.

Śnili teraz, że chata, niegdyś ludna, traci
 Ich ciała, bezpowrotnie wyszłe z jej alkierza.
 Czuli próżnię na miarę wzrostu swych postaci,
 Jak klatka, z której nagle wypłoszono zwierza.

Jeden z nich, zapatrzonej w strzęp własnego cienia,
 Chciwie wody zażądał wargą obolałą,
 A drugi wnet zawołał: "Ja nie mam pragnienia!"
 A miał je, lecz mieć nie chciał... Tak mu się zdawało.

TWO CONVICTS

Once I saw two convicts listening to their
 Execution sentence in bayonet embrace,
 Giving crowds of gawkers a vacant eyeless stare,
 Like a blind man watching the twilight with his face.

One of them was keeping track of time, it seemed—
 Timidly requested his father one last time.
 "I haven't got a family!" the other convict screamed.
 He had, but didn't want one—for thus he was inclined.

They dreamed about their cottage, where people used to live;
 Their bodies it was losing quite irretrievably.
 They felt a void the size of their figures fugitive,
 Like cages that are emptied of fauna suddenly.

The convict who was staring at his shadow-shred
 Desired a drink of water, his lips were sore and dry;
 The other interrupted, "I have no thirst, I said!"
 He did, but didn't want to—for thus he was inclined.

Line TWO CONDEMNED-MEN (TWO CONVICTS)

1 I-saw two condemned-men, that on their out-of-the-way
 2 Listened-out sentence under of-bayonets guard
 3 And onto crowd collected looked without eyes,
 4 Like blind-man, when dusk he-spies-out with-face.
 5 One of them, counting some passed hours,
 6 For seeing himself with father asked shyly.
 7 And second immediately yelled: "I not have family!"
 8 And had it, but to-have not wanted... Thus to-him it seemed.
 9 They-dreamed now, that hut, formerly inhabited, loses
 10 Their bodies, irrevocably gone-out of its alcove.
 11 They-felt vacuum in measure of-height of-their forms,
 12 Like cage, from which suddenly were-scared-out animals.
 13 One of them, stared into tatter of-own shadow,
 14 Greedily water demanded with-lip bepained,
 15 And second immediately called: "I not have thirst!"
 16 And had it, but to-have not wanted... Thus to-him it seemed.

NOTES

This poem is an example of Lesmian's preoccupation with point of view and with negativity: his descriptions of what does not exist are disturbingly concrete.

In "Cmy" (The Moths), the absence of a single mouse cannot be "plugged up" by anything else. Here, as in the case of Shakespeare's Constance mourning the death of her child, grief fills the space formerly occupied by the living person.

ŁĄKA - I

Czy pamiętasz, jak głowę wynurzyłeś z boru
 Aby nazwać mnie Łaką pewnego wieczoru?
 Zawołana po imieniu,
 Raz przejrzałam się w strumieniu—
 I odtąd poznaliśmy się wśród reszty przestworu.

Przyszły do mnie motyle, utrudzone lotem,
 Przyszły pszczoły z kadzidłem i mirra, i złotem,
 Przyszła sama Nieskończoność,
 By popatrzeć w mą zieloność—
 Popatrzyła i odejść nie chciała z powrotem...

Kto całował mak w zbożu—nie zna niedoli!
 Trawa z ziemi wyrwana pachnie, lecz nie boli.
 Kocham stopy twoje bose,
 Że deptały kruchą rosę,
 Rozróżniając na oślepie chabry od kąkoli.

Niechże sen twój wędrowny zielenią poprzedzę,
 Weź kwiaty w jedną rękę, a w drugą weź miedzę,
 Połóż kwiaty na rozstaju,
 Zwiłżnij miedzę w tym ruczaju,
 Co wie o mnie, że trawą brzeg jego nawiedzę.

Już słońce mimochodem do rowu napływa,
 Skrzy się łopuch kosmaty i bujna pokrzywa—
 Jeno pomyśl, że ci wolno
 Kochać łąkę i mysz polną,
 I przepiórkę, co z głuchym trzepotem się zrywa!

Idzie miłość po kwiatach—wadzi o twe ciało,
 Zważaj, by ci przed czasem w słońcu nie zemdląło.
 W mojej rosie, w moim znoju
 Pod dostatkiem masz napoju
 Dla wargi, przeciążonej purpurą dojrzałą.

Cień twej głowy do moich przybłąkał się cieni.
 Wiem, że w oczach nie zdzierżysz tej wszystkiej zieleni,
 A co w oku się nie zmieści,
 To się w duszy rozszeleści!
 Jeszcze dusza ci nieraz żywcem się odmieni.

Parna ziemia przez kwiaty żar dzienny wydycha.
 Uschły motyl zeszywniał wśród jaskrów kielicha—
 Oczarujmy się nawzajem,
 Zaskoczeni nagłym Majem—
 Maj się chyli ku nocy i miłość nacicha...

You peered out of the forest one late afternoon
And called me Meadow—you remember, I presume?
 When I heard that name-selection,
 I glanced at my stream-reflection—
Now spot myself within creation thanks to you.

And I took in the weary-winged butterflies;
With gold and frankincense and myrrh the bees arrived;
 Then the great Infinity
 Visited my greenery;
She loved it, wouldn't leave, she wanted to abide.

You'll never fathom grief by kissing meadow-blooms,
For grass torn from the ground is painless and perfumed.
 Cornflow'r, bullweed, you can sense
 That there is a difference—
I love your bare feet stepping on the fragile dew.

I'll greenly introduce your wander-reverie;
You balance blooms and balk—one in each hand, you see.
 At the crossroads drop the flowers,
 Let the Brook the balk beshower;
His banks I'll green-infest, that's what he knows of me.

The swimming sun has happened on the ditchy dale,
And furry burdocks sparkle, nettles billow-flail;
 You may love—how very nice!—
 Dragonflies and meadow-mice,
As well as muffled flutters of a startled quail.

Love bumps into your body while ambling in the blooms;
Take care the sun won't make you prematurely swoon!
 And your mouth, though overburdened
 With this ripe and royal purple,
Will find sufficient drink in Meadow's sweat and dew.

The shadow of your head has wandered into mine;
You simply cannot grasp my green with human eyes.
 What the eyes can't comprehend
 Rustles through the soul again!
Your soul will often be transformed while you're alive.

Through flowers the earth is steaming sultriness of noon;
A shrivelled moth has stiffened in buttercup cocoon;
 Startled by the sudden May,
 Let us charm each other, hey!
Quiescent now is Love, and May leans toward Moon.

Line MEADOW

1 Do you-remember, how head you-emerged from forest,
 2 In-order-to call me Meadow certain evening?
 3-4 Called by name, / Once I-looked-at-myself in brook—
 5 And since-then I-will recognize self among rest-of infinity.
 6 Came to me butterflies, wearied by-flight,
 7 Came bees with frankincense and myrrh, and gold,
 8-9 Came same Infinity, / So-as-to look in my green—
 10 Looked and to-go not wanted to return-back...
 11 Who kissed poppy in wheat—not will-know misery!
 12 Grass from earth torn smells, but does-not pain.
 13-4 I-love feet your bare, / That they-stepped-on brittle dew,
 15 Distinguishing in blindly bullweed from cornflower.
 16 May sleep-or-dream yours wandering with-green I-precede
 17 Take flowers in one hand, and in other take balk,
 18-9 Lay flowers on crossroads, / Moisten balk in this brook,
 20 Who knows of me, that with-grass bank his I-will-haunt.
 21 Already sun casually to ditch is-swimming-closer,
 22 Sparkles itself burdock hairy and abundant stinging-nettle—
 23-4 Only think-about, that to-you is allowed/ To-love dragonfly and
 mouse of-field,
 25 And quail, which with deaf flutter herself tears-upward!
 26 Walks love about flowers—interferes against your body,
 27 Be-mindful, that to-you before time in sun not faints.
 28-9 In my dew, in my sweat, / For sufficiency you-have drink,
 30 For lip, overweighted with-purple ripe.
 31 Shadow of-your head to my has-erred shadows.
 32 I-know, that in eyes not you-hold-out all of this green,
 33-4 And what in eye itself not fits, / That itself in soul rustles!
 35 Still soul to-you not-once living will-self transform.
 36 Steaming earth through flowers heat of-day breathes-out.
 37 Dried-up butterfly stiffened through chalices of-buttercup—
 38-9 Let-us-charm selves reciprocally, / Surprised by-sudden May—
 40 May itself leans toward night and love becomes-quiet...

NOTES

As in "Ballada bezludna" and "Pan Błyszczczyński," this poem documents a creation so palpable that divine forces stop to admire it. The meadow wants to achieve consciousness and selfhood, but only man can do it for her. Artur Sandauer (*Samobójstwo...* 39) says that in presenting self-creation and self-liquidation as existential actions, the poet behaves like nature. As in Buber's "I and Thou," there is a mutual respect here. In "Słowo i pieśń" in *Studia* (184-5), Głowiński states that in accordance with symbolism, names virtually call things into existence; naming is a creative act, a form of word magic: the word has access to secret spheres not accessible to reason. Cf. Genesis, or Mircea Eliade's *Mythes, rêves et mystères* p. 255, wherein living beings do not begin existing until two brothers name them.

NAPOJ CIENISTY (1936)

SIPPING SHADE

DRINK SHADOWY/SHADY

NOTES

Although "cienisty" literally means shadowy or shady, it was decided to circumvent the adjective and simply reverse it with the noun in order to avoid the overwhelming secondary associations with the criminal underworld. Leśmian was, rather, referring to the relaxed coolness of death.

According to Jan Kott and Jan Parandowski, the original title of this volume was "Strange and Funny Posthumous Customs." Leśmian thought we knew more about life after death than about real life, which cannot be apprehended, while we at least have imaginings about the next one. This information was found in Trznadel, Twórczość Leśmiana, p. 285.

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 519 ff., Leśmian had planned to publish this third volume of his poetry in 1934. In an interview with Edward Boyé (SL, p. 502), the poet indicated that this would not be a continuation of The Meadow; rather than tour the universe from the floral greenery side, he was planning to enter it by way of sorrow.

The volume was published by J. Morkowicz and his "Pod Znakiem Poetów" publishing house; 1200 numbered copies were produced.

PIERWSZA SCHADZKA

Pierwsza schadzka za grobem! Rozwalona brama.
 Stąpaj pilnie!... Ucałuj ten po drodze krzak.
 Czy to—ty?—Już zmieniona, a jeszcze—ta sama?
 Upewnij!... Wzrok mi słabnie... Podaj dłonią znak!

Nie ma znaków! Od dawna już w nic się rozwiay!
 Nie ma żadnych upewnień! Nikt nie wierzy w nas!...
 Zmilkły śmiechy w ciemnościach i płacze ustały.
 W pajęczynie po kątach zagnieździł się—czas...

Zejdź z drogi—ćmom i kwiatom!... Postroń się złudzeniom!
 Chyba najrzeczywistszy jest ten—siana stóg...
 Czemu płaczesz?—Dla ludzi, oddanych istnieniom,
 Ból nasz—ledwo jest dreszczem księżycowych smug.

FIRST TRYST

To ruined gates, to our post-graveyard date we came.
 Step carefully, my dear; in passing, kiss this vine.
 And is it you? Already changed, but still the same?
 Go check, my eyes are failing... give some sort of sign!

There are no signs! They nothing-scattered long ago!
 And no assurances—no one believes in us!
 The cries have stopped and laughter hushed in dark-
 ness, so
 Time built a lair amid the corner-cobweb dust.

Defer to moths and buds! Be chary of appearance,
 The realest being this haystack here!—Why do you weep?
 For all those people at the mercy of existence,
 Our pain is just a shiver of a moonbeam sweep.

Line FIRST TRYST

- 1 First tryst beyond grave Demolished gate.
 2 Step intently!... Kiss th it on way bush.
 3 Is that—you?—Already changed, but still—the same?
 4 Make-certain!... Sight to-me weakens... Give with-palm sign!
 5 Not are signs! From long-ago already into nothing selves dispelled!
 6 Not are no certainties! Nobody not believes in us!
 7 Became-silent laughs in darkneses and weepings stopped,
 8 In cobwebs around corners; nested itself—time....
 9 Go-down from path—to-moths and to-flowers! Distance-yourself
 to-illusions!
 10 Probably most-real is that—of-hay stack...
 11 Why weep-you?—For people, given-up to-existence,
 12 Pain ours—barely is shiver of-moon's trail.

NOTES

In Zaświat przedstawiony (pp. 187-8), M. Głowiński indicates that Leśmian is able to reify time: here, it builds nests in the cobwebs in the corners.

In Kwestia gustu (pp. 168-9), Adam Ważyk points out that in accordance with the "Schauerromantik" tradition, non-living beings can speak and exist, but the tradition becomes grim when the context is erotic. Apparitions love, eat, drink, but are imprisoned in a tunnel of mirrors, trying to become something other than reflection. In "Za grobem" (Beyond the Grave), the poet indicates that one wishes to become something else in the otherworld.

TAJEMNICA

Nikt nas nie widział— chyba te ćmy,
 Co puszyścieją w przelocie.
 I tak nam słodko, że tylko—my
 Wiemy o naszej pieśczoce.

Młodsza twa siostra, zrywając wrzos,
 Śledziła szept nasz daleki...
 I, mówiąc z nami, ucisza głos—
 A milknąc—spuszcza powieki.

I po ogrodzie mknie wzdłuż i wszerz,
 Zaprzepaszczona w swym śpiewie!
 I tak nam słodko, że ona też
 Wie o tym, o czym nikt nie wie...

THE SECRET

Nobody saw us, except for those moths
 Fleeting across in their fluffiness;
 And we're ecstatic together, because
 Nobody knows of our sweet caress.

Your younger sister is harvesting heath,
 Tailing our whispers from far away,
 Lowering her voice when the three of us speak—
 And when she hushes, she drops her gaze.

Then she goes garden-fleeting about,
 Forward and sideways in song-abyss!
 And it's so sweet that she too found out
 Our little secret, our hidden kiss.

Line SECRET

1 Nobody us not saw—unless these moths,
 2 Which fluffify in through-flight.
 3 And thus to-us is-sweet, that only—we
 4 Know of our caress.
 5 Younger your sister, tearing-off heath(er),
 6 Followed whisper our far-away...
 7 And, speaking with us, silences voice—
 8 And saying-nothing—lowers eyelids.
 9 And around garden flits lengthwise and widthwise,
 10 Ravine-lost in own song!
 11 And to-us sweet, that she also
 12 Knows of that, of which nobody not-knows...

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript, this poem was first published in "Tydzień Polski" (The Polish Weekly), Warsaw, 1922 (April 15), as part of an erotic cycle. The original printing had no title and indicated slight differences in punctuation.

In "Pośmiertna..." in Studia (p. 309 ff.), Ireneusz Opacki indicates that this is a public secret, the title therefore probably humorous. But nobody is hurt. This is the real world, with real people familiarizing themselves with it.

Karpowicz (p. 44) indicates that, as in the Raspberry Brushwood cycle, being "lost" does not indicate loss of existence, but delicious hidden lurking: the object is.

Julian Tuwim was apparently inspired by this poem to write a similar erotic, "Do ciebie o mnie" (To You About Me):

"... twój cień w krzewie się zazielenił....
I zniknął—w swoim śpiewie...."

"... your shadow greened within the shrub....
And you disappeared—into your song...."

NOCĄ UMOWIONĄ...

Nocą umówioną, nocą ociemniałą
 Przyszło do mnie ciszką to przychętne ciało.
 Przyszło potajemnie—w cudnej bezzałobie—
 Było mu na imię tak samo jak tobie...
 Zajrzało po drodze w przyszłość i w zwierciadło—
 Na pościeli zimnej obok się pokładło—
 Dla mnie się pokładło, bym je mógł całować
 I znużyć—i zużyć—i nie pożałować!

Lgnęło mi do piersi—ofiarnie pachnące,
 Domyślnie bezwstydne i—posłuszniejące...
 W ciemnościach—w radościach—na granicy łkania
 Mdlalo od nadmiaru niedoumierania.
 I nic w nim nie było, prócz czaru i grzechu,
 Prócz bezwiednej woni—wiednego pośpiechu
 I prócz tego dreszczu, co ginie w krwi szumie—
 A bez niego ciało—ciała nie rozumie.

NOCTURNAL TRYST

On a pre-arranged and fully darkened evening
 Came to me quiet that alluring form.
 Secretly it came, in splendid un-bereaving,
 And that body's name with your name did conform.
 On the way it glanced at Future and at Mirror,
 Then lay down beside me on the chilly sheet
 So I could regretless hug and kiss and thrill her,
 Wearying and wearing out that body sweet.

Clinging to my chest with sacrificial fragrance,
 Cleverly compliant, cuddling brazenly,
 On the verge of sobbing in the murky joyance,
 Fainting from the surfeit of near-demise was she.
 Nothing in that body, only sin and spell,
 Scent involuntary, voluntary speed,
 And the thrill that drowns in roaring bloodstream swell,
 Which to understand each other bodies need.

Line ON-PREARRANGED NIGHT (NOCTURNAL TRYST)

1 On-prearranged night, on-darkened-night,
 2 Came to me quietly that enticing body
 3 It-came secretly—in lovely /miraculous no-mourning,
 4 Was to-it for name the same as to-you...
 5 It-looked on way into future and into mirror—
 6 On sheet cold next-to-me itself laid—
 7 For me itself laid, so-that it I-could kiss
 8 And exhaust—and use-up—and not regret!
 9 Clung me to chest—sacrificially fragrant,
 10 Cleverly shameless and—obedientizing...
 11 In darkneses—in joys—on border of-sobbing
 12 Fainted from excess of-not-quite-dying.
 13 And nothing in it not was, but spell and sin,
 14 But unknowing fragrance—and-knowing hurry—
 15 And but that shiver, which perishes in of-blood roar—
 16 And without it body—a-body not understands.

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript pp. 522-3, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), Warsaw, 1936. Shortly thereafter, Feliks Zahora-Ibiański responded in "Myśl Polska" (Polish Thought), in a characteristically fascist, anti-Semitic manner, taking exception to the "perversely ambiguous" nature of the poem, which did not indicate whether the "body" in question was a boy or a girl; Slimy spiritual impotents should be sent to sanatoriums, Asiatic dirt should be extirpated, "for Europe will not wait for us." I tried to maintain the mysterious ambiguity as long as possible, but finally was forced by rhyme and rhythm to disclose the monumental secret: Leśmian was heterosexual.

Pankowski (95-6) believes that the impersonal verb (sic!) is what saves this poem from being an "almost clinical description of the sex act" such as "Sometimes my blind caprices..."—thankfully, the love-object is anonymized. He thereupon compares it to the ballad "Asoka," whose eroticism is allegedly rendered mystical and more interesting by non-performance of the sex act.

2-3, "Przychętne" (enticing) is dialect for cuddle-happy, and "bezzałoba" (lack of mourning) is a neologism, as is "posłuszniejąc" (obedientizing).
 10 "Niedoumieranie" is an asymptotic, neologicistic inability to execute the act of dying, rendered laborious by the multiple prefixes. In Sindbad, p. 122 ff., two women die by being exponentially themselves: Armina dies when turning white again, and Sermina dies in flame shape while fighting for Sindbad's life.

Gdy domdlewasz na łożu, całowana przeze mnie,
Chcę cię posiadać na zawsze, lecz daremnie, daremnie!

Już ty właśnie—nie moja, już nie widzisz mnie wcale:
Oczy mgłą ci zachocza, ślepną w szczęściu i szale!

Zapodziewasz się nagle w swoim własnym pomroczu,
Mam twe ciało posłuszne, ale ciało—bez oczu!

Zapodziewasz się nagle w niewiadomej otchłani,
Gdziem nie bywał, nie śpiewał—choć kochałem cię dla
niej!...

While you're fainting away with my kisses in bed,
I would like to possess you forever. Instead,

You can see me no longer, your eyes have gone blind
With ecstatic delirium, you're not even mine!

You abscond in a flash to your solitude-highs.
Oh, your body's obedient, all right—but no eyes!

You abscond in a flash to an unknown abyss
That I loved you because of—yet I don't know this!

Line ***

1 While you-part-faint on bed, kissed (female) by me,
 2 I-want you to-have forever, but in vain, in vain!
 3 Now you precisely—not mine, already not see me at-all,
 4 Eyes with-fog to-you are-overtaken, go-blind in joy and frenzy!
 5 You-lose yourself suddenly in your own darkness,
 6 I-have your body obedient, but body—without eyes!
 7 You-lose yourself suddenly in unknown ravine,
 8 Where-I not have-been not sung, although I-loved you for it! ..

NOTES

According to Ireneusz Opacki, "Pośmiertna... maska" in Studia, pp. 285-7, this looks like an orgiastic poem by a Modernist erotomaniac, but it is not erotic in the least. Rather, it is tragic because it points out that even in a situation considered an almost absolute union of two people, the love act serves to separate them and make them lonely. Although the situation is an erotic act, the subject feels an unpleasant shock because reality is different from what he wishes to possess. Thus, the topic of the poem is not eroticism, but confrontation with reality and the disappointment which is exclusively the consequence of the disagreement between accepted concepts and the true state of affairs. In other words, the theme is epistemological: the process of knowing (no pun in Polish) and its result.

Karpowicz (p. 102, pp. 171-3) indicates that the subject panics when the beloved woman flees into her own kind of egotism when her erotic desires are satisfied; he is afraid of the separatism of her happiness. The bliss of love is, i.e. is not possessed; it is perfect and unrepeatable, independent of and not subject to her partner. The desire becomes independent and blind and destroys the object of love; we could just as easily imagine blood without the heart conferring circulatory powers. In "Piła" (The Saw), according to Pankowski (105-6), a young man consents to be loved by a saw because girls sob, as though sad, while making love; this is a tender, lyrical, almost serene description of amorous dismemberment of the man.

- 1 "Domdlewać" means to be in the process of fainting and concentrates on the process, not the result. Some Polish verb forms, as this one, indicate the gender of the actor; here, the fainter is female.
- 5 "Zapodziać się," to lose oneself, is used in a different manner here than in the dual disappearance in "Raspberry Brushwood," wherein the subjects lurked happily instead of being "lost" to each other; they were only "lost" to the world.
- 7-8 The subject loved his object because of the ravine, i.e. wished her to achieve satisfaction. However, he is bewildered when he realizes that her orgasmic joy excludes him, even if only momentarily.

WYZNANIE SPÓŹNIONE

Lubię twoim weselem rozniecony gwar—
 I twoimi oczami upatrzoną drogę—
 I czar w śniechu zjawiony—ten sam zawsze czar!—
 Żem cię dotąd nie kochał—zrozumieć nie mogę!

Dzisiaj, gdy ogród zaszumi lub zaskrzypią drzwi,
 Zrywam się, aby stwierdzić pustkę beznadziejną
 I przypomnieć twe kroki—i głos twój—i brwi—
 I o ustach, i dłoniach pomarzyć kolejno.

Słyszę płacz przewiezbrany obłoków i zórz!
 Wszystko—klęczy i błaga!... a ty—coraz dalej!
 O, nie wracaj, nie wracaj—tylko dłonie złóż
 Do modlitwy za wszystkich, co cię nie kochali!

BELATED CONFESSION

I love the buzz your merriness inflamed,
 The paths your eyes discovered, yes, and how
 Your charm revealed in laughter is the same—
 How could I not have loved you until now!

Today when gardens rustle and doors creak,
 I halt to find a no-hope void despair—
 And I recall your steps, your voice, your cheek,
 Then dream in turn about your lips and hair.

I hear the teeming clouds and sunsets weep.
 The world is kneeling, begging, and you keep
 Receding farther—stay where you withdrew,
 And pray for all those who did not love you!

Line CONFESSION TARDY (BELATED CONFESSION)

- 1 I-like with-your merriment kindled clatter--
 2 And with-your eyes picked path--
 3 And charm in laughter shown--that same always charm!--
 4 That-I you till-now not loved--understand not can-I!
 5 Today, when garden rustles or creak doors
 6 Jump-up I, to ascertain void without-hope,
 7 And remember your steps--and voice your--and eyebrows--
 8 And about lips, and palms to-daydream sequentially.
 9 I-hear weep of-overflowing clouds and auroras!
 10 Everything--kneels and begs!... And you--ever farther!
 11 O, not return, not return--only palms fold
 12 Into prayer for all-those, who you not loved!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 523, this poem was originally published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), March 29, 1936, with only a slight variation in line 3: "always new charm!" instead of "that same always charm!".

In "Pośmiertna... maska" in Studia, pp. 275-6, Ireneusz Opacki indicates that the protagonist fell in love with the image after the original left; this is a romance with his own imagination or, as Sandauer stated, with "nonexistence," as the protagonist specifically asks his beloved not to return.

In "Gra miłości i śmierci..." (Interplay of Love and Death) in Głowiński, ed., Studia z teorii i historii poezji (Studies in the Theory and History of Poetry), pp. 260-3, Eugeniusz Czaplewicz classifies "Belated Confession" among Leśmian's pessimistic later poems. Death has become a one-way abyss, not a temporary, interesting trip to Hades and back. There are no more illusions; everything was a dream. The addressee no longer exists; she is merely a depersonalized grammatical construct, like a rhetorical question fading into futurelessness.

Comparisons can be made to "Ubóstwo" (Poverty), wherein the poet acknowledges that in loving his family, he loved phantoms, and to "Samotność" (Loneliness), which is a soliloquy at an abyss with no hope of being heard by anyone. Also, in "Niedopita czara" (1902), UR 61, we read: "Gdy księżyc blaskiem w okna me zapuka-- / Zrywam się ze snu niespokojny, blady, / Dłoń nieposłuszna piersi twojej szuka, / Na ustach czuję pocałunków ślady." (When the moon knocks at my window with a gleam, / I bolt from sleep, pale and uneasy. / My disobedient hand searches for your breast, / I feel traces of kisses on my lips.)

PO CIEMKU

Wiedzą ciała, do kogo należą,
 Gdy po ciemku obok siebie leżą!
 Warga—wardze, a dłoń dłoni sprzyja—
 Noc nad nimi niechętnie przemija.
 Świat się trwali, ale tak niejedynie!...
 Drzewa szumią, ale pozadrzewnie!...
 A nad borem, nad dalekim borem
 Bóg porusza wichrem i przestworem.
 I powiada wicher do przestworu:
 "Już nie wrócę tej nocy do boru!"
 Bór się mroczy, a gwiazdy weń świecą,
 A nad morzem białe mewy lecą.
 Jedna mówi: "Widziałam gwiazd losy!"
 Druga mówi: "Widziałam niebiosy!"
 A ta trzecia milczy, bo widziała
 Dwa po ciemku pałające ciała...
 Mrok, co wsnął się w ich ściśliwe sploty,
 Nic nie znalazł w ciałach prócz pieszczoty.

IN THE DARK

Bodies know to whom they pertain
 While they lie there in twofold shade!
 Lips and hands become satisfied,
 Night's reluctant to pass on by.
 Earth abides with a shaky feeling,
 Treetops rustle, but meta-treely!
 And above the woods, far away,
 God makes Cosmos and North-wind stray.
 North-wind says to the Cosmos: "I'm
 Not returning to Woods this time!"
 Stars are shining at murky trees,
 Seagulls white overfly the sea.
 One gull sees heaven from afar,
 And the other—the fate of stars.
 While they jabber, the third gull harks:
 Two forms blazing within the dark.
 And the murk which inspinuates
 Finds in flesh nothing but embrace.

Line IN DARKNESS (IN THE DARK)

1 Know bodies, to whom belong,
 2 When in darkness next-to themselves lie!
 3 Lip —to-lip, and palm to-palm favors—
 4 Night above them and unwillingly passes-over.
 5 World itself eternalizes, but so uncertainly!
 6 Trees rustle, but meta-treely!
 7 And above woods, above faraway woods
 8 God moves with-wind and with-endless-space.
 9 And says wind to endless-space:
 10 "Already not return-I this night to woods!"
 11 Woods itself murks, and stars into-it shine,
 12 And above sea white seagulls fly.
 13 One says: "I-saw of-stars fates!"
 14 Second says: "I-saw heavens!"
 15 And that third is-silent, for she-did-see
 16 Two in darkness blazing bodies...
 17 Murk, which in-spun itself in their compressible hugs
 18 Nothing not found in bodies aside-from caress!

NOTES

According to Karpowicz, p. 103, this poem, like the Raspberry Brushwood erotic cycle, shows how love ignores not only the world all around, but the partners themselves as well.

- 1-3 Polish has no articles.
 2 "Self/selves" in Polish is reflexive or mutual depending on context. Here, the bodies are lying next to each other.
 3 Polish makes no distinction between "hand" and "arm," but does have a separate word for the inside of the hand, i. e. "palm."
 5 "Trwalić się" is a novelty, "to duration itself," and contains a hidden reference to Bergson's duration. What the poet means is that the world survives, but shakily.
 6 "Meta-treely" is one of Leśmian's neologisms.
 11 "To murk oneself" means to become darkened. Herein, I darkened the trees rather than the forest for purposes of rhyme.
 17 "In-spun," as in "In the Evening" of the "Crossroads Orchard" book, contains a suggestion of insinuation, of having nestled into something almost illegally. Thus, "inspinuates" in the verse version; one evocative neologism deserves another.
 18 The bodies themselves are not important; what counts is the relationship between them. Thus, in the verse version, the murk finds nothing but embrace within the flesh.

Już czas ukochać w sadzie pustkowie bezdomne,
 Ptaki niebem schorzałe i drzewa ułomne,
 I płot, co tyle desek w złe stracił godziny,
 Że na trawę cień rzuca przejrzystej drabiny.

Już czas ukochać wieczór z tamtej strony rzeki
 I zmarłego sąsiada ogród niedaleki,
 I ciemność, co, nim dusze sny do snu uprzątą,
 Żywi nas po kryjomu dobrocią pokątną.

Już czas ciulać okruchy ostatniego znoju
 W ubogich złocistościach złąkłego pokoju,
 I skroń złożyć w twe ręce, wycienzone mgłami—
 I nie płakać—nie płakać wspólnymi siłami!

It's time to cherish homeless orchard voids,
 The sky-sick birds, the crippled trees, the fence
 Which lost, in rotten times, so many boards
 Its shadow looks like see-through ladder-steps.

It's time to love dead neighbor's garden close,
 The evening on the other side of streams,
 The dark that secret-nourishes our souls
 With good before they're sleep-prepared by dreams.

It's time to gather crumbs of final sweat
 From startled space's humble golden lights;
 Into your fog-thin hands I lay my head—
 We mustn't, mustn't cry with both our might!

| Line | *** |
|------|--|
| 1 | Already time to-love in orchard voids homeless, |
| 2 | Birds with-sky sickened and trees defective, |
| 3 | And fence, which so-many boards in bad lost hours, |
| 4 | That on grass shadow throws of-transparent ladder. |
| 5 | Already time to-love evening from that side of-river |
| 6 | And of-dead neighbor garden not-far-away, |
| 7 | And darkness, which before soul dreams to sleep prepare, |
| 8 | Nourishes us in secret with-goodness secret. |
| 9 | Already time scrape-up crumbs of-last sweat-or-toil |
| 10 | In poor goldennesses of-scared room-or-peace, |
| 11 | And forehead to-lay in your hands, emaciated by-fogs— |
| 12 | And not to-cry—not to-cry with-mutual forces! |

NOTES

It is interesting to compare this poem to "In the Field," which dozes benevolently in ecstatic optimism: caterpillar-gnawed leaves are lovely lace, and overheated foreheads are cooled by flowers. Here, a ruined fence is a prosaic gap-toothed ladder, and the protagonist entrusts his forehead to his spectral partner's foggy hands. As already mentioned, Leśmian's pessimism increased with age. In "Ubóstwo" (Poverty), he invites God to hit him hard: "I am a human being and can stand anything." The earlier "Niedopita czara" (1902, UR 54; cf. also 56, 63) contains a palm (hand) emaciated by death; love must be sorrowful, and hugs are similar to longing.

- 1-4 In contradistinction to the idyllic "In the Field," nature here is defective and sick.
- 7-8 Polish uses the same word for sleep and dream; the context is important. Here, the dreams prepare the soul for sleep.
- 10 "Pokój" can mean either "room" (as in a house) or "peace," and there is no guiding context here. According to the translator's motto, "If in doubt, be as vague as possible," I opted for "space." Thus, the verse version states "startled space's humble golden lights."
- 12 This is an example of Leśmian's obsession with the negative: the protagonists expend great energy performing the absence of action.

NOCĄ

Coś bez twarzy i na wznak śpi w gwiazdach niezłomnie,
 Śpi i nie chce się zbudzić w tych skier zawierusze.
 Mieszkasz w domu nad rzeką i trwożysz się o mnie.
 Przyjdę jutro na pewno! Dziś smucić się muszę.

Śpieszy w zaświat na zębry cień brzozy sierocy.
 Krzyż chce w przepaść się rzucić z pagórka nad drogą!
 Wszyscy na raz bogowie wymarli tej nocy
 I odtąd już się nie mam pomodlić do kogo!

Nie zaufam bezmiarom! Nie załam w noc ciemną!
 Ręk nie wzniosę ku niebu po modlitwy zgonie!
 A ty za mnie w tej chwili wyciągasz swe dłonie,
 Choć wiesz, że prócz tych dłoni nic nie ma nade mną!

Jest tylko ta próżnica, w którą czar przelewa
 Słońce, ażeby spełnić mgieł wolę daleką...
 Ta próżnica—te kwiaty—motyle i drzewa—
 Drzewa—kwiaty—motyle—i ten dom nad rzeką...

IN THE NIGHT

A faceless thing supine sleeps firmly in the stars;
 It doesn't want to waken in the sparkle-swirl.
 You're trembling for me in your river-house afar;
 I'll surely come tomorrow—today I'm mourning, girl.

An orphaned beggar birch-tree shadow hurries through
 Eternity, while crosses try from hills to dive!
 Henceforth I've got no one to say my prayers to—
 Last night the gods all simultaneously died.

I'll never trust forever, never sob at night,
 Nor raise my hands to heaven when all prayer's dead!
 To lift your arms to me you suddenly decide,
 Although you know there's nothing else above my head!

Nothing but a vacuum, where the sun decants
 Magic, thus fulfilling distant fog-desires;
 Nothing but a void where butterflies now dance,
 Trees and flowers, river-house, and butterflies.

Line AT-NIGHT (IN THE NIGHT)

- 1 Something without face and on back sleeps in stars unshakenly,
 2 Sleeps and not wants to wake in this of-sparks turmoils.
 3 You-live in house above river and fear yourself for me.
 4 I-will-come tomorrow for sure! Today grieve myself must-I.
 5 Hurries into otherworld in beg shadow of-birch orphaned.
 6 Cross wants into ravine itself to-throw from hill above road!
 7 All at once gods died-out this night
 8 And from-now already myself not have to-pray to whom!
 9 Not will-I-trust measurelessnesses! Not sob-will-I in night dark!
 10 Arms-or-hands not will-I-lift to heaven after of-prayer death!
 11 And you to me in this moment you-stretch your palms,
 12 Although you-know, that besides those palms nothing not is above me!
 13 There-is only that vacuum, in which spell transpours
 14 Sun, so-that fulfill of-fogs will faraway...
 15 That vacuum—those flowers—butterflies and trees—
 16 Trees—flowers—butterflies—and that house above river...

NOTES

- 3, 4 "To be afraid" and "to grieve" are reflexive verbs in Polish.
 5 "In beg" means it is begging its way from one place to another.
 8 "To pray" is also reflexive in Polish.
 10 Polish makes no distinction between hands and arms, but the context of prayerful supplication would dictate the lifting of hands.
 14- The original verse translation had "distant fog-requests" to rhyme with "river-house address" in line 16. However, since "request" is not "will" or "desire," and since "river-house address" sounds too much like a New York black book for a philanderer, "desires" was used to substitute for "requests," and "butterflies" conveniently repeated as a near-rhyme. The only deficiency in accuracy was thus that "a house on the river" became a "river-house."

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 524, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), Warsaw, July 5, 1933. The texts are identical except for one slight change in punctuation.

WIERSZ KSIĘŻYCOWY

W księżycowy wniknąc chłód,
 We śc w to srebro na wskroś złote,
 W niezawily śmierci cud
 I w zawiła beztęsknotę!

Był tam niegdyś czar i śmiech,
 Tłumy bogów w snów obłędzie—
 Było dwóch i było trzech—
 Lecz żadnego już nie będzie!

Został po nich—rozpęd wzwyż
 I ta oddal bez przyczyny,
 I ten złoty nadmiar cisz—
 I te srebrne szumowiny...

Tam bym ciebie spotkać chciał!
 Tam się przyjrzeć twemu licu!
 Właśnie dwojga naszych ciał
 Brak mi teraz na księżycu!

Nad oddycha naszą krwią,
 Krew podziemną płynie miedzą...
 Nasze ciała teraz śpią—
 Nasze ciała nic nie wiedzą...

MOON POEM

Oh, to crawl into the lunar cool,
 Entering that silver soaked in gold,
 And to know Death's wonder scrutable,
 And inscrutable no-yearning cold!

There was laughter, there was magic once,
 Throngs of gods in lunacy of dreams,
 There were two or three, there will be none—
 No more future gods, or so it seems.

Impetus of heights they left behind,
 And expanse of distance without cause,
 And this surplus silence goldenshine,
 And this residue of silver froth.

I would like to meet you there someday,
 Gaze at your complexion and your hair!
 What is missing on the moon? I say:
 Neither of our bodies, dear, is there.

Night is breathing through our blood, which flows
 Through a virgin furrow underground.
 Now our bodies are asleep, and know
 Nothing of what's going on around.

Line POEM OF-MOON (MOON POEM)

1 Into of-moon to-penetrate cool,
 2 Entèr into that silver through-and-through golden,
 3 Into not-intricate of-death miracle,
 4 And into intricate no-yearning!
 5 Was there once charm and laughter,
 6 Crowds of-gods in of-dreams madness,
 7 There-were two and there-were three,
 8 But none already not will-be!
 9 Remained after them—impetus of-heights,
 10 And that distance without reason,
 11 And that golden surplus of-silences,
 12 And those silver froths...
 13 There I-would you to-meet want!
 14 There to look at-your cheek!
 15 Exactly two of-our bodies
 16 Lack to-me now on moon!
 17 Night breathes with-our blood,
 18 Blood in-underground flows balk...
 19 Our bodies now sleep—
 20 -Our bodies nothing not-know...

NOTES

For a comparison, see the "Noc" (Night) poem in Leśmian's Russian-language cycle, "Moon Intoxication" (UR 83-93, 1907), which is ethereal erotica containing dreams of sailing the moon in a boat. Interesting information on lunar mythology is contained in Mircea Eliade, History of Religious Ideas, I, 22-3: "Time-factored" notations of the lunar cycle are documented as early as the Upper Paleolithic and some 15,000 years before agriculture was discovered; these were later incorporated into a symbolic system including woman, water, vegetation, and fertility/death/rebirth.

- 2 This is an example of Leśmian's contradictions: silver gold.
 3-4 "Zawiły" and its negative mean "intricate" and its negative, and create the effect of a neologism, as though one called a person "couth, kempt, and shevelled." I therefore opted for "inscrutable" and, of course, "scrutable."
 4 "Beztesknota" is the absence of yearning or longing: no-yearning. On pp. 168-72 of "Słowotwórstwo na usługach filozofji" (Lexical Innovation in the Service of Philosophy) in Studia, Ewa Olkuśnik documents over a dozen such neologisms in this and other poems.
 9 The Faustian personality seems to be a divine legacy of humans.
 10 Cf. Leśmian's essays on poetics in SL, wherein the principle of cause and effect is attacked.

Dwunastu braci, wierząc w sny, zbadalo mur od marzeń strony.
 A poza murem płakał głos, dziewczęcy głos zaprzepaszczoney.
 I pokochali głosu dźwięk, i chętny domysł o Dziewczynie,
 I zgadywali kształty ust po tym, jak śpiew od żalu ginie...
 Mówili o niej: "Łka, więc jest!"—I nic innego nie mówili,
 I przeżegnali cały świat—i świat zadumał się w tej chwili...
 Porwali młoty w twardą dłoń i jęli w mury tłuc z łoskotem!
 I nie wiedziała ślepa noc, kto jest człowiekiem, a kto młotem?
 "O, prędzej skruszmy zimny głaz, nim śmierć Dziewczynę rdzą
 powlecze!"

Tak, waląc w mur, dwunasty brat do jedenastu innych rzecze.

Ale daremny był ich trud, daremny ramion sprzęg i usił!
 Oddali ciała swe na strwon owemu snowi, co ich kusił!
 Łamią się piersi, trzęszczy kość, próchnieją dłonie, twarze
 bledną...
 I wszyscy w jednym zmarli dniu, i noc wieczystą mieli jedną!
 Lecz cienie zmarłych—Boże mój!—nie wypuściły młotów z dłoni!
 I tylko inny płynie czas—i tylko młot inaczej dzwoni...
 I dzwoni wprzód! I dzwoni wspak! I wzwyż za każdym grzmi
 nawrotem!
 I nie wiedziała ślepa noc, kto tu jest cieniem, a kto młotem?
 "O, prędzej skruszmy zimny głaz, nim śmierć Dziewczynę rdzą
 powlecze!"

Tak, waląc w mur, dwunasty cień do jedenastu innych rzecze.

Lecz ceniom zbrakło nagle sił, a cień się mrokom nie opiera!
 I powymarły jeszcze raz, bo nigdy dość się nie umiera...
 I nigdy dość, i nigdy tak, jak tego pragnie ów, co kona!...
 I znikła treść—i zginął ślad—i powieść o nich już skończona!
 Lecz dzielne młoty—Boże mój!—mdłej nie poddały się żalobie!
 I same przez się biły w mur, huczały spiżem same w sobie!
 Huczały w mrok, huczały w blask i ociekały ludzkim potem!
 I nie wiedziała ślepa noc, czym bywa młot, gdy nie jest młotem?
 "O, prędzej skruszmy zimny głaz, nim śmierć Dziewczynę rdzą
 powlecze!"

Tak, waląc w mur, dwunasty młot do jedenastu innych rzecze.

I runął mur, tysiącem ech wstrząsając wzgórze i doliny!
 Lecz poza murem—nic i nic! Ni żywej duszy, ni Dziewczyny!
 Niczych oczu ani ust! I niczyjego, w kwiatach losu!
 Bo to był głos i tylko—głos—i nic nie było oprócz głosu!
 Nic—tylko płacz i żal, i mrok, i niewiomość, i zatrata!
 Takiż to świat! Niedobry świat! Czemuż innego nie ma świata?
 Wobec kłamliwych jawnie snów, wobec zmarniałych w nicość cudów
 Potężne młoty legły w rząd na znak spełnionych godnie trudów.
 I była zgroza nagłych cisz! I była próżnia w całym niebie!
 A ty z tej próżni czemu drwisz, kiedy ta próżnia nie drwi z ciebie?

Twelve brothers who believed in dreams surveyed a daydream-sided wall;
 A voice was weeping from beyond, a plaintive, wasted, girlish call.
 And with that voice they fell in love, and speculated on the Girl;
 The earth sank into reverie the moment that they blessed the world.
 They fastened to her sorrow-song and guessed the contour of her lips;
 Her voice was perishing with grief: "She's sobbing, therefore she exists!"
 They grabbed some hammers, and to pound the wall they noisily began;
 The blinded night could not make out which thing was hammer, which was
 man.

"Let's pulverize this icy stone ere Death rust-drags this Girl away!"
 That's what eleven pounding brothers heard the twelfth, while pounding,
 say.

Their toil, however, was in vain, in vain their arms' cooperation!
 They squandered all their bodies recklessly on futile dream-temptation!
 Their chests collapsed, their faces paled, and bones went rotting in the
 brothers.

Eternal night they share; they died within a day of one another.
 But—oh, my God!—the dead men's shadows wouldn't let the hammers go!
 It's just another time, that's all, a different-sounding hammer-blow!
 A forward thump, a backward ring, a thund'ring upward hammer-raid;
 The blinded night could not make out which thing was hammer, which
 was shade.

"Let's pulverize this icy stone ere Death rust-drags this Girl away!"
 That's what eleven pounding shadows heard the twelfth, while pounding,
 say.

But suddenly the shadows weakened, shade cannot resist the rough...
 And they became extinct again, nobody ever dies enough!
 No, not enough, and never how the dier wishes it to be!
 The contents gone, the tracks erased—the story's finished now, you see!
 But—oh, my God—the hammers brave would not submit to grief inane!
 They hit the wall all by themselves and thundered their own bronze
 refrain!

They thundered in both murk and glare, adrip with human sweat.

"But what, "

the blinded night was wondering, "What is a hammer when it's not?"
 "Let's pulverize this icy stone ere Death rust-drags this Girl away!"
 That's what eleven pounding hammers heard the twelfth, while pounding,
 say.

The wall collapsed, a thousand echoes shook the valleys and the hills,
 But behind it—not a soul! No girl, nobody, nothing, nil!
 There were no lips, no eyes beyond, nobody's flower-laden fate—
 There was a voice and nothing more—a voice with neither shape nor
 weight!

Regret and tears and murk, that's all, perdition and unconsciousness!
 Why isn't there another world? Why is our bad one such a mess?
 The hammers strong lay in a row to represent a job well-done,
 But dreams kept lying openly while wonders atrophied to scum.
 A sudden silence horrible, the sky was voided through and through!
 Why are you jeering at this void? The void has never jeered at you!

Line GIRL

1 Twelve brothers, believing in dreams, inspected wall from of-dream side,
2 And beyond wall wept voice, girlish voice ravine-lost.
3 And they-fell-in-love-with of-voice sound, and eager guess about Girl,
4 And guessed shape of-lips by that, how song from sadness perishes...
5 They-said of her: "Sobs, thus is!"— And nothing else not said-they,
6 And crossed entire world—and world got-lost-in-thought at that moment...
7 They-grabbed hammers in hard palm and began in walls banging with noise!
8 And not knew blind night, who is human, and who hammer?
9 "O, faster let-us-crush cold boulder, before death Girl with-rust drags!"—
10 Thus, banging in wall, twelfth brother to eleven others speaks.
11 But in-vain was their toil, in-vain of-shoulders link and attempt!
12 They-surrendered bodies their to waste to-that dream, which them tempted!
13 Break themselves breasts, creaks bone, rot palms, faces pale...
14 And all in one died-off day, and night eternal had one!
15 But shadows of-dead-men—God my—not let-go hammers from hands!
16 And only another flows time—and only hammer differently rings!
17 And rings forward! And rings backward! And higher at each of-thunder
 return!
18 And not knew blind night, who here is shadow, and who hammer?
19 "O, faster let-us-crush cold boulder, before death Girl with-rust drags!"—
20 Thus, banging in wall, twelfth shadow to eleven others speaks.
21 But to-shadows lacked suddenly power, and shadow itself to-murks not
 resists!
22 And died-off one-more time, for never enough oneself not dies...
23 And never enough, and never thus, how that thirsts he, who perishes!...
24 And disappeared content—and perished trace—and novel of them is finished!
25 But brave hammers—God my!—to-insipid not surrendered themselves grief!
26 And alone by themselves hit in wall, roared bronze themselves in them!
27 Roared in murk, roared in glare-and dripped with-human sweat!
28 And not knew blind night, what normally-is hammer, when not is hammer?
29 "O, faster let-us-crush cold boulder, before death Girl with-rust drags!"—
30 Thus, banging in wall, twelfth hammer to eleven others speaks.
31 And fell wall, with-thousands-of echoes, shaking hills and valleys!
32 But beyond wall—nothing and nothing! No living soul, no Girl!
33 Nobody's eyes or lips! And nobody's in flowers fate!
34 For that was voice and only—voice—and nothing not was besides voice!
35 Nothing—only weeping and sadness, and murk, and unknowing, and loss!
36 Such is world! Not-good world! Why another not is world!
37 Before devious openly dreams, before wasted into nothing miracles
38 Powerful hammers lay in line for sign of-fulfilled properly toils.
39 And was horror of-sudden silences! And was void in whole sky!
40 And you of this void why jeer, when that void not jeers of you?

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 524, this poem was originally published in "Wiadomości Literackie" (Literary News), Warsaw, December 3, 1933 without any dedication. The texts are identical except for a few punctuation changes. A German translation ("Das Mädchen") by Karl Dedecius was published in the collection Polnische Poesie, p. 21, Heidelberg, 1960.

Kazimierz Wyka, in "Dwa utwory" (Two Works), p. 217 of Prokop & Sławinski Liryka polska, calls this poem a "philosophical ballad," partly because of the last line. Eugeniusz Czaplejewicz, in "Adresat ballad Leśmiana" (The Addressee of Leśmian's Ballads) in Studia pp. 352-68, indicates that the poet has adopted and adapted the folk tradition of a narrator and audience. Here, the addressee is an individual, and an intellectual one at that: one who thinks about infinity and void. The relatively few folk elements are stylized into graceful aphorisms (no one ever dies enough) or philosophical travesties (she sobs, therefore she exists). The ballad is thus an educated conversation with a refined but silent intellectual; the author treats the narrator and the addressee at arm's length, like a stage director, poking fun in irony. Since the situation is constructed, it is a fiction by definition; the only thing the addressee "says" is a gesture at the end, which the narrator negates.

Karpowicz (45-6, 57-8, 208-9) indicates that "The Girl" appears cold and stark, like the inside of a Gothic cathedral; like the girl who never appeared in "Ballada bezludna," she is an attempt to reach the zero of zeroes, the "ontological Ultima Thule." It represents the desire to know the source of primeval phenomena, an ownerless no-man's promised land. The wall hides nothing and is therefore reminiscent of the Kafka story about a guard whose sole purpose is keeping a single person away; if it were not for the ending of the poem, it could be a hymn or paean to work. The irony is that the girl is a projection of the twelves' desires ("they have no imagination"), and of course the number twelve has fairy-tale and cabbalistic significance.

In Twórczość Leśmiana, pp. 32-4, 179-81, Trznadel states his belief that this poem is an allegory; he compares it to the Roman de la Rose (mur aux images), except that the rose actually exists, whereas in "The Girl" it is the search itself which is the object, not the nonexistent girl. (He considers Leśmian's poetry in general to be a "one-shot allegory.") This particular poem is partially based on a Rumanian song, Master Manole, which ends with a girl buried alive in a wall as a sacrifice; however, Leśmian begins where Manole leaves off, and what is sacrificed is everything but the girl.

Sandauer (Samobójstwo ... 37-8) compares the banging to a sawfish's sawing: unconscious compulsion, an existential action allowing the actor to complete his essence; in fact, the action survives the actors in a form of tragic atheism, and the shadows and hammers carry on. Unlike Czaplejewicz, who considers the invisible addressee an intellectual, Sandauer believes the question at the end is posed to those who have never considered metaphysical matters or attempted to seek their purpose. He also believes "The Girl" to be a polemic of two generations, the twelve brothers being Leśmian's fellow students from the time preceding World War I.

Stone (pp. 285-7, 143-4, 271) indicates that "The Girl" is seventeen-foot syllabic verse (8+9, with a caesura after the eighth syllable). The caesura is masculine, which is unusual in Polish: the eight-foot iambs emphasize the feverish action of demolition. The "illusory cognition ends in catastrophe.... (this is) an unfulfilled myth." The brothers represent twelve "poet-apostles" who believe, like Descartes, that "where there is action there is existence." The philosophical problem is posed indirectly through the plot structure: "the poet uses the ballad as a vehicle to express his perseverance in trying to break down the barrier of the mystery of life. The superhuman efforts expended in finding out what life is all about.... (lead into) ironic tragedy. Everything in the plot turns out to be catastrophic...." As in other ballads, repetition with a change of protagonists makes the poem very dramatic.

There are similarities to other Lesmian poems, particularly other ballads. Like "Pururawa and Urwasi" and "Two Humble Humans," "The Girl" presents a series of exclusions and negations adding up to supreme nothingness. The dialectics of human hope is exhausted and destroyed: man stops at the void of absurdity and finds that he has no adversary. It is for this reason that Pankowski (75-6) calls "The Girl" a tragedy of Everyman multiplied by twelve.

In "Matysek," a fiddler plays out/wins (a pun in Polish) the weeping of a dead girl, who never materializes. Other poems repeat Lesmian's favorite image of multiple death as the supreme horror (nobody ever dies enough, line 22):

"Jam —nie Osjan!" (I'm not Ossian!): man cannot die completely, but agonizes in semi-consciousness. God can neither die completely nor become completely incarnate.

"Do Siostry" (To My Sister) joins "The Girl" in its fantastic medieval "dance of death" motif and baroque macabre hyperbole: decomposition of form, both physical and poetic, grotesquely mirrors the chaos of inadequacy and implies that poetry and its forms cannot be a clean reflection of some essence of existence. This mythology of forms revolting against themselves is related to elements of folk paradox and nonsense rhymes. (Trznadel LMP p. 851.)

"Ubdstwo" (Poverty): the poet remembers the loss of his beloved family, but since his memory is fading, they die again within the recollection process, intensifying the tragedy. (Stone 283)

"Smierc wtora" (Repeated Death): lovers unite with the remembrances of lips.

"Po smierci" (After Death): dying once is not enough.

Line 28: Polish verbs have no imperfect tense. Rather, the imperfect (repeated or customary action) is rendered with a different verb entirely, a so-called "imperfective." Here, the night is wondering what hammers usually tend to be when they are not hammers.

Tam — u samego lasów brzegu,
 Gdzie kruk — jedyny pustki widz,
 Ktoś go ulepił z tego śniegu,
 Co mu na imię: biel i nic...
 Na głowę śmieszna wdział czapule,
 A w łok żebraczy wraził kij —
 I w oczy spojrział mu nieczule,
 I rzekł na drwiny: "Chcesz — to żyj!"
 I żył niezgrabny, byle jaki,
 A gdym doń przyszedł śladem trwóg —
 Już weń wierzyły wszystkie ptaki,
 Więc zrozumiałem, że to — bóg...
 Czarował drzewa ocz błyskotem,
 Piersią, do której wichry lgną —
 I kusił mnie niewiedzą o tem,
 Co było we mnie — tylko mną...
 Pan ośnieżonej w dół przyczyny
 Poprzez ślepotę mroźnych cisz
 Patrzył w wądoły i w niziny,
 Co mu się śniły wzwyż i wzwyż!
 A kiedy poblask wziął od słońca
 I w nicość zalsnił — błędny wskaz —
 Pojąłem wszystko aż do końca
 I uwierzyłem jeszcze raz!

THE SNOW IDOL

Somebody made him from this snow
 At empty edge of woods before;
 The only witness was a crow.
 His name is whiteness, nothing more.
 He made him don a silly hat
 And thrust a beg-stick in his side,
 Then looked into his eyes and spat
 And jeered, "You want to be alive?"
 He lived on drab and clumsy, and
 When trails of terror led me there,
 I was allowed to understand
 He's god — he's worshipped everywhere.
 The birds believed in him, the trees
 Were spellbound, winds clung to his chest,
 He tempted me with what's in me,
 The private nescience in my breast.
 Through silences of blinding chill,
 The lord of snowbound distant cause
 Stared at the flatlands and the hills
 And dreamt them higher, without flaws.
 And when he used Sun's afterglow
 To brighten Void — fallacious sign! —
 I comprehended all, and so
 I re-believed in him that time!

Line IDOL-OR-SNOWMAN OF SNOW (THE SNOW IDOL)

1 There—at of-same woods end,
 2 Where crow—only of-void witness,
 3 Someone him built from this snow,
 4 Which him to name: whiteness and nothing.
 5 On head ridiculous put hat, (= czapula, a pseudo-dialect invention)
 6 And in side begging stuck stick—
 7 And in eyes looked him not-affectionately,
 8 And said in jeer: "Want—then live!"
 9 And lived clumsy, like unspecial,
 10 And when-I to-him came in-track of-frights,
 11 Already in-him believed all birds,
 12 So I-understood, that that—god...
 13 He-charmed trees! eyes with-glitter,
 14 With-chest, to which winds adhere—
 15 And tempted me nescience-with of that,
 16 What was in me—only me...
 17 Lord of-snowed in distance cause
 18 Through blindness of-chilly silences
 19 Looked into gullies and flats,
 20 Which to-him themselves dreamt up and up!
 21 And when afterglow took from sun
 22 And into void glared—false signal—
 23 I-understood all up to end
 24 And believed once again!

NOTES

This poem indicates an attitude similar to Goethe: although neither Leśmian nor Goethe were particularly devout, they came to understand that the unenlightened common man needs religion. As Max Weber stated, man cannot grasp the holy and needs to anthropomorphize it. The title is a good indication: "bałwan" is both a snowman and an idol ("bałwochwalczy" means idolatrous); thus, the pun itself shows God to be man's construct.

- 4 The Modernists loved to give God negative attributes such as "endless."
 5-8 This stanza appears to echo the mocking of Christ.
 9 The word "bylejaki" is used here (it was taken up by Sandauer to describe Leśmian's poetry): it means haphazard, willy-nilly, unspecial.
 17 Cf. Leśmian's attack upon cause and effect in Szkice literackie.

Trznadel (Twórczość Leśmiana p. 187) considers this poem an ironic view of the fetishist mythologizing of reality by humans: God is an ambiguous creation. Stone (279-80) defines it as the philosophical problem of theodicy. "Here the animated snowman symbolizes divinity identifiable with creative power and the poet himself."

ZNIKOMEK

W cieniowym istnieniu bezładzie Znikomek błąka się skocznie.
 Jedno ma oko błękitne, a drugie—piwne, więc raczej
 Nie widzi świata tak samo, lecz każdym okiem—inaczej—
 I nie wie, który z tych światów jest rzeczywisty—zaocznie?

Dwie dusze tai w swej piersi: jedna po niebie się włóczy—
 Druga—na ziemi marnieje. Dwie na raz kocha dziewczyny:
 Ta czarna—snu wieczystego na pamięć barwnie się uczy—
 Ta jasna—całun powiewny tka dla umarłej doliny.

Któż z nich kocha naprawdę? Złe ścieżki!—Głębokie wody!—
 Urwiska!—Nawoływania!— I znikąd żadnej pomocy!—
 I powikłane od lęku, w mrok pierzchające ogrody!—
 A w dłoniach—nadmiar istnienia, a w oczach—okruchy nocy!

I mgła na ustach dziewczyny, rumianych marzeń rozgrzewką—
 A kwiaty wzajem się widzą— a zgony wzajem się tłumią!—
 Znikomek spożył kęs nieba i miesza złotą matawką
 Cień własny z cieniem brzoź kilku. A brzozy śnią się i szumią...

PALTRY

Here's Paltry erring agile in shady chaos-being.
 One eye is colored sky and the other hazel; he
 Can't see the world the same, for each eye sees differently—
 Which of these worlds is eyewash, which is he really seeing?

He hides two souls within him: one roams the heavens far,
 The other's rotting, grounded. He loves two girls besides:
 The blonde one weaves a shroud for a valley that has died,
 The dark one's color-learning eternal sleep by heart.

So which one does he love, then? Deep water! This won't work!
 And cliffs! And exhortations! No help from anywhere!
 In craven convolution, the gardens flee to murk!
 In hands excess existence—in eyes, dust of night air!

The fog on girlish lips is a warm-up drink for dreams—
 The flowers see each other—deaths crowd each other out—
 He's had a taste of heaven, and with a golden spout
 He pours his shadow into the shade of rustling trees.

Line LITTLE-INSIGNIFICANCE (PALTRY)

- 1 In shady of-existences disorder Little-Insignificance roams himself
vivaciously.
- 2 One has eye blue, and second-of-beer, so rather
- 3 Not sees world the same, but with-each eye-differently-
- 4 And not knows, which of these worlds is actual-by-default?
- 5 Two souls hides in his breast: one around heaven self roams,
- 6 Second-on earth wastes. Two at time loves girls:
- 7 That black-one-sleep eternal by heart colorfully learns;
- 8 That light-one-shroud airy weaves for deceased valley.
- 9 Which of them loves really? -Bad paths! Deep waters! -
- 10 Cliffs! Calls! And from-nowhere no assistance!
- 11 And knotted from fear, in murk flee gardens! -
- 12 And in palms-excess of-being, and in eyes-crumbs of-night!
- 13 And fog on lips of-girl, of-ruddy musings warm-up drink-
- 14 And flowers reciprocally themselves see-and deaths reciprocally
suppress themselves-
- 15 Little-Insignificance consumed bite of-heaven and mixes with-golden
mixing-stick
- 16 Shadow own with shadow of-birches several. And birches dream
- themselves and rustle...

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 525, this poem was first published in Skamander, Warsaw, April 1935. The texts are identical. On pp. 182-5 of Twórczość Leśmiana, the same author indicated that Leśmian based this autobiographical, autoironic poem on the folk superstition concerning apparently human creatures which have a tendency to disappear during storms and drag clouds in their wake. The suffix "-ek" is an affectionate diminutive with folksy tendencies; Leśmian used similar suffixes, such as -iska and -ała, in poems such as "Do śpiewaka" (To the Singer) and "Bajdała" (the closest translation of which would be "Klutz"). (Papierkowski 134, 66-70.) Artur Sandauer (Samobójstwo... 19) believes the two girls are the dark-haired Dora and an imaginary blonde such as the nonexistent girl in "Pan Błyszczczyński." In "Dwa krzyże" (Two Crosses, 1908), the poet said that two girls loved him: "jedna weselem, a druga bólem," one with joy/wedding (a possible pun), and the other with pain. A similar pun is present here in line 4: "zaocznie" means both "by default" (in legal terminology) and "para-eye-ly," which I rendered as "eyewash."

Both Stone (138-9) and Trznadel (Twórczość 182-5, 352) say this poem represents the absurdity, paltriness, and futility of human endeavor in the midst of banal necessity; Anatol Stern ("Powroty..." in Wspomnienia 333-5) adds that the poet was a tiny, modest, mousy gentleman with a worried face who was very easy to overlook.

SREBRON

Nastała noc, spragniona wymian
 Mroku na dreszcze w półśnie rosy.
 Dąb bałwochwalczo wierzy w Tymian,
 We wpływ Tymianu—na niebiosy.

Światła na trawie mrą pokotem—
 Śmierć światła wzrusza leśne knieje.
 Północ przedawnia się pod płotem,
 A płot—przyszłości gwiazd srebrnieje.
 Gdzie jest bezdroże? A gdzie—droga?
 Gdzie—dech po śmierci? Ból—po zgonie?
 Więc nie ma tchu i nie ma Boga?
 I nie ma nic—a księżyc plonie?

Księżyc to—wioska ogromniasta,
 Gdzie ciszę ciula brat mój—Srebroń,
 Co siebie własnym snem przerasta,
 Więc mu istnienia w srebrze—nie broń!

To—niepoprawny Istnieniowiec!
 Poeta!—Znawca mgły i wina.
 Nadskakujący snom—manowiec,
 Wieczności śpiewna krzątanina.

W sieć rymów łowi srebrne myszy,
 I srebrny chwast, i srebrną jabłoń—
 I rzuca strzępy srebrnej ciszy
 Na księżycową błon czy prablon...

"Śmierci!"—powiada. —Mrok nas słyszy!

Nie śmieć się w niebo i nie błaznij!"

I rzuca strzępy modrej ciszy

Na księżycowy znój czy praznoj...

"Jam ten—powiada—co mgłą dyszy

I wie, że Bóg to—lza i zamieć!"

I rzuca strzępy złotej ciszy

Na księżycową miedź czy pramieź...

Pełno tam—dolin, wzgórz, bajorów,
 Modrych rozwiśleń i udniestrzeń
 I niby scena bez aktorów
 Rozpacza pusta w świetle przestrzeń.

I szepce Srebroń w dal znikomą:

"Nie samym światłem mrok się żywi—

Wszyscy jesteśmy nieszczęśliwi,

Lecz po co srebrnieć? — Nie wiadomo...

Nim śmierć w zdźbło mroku przeistoczy

Pomysł mych łez—i zarys ducha—

Niech mi gwiazdami spyla oczy

Nicości złota rozsypucha!"—

I gdy tak mówi—nicość właśnie
 Kłami połyska—zła i szczera—
 I jeszcze jedna gwiazda gaśnie—
 I jeszcze jeden Bóg umiera.

SILVRON

The night ensued and thirsted for a change
 Of murk to shivers in the half-dream dew.
 The Oak idolatrous believes in Thyme,
 In Father Thyme's effect on heavens blue.

The grassy lights are dimming in a row,
 Their death affecting forests full of game,
 And midnight is estopped by laches while
 The fence glows starry with the future's flame.
 Where is the path, and where the pathlessness?
 And where do life and pain go after death?
 Why does the moon blaze on if there is naught?
 You mean there is no God and there's no breath?

The moon is a largescent village where
 My brother Silvrion scrapes the silence which
 Outgrows itself by means of sleep and dreams—
 The right to silver-be do not abridge!

Oh, what a silly no-kay connoisseur
 Of mist and wine!—We've got a poet, see!
 Attendance-dancing on the badlands dreams
 And on Forever's bustling melody!

He catches silver mice in nets of rhyme,
 And silver weeds, and silver apple-trees!
 And onto lunar plains or proto-plains
 He throws confetti silence, silver peace...

"The murk can hear us, Death!" he says, "Do not
 Guffaw at heaven, don't be silly, please!"
 And onto lunar toil or proto-toil

He throws confetti silence, azure peace...

"I breathe the fog," he says, "I'm he who knows
 That God is tears and storms without surcease!"
 And onto lunar bronze or proto-bronze
 He throws confetti silence, golden peace...

Cerulean rivulations swell and teem,
 It's full of valleys, hills, and puddles there,
 As empty as a stage without a cast,
 A no-hope void in Space's floodlight glare.

So Silvrion whispers into the expanse

Inane: "Murk doth not live by light alone!

We're all of us unhappy, so why should

We go on silvering? That is an unknown...

Ere Death transforms into a blade of murk
 The contour of my soul, the concept of
 My tears, may brittleness of golden void
 Suffuse my eyes with stardust from above!"

And while he speaks, the Void has bared her fangs
 Aglitter with her viciousness sincere—
 Another God is dying presently,
 Another star is due to disappear.

Line SILVERISHNESS (SILVRON)

1 Closed-in night, thirsted for-changes
 2 Of-murk to shudders in half-dream of-dew.
 3 Oak idolatrously believes in Thyme,
 4 In influence of-Thyme—upon heavens.
 5 Lights on grass die in-windrow—
 6 Death of-lights moves of-forests game-forests.
 7 Midnight prescribes itself under fence,
 8 And fence—with-future of-stars silvers.
 9 Where is without-pathness? And where—path?
 10 Where—breath after life? Pain—after demise?
 11 Thus not is breath and not is God?
 12 And not is nothing—and moon blazes?
 13 Moon that-is—village large-escent,
 14 Where silence scrapes brother mine—Silverishness,
 15 Who himself with-own sleep-or-dream outgrows,
 16 So to-him existence in silver—do-not prohibit!
 17 That—incorrigible Existence-or!
 18 Poet! —Knower of-fog and of-wine.
 19 Courting sleep-or-dreams—of wilds,
 20 Of-eternity melodious bustling.
 21 In net of-rhymes fishes silver mice,
 22 And silver weed, and silver apple-tree—
 23 And throws tatters of-silver silence
 24 On moon's plain or proto-plain...
 25 "Death!" —he-says. —"Murk us hears!
 26 Not laugh yourself in sky and not clown-around!"
 27 And throws tatters of-cerulean silence
 28 On moon's toil or proto-toil...
 29 "I-am he—he-says—who with-fog pants
 30 And knows, that God that—tear and snowstorm!"
 31 And throws tatters of-golden silence
 32 On moon's copper or proto-copper...
 33 Full-of there—valleys, hills, muddy pools,
 34 Cerulean Vistulations and Dniestrations
 35 And ostensibly stage without actors
 36 Despairing empty in light of-infinite-spaces.
 37 And whispers Silverishness into distance insignificant:
 38 "Not with-only light murk itself feeds—
 39 All-we are unhappy,
 40 But what for to-silver? —Not known...
 41 Before death into blade of-murk transsubstantiates
 42 Idea of-my tears—and outline of-spirit—
 43 May to-me with-stars dustify eyes
 44 Of-nothing golden dustification!
 45 And while thus says—nothingness precisely
 46 With-fangs glitters—bad and honest—
 47 And another one star extinguishes—
 48 And another one God dies.

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 525, this poem was originally published in Skamander, Warsaw, March-April 1936. (Line 20 read "of-God with butterfly—confusion.") "W chmur odbiciu" (In Cloud Reflection) was printed in the same issue.

Line

- Title "Srebron" is a noun formation from "srebro," silver, but since both noun and adjective are identical in English, a change had to be made.
- 7 To become prescribed by the statute of limitations: legal terminology for to become too outdated for filing suit. The explanation was much too voluminous for one short line, so I found a legal synonym in equity: estopped by laches. Polish jurisprudence did not distinguish between law and equity, so either synonym can be used.
- 13 "Ogromniasty" is pseudo-dialect: "huga" with an unexpected folksy suffix.
- 18 Papierkowski (156-7) calls "Istnieniowiec" a neologism; it also contains an allusion to Existentialism (Trznadel considered Leśmian to be one). However, such a philosophical term in English would belie the crude folksiness of the Polish word.
- 21 In Sindbad, 87-8, Leśmian has magic silver flying creatures bringing Sindbad silver apparel in the moonlight so as to appear before the flaming Princess Sermina, who has the power to command whatever dream she wants.
- 24 ff "Pra-" is a prefix for "very ancient, very old," and "błonie" is an archaism for "błonie," meadow or plain. (Papierkowski 123) According to Giergielewicz, Rym i wiersz, 119, the repetitions are crucial here: depriving this poem of the similar sounds elicited by combining the same prefix with different monosyllables would be depriving it of its basic structural agent and main catalyst of ambience. Rhyme is a good quiet servant with a dash of magic: the more unexpected, the more effective.
- 34 The Vistula and the Dnieper are rivers. (Cf. Papierkowski 134)
- 38 An allusion to "Man does not live by bread alone."
- 40 According to Pankowski 76-81 and Trznadel (Twórczość Leśmiana 351-2), human existence is questioned as senseless, absurd, and unhappy, and rhetorical questions about its purpose are answered in the same stanza. The absence of justification makes the questions come full circle. The poem closes with death and nothingness; existence and silvering are interchangeable, and the absurdity of both is brought out.
- 44 "Rozsypucha," dustification, is a pseudo-neologism for brittle sand.
- 48 According to Sandauer, Samobójstwo... p. 32, Silvrion is the personification of creative powers of natura naturans within the object, somewhat like the Roman harvest-god Consus. What, Sandauer interjects, did this god do the rest of the year?

According to Karpowicz, pp. 5-35, Leśmian was passionately interested in the "proto-cause" which precedes the first cause, much like a wave precedes the water it pushes. He wished to arrive at "zero existence" so as to be able to create from the point preceding matter and name, thus using psychology to conquer physics. He was also very interested in transitional forms (such as liquid crystals in physics) and antitheses because he felt that nothingness exerts a pressure on matter equal to the pressure matter exerts on nothingness, with the resulting tension being the genesis of creation. Since, according to Karpowicz' interpretation of Leśmian, the past and future are separated only by an observer, who cannot control either, the theory of relativity has become polarized, and time becomes eternal, mythical, and sacred.

Balcerzan, in Oprócz glosu, pp. 29-44, indicates that in this poem the absence of actors does not interfere with the drama in the least: the tension of conflict is created among the parts of the landscape. The existence of matter is a fact, the existence of spirit only an illusion, so God becomes problematic; if the reason and order of the world cannot be grasped by earthly experience, the poet "installs" his observer on a higher plane, on the moon. (Let us not forget that the Polish word for "sky" also means "heaven.")

According to Balcerzan, this poem documents pre-biological creation: the only "actors" are chemical elements, resulting in a dialogue between positive and negative in which universal nonexistence does not interfere with the moon's blazing. The end result of all this absurdity is absurdist laughter, which alone can reconcile the unreconciled.

URSZULA KOCHANOWSKA

Gdy po śmierci w niebiosów przybyłam pustkowie,
 Bóg długo patrzył na mnie i głaskał po głowie.
 "Zbliź się do mnie, Urszulo! Poglądasz jak żywa...
 Zrobię dla cię, co zechcesz, byś była szczęśliwa!"
 "Zrób tak, Boże—szepnęłam—by w nieb Twoich krasie
 Wszystko było tak samo, jak tam—w Czarnolasie!"
 I umilkłam złęczniona, i oczy unoszę,
 By zbadać, czy się gniewa, że Go o to proszę?
 Uśmiechnął się i skinął—i wnet z Bożej łaski
 Powstał dom—kubek w kubek jak nasz—czarnolaski.
 I sprzęty, i donice rozkwitłego ziela
 Tak podobne, aż oczom straszno od wesela!
 I rzekł: "Oto są—sprzęty, a oto—donice.
 Tylko patrzeć, jak przyjdą stęsknieni rodzice!
 I ja, gdy gwiazdy do snu poukładam w niebie,
 Nieraz do drzwi zapukam, by odwiedzić ciebie!"
 I odszedł, a ja zaraz krzątam się, jak mogę,
 Więc nakrywam do stołu, omiatam podłogę—
 I w suknię najróżowszą ciało przyoblekam,
 I sen wieczny odpędzam—i czuwam—i czekam...
 Już świt pierwszą rozniętą złoci się po ścianie,
 Gdy właśnie słyhać kroki i do drzwi pukanie...
 Więc zrywam się i biegnę! Wiatr po niebie dzwoni!
 Serce w piersi zamiera... Nie! To Bóg, nie oni!...

I went to heaven's wilderness when I was dead,
 God looked at me a long time, then He stroked my head.
 "Come closer, Ursula! You look alive to me!
 I'd like you to be happy--say what you want," said He.
 I whispered, "God almighty, if you could just make
 The lovely heavens just like home in Blackwood Lake!"
 I hushed, alarmed, and raised my eyes to see if He
 Might possibly be angry to hear that wish from me.
 God beckoned with a smile; there suddenly appeared
 —o praised be God! —a home just like my own so dear.
 Same household goods, same flowers, down to every blade!
 In spite of my delight, my eyes were sore afraid!
 "Here are your goods, your flowerpots," He said. "In sum,
 I'd like to be here when your yearning parents come.
 And after I have tucked the stars to sleep at night,
 I'll visit you from time to time, if that's all right."
 He left, I went to work with bustle and ado,
 I swept and washed the floor, and set the table too;
 I put my pinkest dress on, and sat down as before,
 To conquer sleep eternal, and watch, and wait some more.
 The early splash of dawn moved golden on the wall;
 I heard somebody knock, and footsteps in the hall.
 I ran up to the door and saw, to my dismay—
 My heart was breaking—it was only God, not they!

Line URSZULA KOCHANOWSKA

1 When after death to heavens' I-arrived wilds,
 2 God long looked at me and petted on head.
 3 "Near yourself to me, Ursula! You-view like live...
 4 I-will-do for you, what you-want, so-that you-be happy!"
 5 "Do so, God—I-whispered—that in of-sky Thine lovely
 6 Everything to-be the same, as there—in Blackforest!"
 7 And hushed alarmed, and eyes raise,
 8 To examine, if is angry, that Him for something ask?
 9 Smiled himself and beckoned—and then from Divine grace
 10 Arose house—cup in cup like ours—blackforestish.
 11 And furnishings, and earthen-pots of-bloomed green
 12 So similar, that eyes scared from merriness!
 13 And said: "Here are—furnishings, and here—earthenpots
 14 Only to-see, how come homesick parents!
 15 And I, when stars to sleep will-lay in heaven,
 16 Not-once to door will-knock, to visit you!"
 17 And went-away, and I immediately bustle myself, as can,
 18 So set to table, sweep floor—
 19 And in dress pinkest body beclothed,
 20 And sleep eternal chase—and vigilate—and wait...
 21 Already dawn first dash-with goldens self on wall,
 22 When just-then one-hears steps and to door knocking...
 23 So I-tear myself and run! Wind around heaven rings!
 24 Heart in chest dies—No! That—God, not they!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 528, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), Warsaw, December 24, 1932, and appears to have been inspired by a poetry convention dedicated to the Baroque poet Jan Kochanowski. According to Miłosz p. 75, Kochanowski wrote his "Treny" (Laments or Threnodies) when his little daughter Urszula died at the age of three; although he disregarded Scaliger's precept that only important person-ages may be mourned in verse, he nevertheless adhered to strictly conventional form. For instance, Jan Kochanowski's Polish works (*Dzieła polskie*, Vol. II, pp. 59-75) contain 19 threnodies for Urszula plus an epitaph for her sister Hanna, who followed shortly; they are 13-syllable distichs almost entirely lacking enjambments. (A rare example of enjambment is on p. 9 of the same volume: the reason is that the poem has no end and no beginning, referring to a serpentine constellation which bites its own tail.) Threnody no. xviii, pp. 70-1, are in modified "lira" form (11, 7, 7, 11); the heptasyllables and hendecasyllables rhyme with each other, producing the effect of a child enclosed within her father's arms.

As Stone (277) and Karpowicz (137) indicate, this is naive conventional dialogue appropriate for children, imitating Kochanowski's form; in terms of theodicy, however, God is rendered useless at best.

LUDZIE

Sz i tędy ludzie biedni, prości—
 Bez przeznaczenia, bez przyszłości,
 Widziałem ich, słyszałem ich!...

Sz i niepotrzebni, nieprzytomni—
 Kto ich zobaczy—ten zapomni.
 Widziałem ich, słyszałem ich!...

Szli ubogiego brzegiem cienia—
 I nikt nie stwierdził ich istnienia.
 Widziałem ich, słyszałem ich!...

Śpiewali skargę byle jaką
 I umierali jako tako...
 Widziałem ich, słyszałem ich!...

Już ich nie widzę i nie słyszę—
 Lubię trwającą po nich ciszę.
 Widziałem ją, słyszałem ją!...

PEOPLE

Some poor and simple people walked on by,
 No future and no destiny, and I—
 I saw them and I heard them go!

They walked unnecessary, unaware—
 You see them and forget that they were there.
 I saw them and I heard them go!

They walked the humble edge of shadow-sighs,
 And their existence went unrecognized.
 I saw them and I heard them go!

They sang some sort of grievance workaday,
 Their deaths were commonplace, the same old way.
 I saw them and I heard them go!

I see and hear them no more at this time—
 I like the silence that they left behind.
 I saw it and I heard it too!

| <u>Line</u> | <u>PEOPLE</u> |
|-------------|--|
| 1 | Walked here people poor, simple— |
| 2 | Without fate, without future. |
| 3 | I-saw them, I-heard them! |
| 4 | They-walked unnecessary, unconscious— |
| 5 | Who them sees—he forgets. |
| 6 | I-saw them, I-heard them! |
| 7 | They-walked of-humble by-edge of-shadow— |
| 8 | And nobody not ascertained their being. |
| 9 | I-saw them, I-heard them! |
| 10 | They-sang complaint just any-old-kind |
| 11 | And died just any-old way... |
| 12 | I-saw them, I-heard them! |
| 13 | Already them not see-I and not hear-I— |
| 14 | I-like lasting after them silence. |
| 15 | I-saw it, I-heard it! |

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 531, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), Warsaw, December 9, 1934. The texts are virtually identical except for a small change in punctuation.

Pankowski (76-81) considers the people's trek similar to the lemmings' "absurd migration." Human existence is questioned as senseless and unhappy, and nature is the only consolation. (However, as we have seen, it is losing its consoling power for Leśmian as time goes by.)

This poem may echo line 39 of "Silvron"—we are all unhappy—except that these "unconscious" and "workaday" people do not even have art and creativity to console themselves.

The "any-old-kind" nature of lines 10-11 (bylejaki) uses the same word Sandauer applied to Leśmian's poetry in general. It can mean anything from willy-nilly/haphazard to workaday/nothing-special to sloppy/perfunctory.

Przypominam—wszystkiego przypomnieć nie zdołam:
 Trawa... Za trawą—wszechświat... A ja—kogoś wołam.
 Podoba mi się właśnie w powietrzu wołanie—
 I pachnie macierzanka—i słońce śpi—w sianie.
 A jeszcze? Co mi jeszcze z lat dawnych się marzy?
 Ogród, gdzie dużo liści znajomych i twarzy—
 Same liście i twarze!—Liściasto i ludno!
 Śmiech mój—w końcu alei. Śmiech stłumić tak trudno!
 Biegnę, głowę gmatwając w szumach, w podobłoczach!
 Oddech nieba mam—w piersi!—Drzew wierzchołki—w oczach!
 Kroki moje już dudnią po grobli—nad rzeką.
 Słysząc je tak daleko! Tak cudnie daleko!
 A teraz—bieg z powrotem do domu—przez trawę—
 I po schodach, co lubią biegnących stóp wrzawę...
 I pokój, przepełniony wiosną i upałem,
 I tym moim po katach rozwłoczonym ciastem—
 Dotyk szyby—ustami... Podróż—w nic, w oszklenie—
 I to czujne bezbrzeżne z całych sił—istnienie!

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

I recollect—I can't remember everything—
 The grass—infinity beyond—I'm calling out.
 The thyme is fragrant, and the sun's asleep in hay—
 I'm happy with the sound of my own airborne shout.
 What other reminiscences from bygone years?
 A garden full of faces and familiar leaves—
 My glade-end laughter—it's so hard to stifle it!—
 A populated, leafy, crowded world naive.
 My head's embroiled in sky-high rustling as I run,
 Inhaling breath of heaven, treetops in my eyes!
 My footsteps thunder on the levee—they are heard
 So far away—so dandy far away—oh, my!
 I hurry home through meadows, up along the stairs
 That seem to like the uproar of my running feet...
 My body's dawdling in the corners everywhere,
 The room is overfull with springtime and with heat.
 Alert and boundless life with all its might! My lips
 Are touching windowpanes—a glassy nowhere trip!

Line FROM YEARS-OF-CHILDHOOD (CHILDHOOD MEMORIES)

- 1 I-remember—everything remember not I-am-able:
 2 Grass... After grass—allworld... And I—someone call.
 3 Pleases me myself own in air calling—
 4 And fragrances wild-thyme—and sun sleeps—in hay.
 5 And more? What me more from years past itself dreams?
 6 Garden, where many leaves familiar and faces—
 7 Just leaves and faces!—Leafy and peoply!
 8 Laughter my—at end of-glade. Laughter stifle so difficult!
 9 I-run, head confusing in roars, in under-clouds!
 10 Breath of-sky have—in chest!—Of-trees tops—in eyes!
 11 Steps my already thunder along dike—above river.
 12 Hear them so far! So miraculously far-away!
 13 And now—run to back to house—through grass—
 14 And on stairs, which like of-running feet clamor...
 15 And room, overfilled with-spring and with-heat,
 16 And that my in corners dragged-around body—
 17 Touch of-pane—with lips... Trip—into nothing, into glassification—
 18 And that alert no-boundary from all powers—existence!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), Warsaw, July 5, 1936. (With the exception of one punctuation change, the texts are identical.) In Twórczość Leśmiana, pp. 349-51, the same author indicates that childhood herein is presented as a paradise lost; the pessimistic and tragic fate of humanity finds no justification, and any attempts to explain unhappiness and destructiveness lead to absurdity and the confusion of cause and effect (cf. "Sen," "Kłęska," "Zły jar," etc.) In LMP, Trznadel says, Leśmian escapes into the subjective individual time of primeval myth and fairy-tale, presenting an elegy of happiness dating from the days before confrontation with defeat. According to Głowiński, Zaświat..., p. 244 ff., elegies present the real world as a crystallization of the function of recollection because of the distance separating act from remembrance.

Stone (282-3) compares this elegy to "Udóstwo," wherein the beloved family dies a second time in memory. "The concreteness of the recollections makes the poem extremely vivid, heightening the longing for the minutiae associated with childhood... the images and actions of the past... are juxtaposed haphazardly—as though related by a child." In a 1901 fragment "Ze wspomnień dzieciństwa" (From Childhood Memories, UR 46-8), Leśmian indicated that he was fascinated by magic and reflection: his own room in the mirror did not reproduce the sound of his foot-stamping in the real world. The sun painting dogs on the wall is an echo of a Romantic commonplace of "repetition" in water or mirrors, the "nature painting" of contemplation.

Za miastem na odludziu—rozpacz i Niedziela!
 Puste niebo za ledwo ziemi się udziela.
 Dwoje nędzarzy bladych z miłości i strachu
 Szuka w rowie przytułku dla pieszczoł bez dachu.
 On jej piersi, zużytym śniatkujące czarem,
 Ogarnął skrzętną dłońi przymilnym sucharem.
 A ona w zmierzchach rowu zreniociami dnieje,
 Oddając, zamiast cnoty—mus i beznadzieję.
 Niedołężni od żądy, śmieszni od pośpiechu
 Uzręczniali się gnuśnie do żwawego grzecnu.
 Do jej włosów wargami wpelzał, jak do krzaka,
 Raz tylko czułe słówko szepnął na bosaka.
 I ona, nim wylgnęła z rąk uboczem ciała,
 Raz się tylko do niego mgłą przycalowała.
 Trudno im, w twardym łożu głodne żarząc brzuchy,
 Ciulać steranych pieśczoł poniszczone puchy!
 Nawet w snach upojenia tkwią zadry i sęki:
 Trzeba się docałować do nacichłej meki.
 Trzeba dreszczom dać dostęp do zboliałych kości—
 Więc kochali się wrogo—na przekór miłości.
 Poistnieli dla siebie z łaski tego cienia,
 Co ich w rowie od reszty wygrodził istnienia.
 Milczkiem rozkosz spożyli—z dala od wesela,
 Tyle tylko, że była naokół Niedziela!

SUNDAY

Beyond the town there's bleakness, Sunday, and despair!
 The barren sky just barely gives the earth her share.
 Two castaways, their faces pale with love and stress,
 Found shelter in the ditch for their no-roof caress.
 He wrapped a busy hand ingratiatingly,
 In shopworn cheeky charm, around her breast, while she
 —Her eyes adawn in ditchy murk—not virtue shed;
 She yielded to necessity-despair instead.
 Incompetent with lust, ridiculous with haste,
 Routinely they prepared a sinful-brisk embrace.
 As if it were a bush, he nibble-crawled her hair,
 Just whispered one endearment when his feet were bare.
 Before she freed her byway body from his hug,
 She only kissed him once, and that was through the fog.
 It's hard, with hungry bellies aglow in stony beds,
 To scrape the wasted hugs for some leftover shred.
 And even drunken dreams are fraught with splinter-snares:
 You've got to kiss your way into the numb despair,
 And shivers must have access to sore bones and skin.
 Their love was therefore hostile, spiteful and chagrined.
 The shadow fenced the rest of all existence out;
 They owed their shared existence to its grace, no doubt.
 So they consumed their ecstasy without a sound,
 No feast in sight—but it was Sunday all around!

Line SUNDAY

- 1 Beyond city in lonely-place—despair and Sunday!
 2 Empty sky hardly to-earth itself imparts.
 3 Two wretches pale from love and fear
 4 Search in ditch shelter for caresses without roof.
 5 He her breasts, with-used-up boldly charm,
 6 Collects industrious palm-of ingratiating bread-bun.
 7 And she in dusks of-ditch with-pupils dawns,
 8 Surrendering, instead-of virtue—necessity and ho-hope.
 9 Incompetent from desire, ridiculous from hurry
 10 Adroitified themselves lazily to alert sin.
 11 To her hair with-lips crawled-in, as-if to bush,
 12 Once only affectionate little-word whispered in barefoot.
 13 And she, before crawled-out from arms with-side-of body,
 14 Once herself only to him with-fog kissed-up.
 15 Hard for-them, in hard bed hungry incandescing bellies,
 16 Scrape of-consumed caresses ruined fluffs!
 17 Even in dreams of-inebriation stick splints and knots:
 18 Is-necessary oneself to-kiss-up to hushed suffering.
 19 Is-necessary to-shivers give access to hurtified bones—
 20 Therefore loved themselves hostilely—in spite-of love.
 21 Existified for themselves from grace of-that shadow,
 22 Which them in ditch from rest fenced-out of-existence.
 23 Silently delight consumed—in far from merriness-or-wedding,
 24 That only, that was around Sunday!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 533, this poem was first published in "Kultura," Warsaw, April 3, 1932.

- 1 Sunday, etymologically broken down, means "no-actionness," i. e. the day on which no work is done.
 5 According to Papierkowski (163, 171), "śmiałkować" is a neologism meaning "to behave boldly."
 7 "Dnieje," "she-dayifies," is a neologism when used for a person; normally, nothing can "dayify" or dawn except a day.
 13 "Ubocze" is a neologism for "bok," side, which, according to Papierkowski p. 131, has the purpose of making the language strange.
 14 "Przycałować" is, according to Papierkowski p. 159, a neologism; it means to stick onto while kissing, or kiss in something's direction. The same applies to line 18, "docałować," except that here the prefix indicates that the distance has been covered in full.
 19 "Zbolały," lit. "hurtified," is not a neologism in Polish. Neither is "existify" in line 20 or "adroitify" in line 10.
 22 "Wygrodzić" means to separate, both in the sense of establishing parameters and of physically cutting off access.

Płomienny uśmiech nietrwałych zórz
(O, złoć się dłużej!)—umiera już.

I jeszcze jedna z różowych chmur
Skrajem dogasa na grzbiecie gór.

I jeden jeszcze przeżyty dzień
(O, złoć się dłużej!)—odchodzi w cień...

Volatile sunset's fire-glowing smile
(Goldify longer!) starts to decline.

One more pink cloud on the mountainous crest
Quenches its edges like all the rest.

And one more day we have all lived through
(Goldify longer!) shade-rendezvous.

line ***

1 Flamey smile of-unlasting auroras
 2 (O, gild yourself longer!)-is-dying already.
 3 And still another of rosy clouds
 4 With-edge is-extinguishing on back of-mountains.
 5 And still another lived-through day
 6 (O, gild yourself longer!)-goes-off into shadow.

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 535, this poem was first published in "Literatura i Sztuka" (Literature and Art), as a supplement to the "Nowa Gazeta" newspaper, June 11, 1911. The original title was "Mimochodem," which means "in passing" or "by the way," i. e. something like "an incidental poem."

A 1902 poem by Leśmian (UR, p. 65) reads, in part: "That blue-gray star which is acquainted with the lake/ Is pinkified by the not-quite-extinguished shudders of the aurora."

Ireneusz Opacki, in "Pośmiertna w głębi jezior maska" (Death Mask in the Depths of the Lake) in Studia o Leśmianie, pp. 311-37, considers this poem an example of the rapid and unrepeatably manner in which things pass.

ZWIERZYNIEC

Flamingo, różowiejąc, smukli się nad wodą
 Skrzydlatego jedwabiu zaciszną urodą.
 Sama dal tak w nim skupia swe znikliwe dzieje,
 Że—czy leci, czy stoi—zawsze daleczeje.

Wielbiąd w słońcu zapłował stąd o kroków siedem
 Jak sprzęt Boży, okryty poniszczonym pledem.
 Świat, co szuka oparcia dla swego zamętu,
 Korzysta z pogarbionej ciszy tego sprzętu.
 Ślepie, z których się słońce nigdy dość nie wylśni,
 Patrzą na mnie z plamiście rozwrzaskanej pilśni,
 W ktorej mrok się tygrysim gęstwi uścierwieniem—
 Ten sam mrok, co w ogrodzie był tylko—brzóz cieniem...

Pies mój, kwiat oszczekując, łbem się tuli ku mnie—
 By poistnieć w mym świecie trafnie i beztłumnie—
 I oczami po prośbie w twarz mi się człowieczy,
 A ja wchodzę—w Mgłę zwierzat i w Tuman wszechrzeczy.

THE ZOO

Flamingo slender rosifies above the pond,
 And hushes mirror-quiet beauty silken-winged.
 The distance concentrates its perishable deeds
 Therein—no matter what, it's always distancing.

Like furniture divine, and covered with a rag,
 A nearby camel has turned flaxen in the sun.
 The world requires support for its confusion, and
 Decides to use his humpy silence to lean on.
 The sun can never quite unglister from his eyes.
 They stare at me beneath the blotchy blanket blare
 That's thickifying with a tiger-carrionness
 Composed of murk that's only birches' shade elsewhere.
 My flower-barking dog head-nestles unto me—
 He wants to be correct and crowdless in my world,
 With begging eyes before my face personifies—
 I enter Creature-mist and cloudy All-thing swirl.

Line BESTIARY (THE ZOO)

- 1 Flamingo, pink fying, slimming self above water
 2 Of-winged silk with-hushified beauty.
 3 Same distance thus in it concentrates its disappearant deeds,
 4 That—if flies, if stands—always distances.
 5 Camel in sun fluxified from here steps seven
 6 Like furniture of-God, covered with-ruined plaid-blanket.
 7 World, which searches-for support for its turmoil,
 8 Takes-advantage of humped silence of-this furniture.
 9 Eyes, from which itself sun never enough not glistens-out,
 10 Look at me from spottily shouted-apart felt,
 11 In which murk itself with-tigerish thickens carcassness,
 12 That same murk, which in garden was only—of-birches shadow...
 13 Dog my, flower aroundbarking, with-animal-head himself cuddles
 toward me—
 14 To exist in my world accurately and without-crowdly—
 15 And with-eyes after request in face to-me himself personifies,
 16 And I enter—into Fog of-animals and into Cloudswirl of-all-things.

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 537, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), August 14, 1932, along with the "Moths" from Sipping Shade. However, only the first two strophes were published, as the space for the rest of the poem was evidently needed for an announcement regarding the Feminine Commercial School. ("The fate of poetry," Trznadel concludes laconically.) In Twórczość Leśmiana p. 119, the same author indicates that the animals try to achieve consciousness and self-contemplation while the human tries to return to identity with nature as a perceptual or epistemological act of intuition. Karpowicz (113-17, 136, 289) says that in the experiment known as life, everything is fleeting, unrepeatable, precious, pivotal, and dignified. A camel becomes an Archimedean support point for the muddled world: God is thus dependent on a camel, much as John Donne (in a funeral sermon for Sir William Cokayne December 12, 1626) neglected God for a fly-buzz distracting him.

- 3 As in "Spring Ox" and "The Cobbler," the distance itself distances, i. e. is not a function of perception; similarly, the flamingo in line 1 "slimmifies."
 9 "To glisten to the end," i. e. all the way out; to complete that action.
 10 "Spottily" and "shouted-apart" are neologisms according to Papierkowski pp. 178, 195, formed from verbs or adverbs plus suffixes.
 14 "To exist for a while" in a manner lacking crowds (Papierkowski 157, 193).
 15 The dog becomes human and the human reverses the process. Even the word for the dog's eyes is the word used for human eyes (oczy), not for animal eyes (slepia).

Brzęk muchy w pustym dzbanie, co stoi na półce,
 Smuga w oczach po znikłej za oknem jaskółce.
 Cień ręki—na murawie... A wszystko—niczyje,
 Ledwo się zazieleni—już ufa, że żyje.
 A jak dumnie się modrzy u ciszy podnóża!
 Jak buńczucznie do boju z mgłą się napurpurza!
 A jest go tak niewiele, że mniej niż niebiesko...
 Nic, prócz tła. Biały obłok z liliową przekreską.
 Dal świata w ślepiach wróbla. Spotkanie traw z ciałem.
 Szmary w studni. Ja—w lesie. Mgłą byłeś? —Bywałem!
 Usta twoje—w alei. Świt pod groblą w młynie.
 Niebo—w bramie na oścież... Zgon pszczoł w koniczynie.
 Wstążka zmarłej dziewczyny na znajomej darni,
 Słońce, co chwiejnie skacząc, źdźbli się w łożach deszczarni.
 Wiara fali w istnienie za drugim nawrotem
 I wołanie o wieczność w jaśminach za płotem.
 Chód po ziemi człowieka, co na widnokresie,
 Malejąc, łatwo zwiewną gęstwę ciała niesie
 I w tej gęstwie się modli, i gmatwa co chwila
 I wyziera z tej gęstwy w świat i na motyla.

ETHEREALNESS

An empty-pitcher fly-buzz on the shelf,
 The eye-sweep of a vanished bird outside,
 Hand-silhouettes on lawns—all ownerless,
 It's barely greened and trusts that it's alive!
 It proudly indigoes at Quiet's feet
 And purples cocky, challenging the haze!
 But it's so paltry that it's less than blue,
 Just background. Lilac lines on white-cloud sprays.
 Beyondness in a sparrow's eyes. Wells purr.
 Flesh meets the grass. The woods I mistify!
 You glade your lips. The windmill-levee dawns.
 Wide-open sky. The clover-bees' demise.
 A dead girl's ribbon on familiar sod,
 Unstable sun-jerks blade in rainment tears,
 Re-undulating faith, converted twice,
 The jasmine's calling for forever here.
 Man walks the earth, and dwindles faraway.
 He carries body-thicket easily;
 Within that airy copse he often trips,
 And prays, and peers at universe and bees.

Line AIRINESS (ETHEREALNESS)

- 1 Sound of-fly in empty jug, which stands on shelf,
 2 Trail in eyes after disappeared behind window swallow.
 3 Shadow of-hand-or-arm—on lawn... And all—of-nobody,
 4 Hardly itself greenifies—already trusts, that lives!
 5 And how proudly itself blues at of-silence foot!
 6 How cockily to fight with fog itself bepurples!
 7 And is of-it so not-much, that less than blue...
 8 Nothing, besides background. White cloud with lily through-line.
 9 Distance of-world in eyes of-sparrow. Meeting of-grasses with
 body.
 10 Murmurs in well. I—in woods. With-fog you-were?—I would!
 11 Lips yours—in glade. Dawn under dike in windmill.
 12 Sky—in gate in wide-open... Death of-bees in clover.
 13 Ribbon of-died girl on known sod,
 14 Sun, which falteringly jumping, blades itself in tears of-rainness.
 15 Faith waves for existence after second conversion
 16 And calling for eternity in jasmines beyond fence.
 17 Walk on earth of-human, who on horizon,
 18 Smallifying, easily airy thicket of-body carries
 19 And in that thicket himself prays, and embroils each moment,
 20 And looks-out from this thicket on world and on butterfly.

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 537, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), Warsaw, July 31, 1932. In his Twórczość Leśmiana pp. 343-4, the same author indicates that nature is not a fairy-tale here, as in Łąka; occurrences are one-time and non-transferable. The meaning is not in the intellectual construction of the poem, but in the cracks between items: disparate things acquire dynamism and general applicability through compressed sequences of diachronic observations reminiscent of "In the Evening" in The Crossroads Orchard.

- 6 "Napurpurzać się," to bepurple oneself, is, according to Papierkowski 171, an example of a repeated verb derived from an unrepeated one.
 13 Cf. "Matysek," wherein the hero "plays out/wins" (pun) the weeping of a dead girl who never materializes.
 14 "To blade itself" is derived from "blade," i.e. something small; (Papierkowski 163) such dynamizations of nouns are unusual in Polish. This one is reminiscent of Goethe's "türmende Ferne" in "Auf dem See." "Deszczarnia" (Papierkowski 130) is a neologism having something to do with rain, but it is never defined; thus, I translated it "rainment" in the verse version.
 17 "Widnokres" is a juxtapositional neologism for "horizon." (P. 159, Papierkowski.)

W CZAS ZMARTWYCHWSTANIA

W czas zmartwychwstania Boza moc
 Trafi na opor naglych zdarzen,
 Nie wszystko stanie sie w te noc
 Wedlug niebieskich wyobrazen.

Sa takie gardla, ktorych zew
 Umilkl w mogile—bezpownotnie.
 Jest taka krew—przelana krew,
 Ktorej nie przelal nikt—dwukrotnie.

Jest takie prochno, co juz dosc
 Zaznalo zgrozy w swym konaniu!
 Jest taka dumna w ziemi kosc,
 Co sie sprzeciwi—zmartwychwstaniu!
 I coz, ze surma w niebie gra,
 By nowym bytem—swiat odurzyc?
 Nie kazdy smiech sie zbudzic da!
 Nie kazda lza sie da powtorzyc!

ON RESURRECTION DAY

On Judgment Day, God's might will meet
 With unexpected opposition;
 That night not everything will go
 According to His supposition.

There are some throats whose cry has died
 And hushed, irrevocably buried.
 Some blood has never been spilled twice,
 Some bloodshed has been solitary.

For some decay, its own demise
 Was horrifyingly sufficient!
 Some buried bones are proud, and won't
 Revive without some opposition!

So what if heaven's trumpet calls
 To daze the world with Death defeated?
 Not every laugh can be revived,
 Not every sob can be repeated!

Line AT TIME OF-RESURRECTION (ON RESURREC'ION DAY)

- 1 At time of-resurrection God's power
 2 Will-meet upon opposition of-sudden occurrences,
 3 Not everything will-be itself in that night
 4 According-to heavenly imaginations.
 5 Are such throats, whose call
 6 Silenced in (burial-)mound—unreturnably.
 7 There-is such blood—spilled blood,
 8 Which not spilled anyone—twice.
 9 There-is such rot, which already enough
 10 Experienced horror in its dying!
 11 There-is so proud in earth bone
 12 Which will object—to resurrection!
 13 And so-what, that trumpet in heaven plays,
 14 In-order-to with-new being—world to intoxicate?
 15 Not every laugh itself to-wake allows!
 16 Not every tear itself allows to-repeat!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), April 11, 1936, the Easter issue; Trznadel considers it significant that the editors chose this particular day to print the poem. In LMP, the same author explains that the ethical superiority of man to God evident in this poem is reminiscent of Heine's paganism in "Adam der Erste," and also of "Eliasz" and "Two Matthews." Eliasz retreats into the no-world in order to determine the possibility of a consciousness other than existence; the Matthews find the herb of immortality and give it to "Crygod" in their compassion instead. This poem is also reminiscent of the untitled poem beginning with "To-day's the anniversary of the day we met" (actions are ephemeral and passing, and the lyrical hero wants to resurrect the past) and of "Wyruszyła dusza w droge," wherein God maliciously deprives the dead soul of everything so it will have no choice but to love him. Cf. also "Matysek."

Pankowski (76-81) indicates that herein, man refuses to accept a future imposed by Authority. Karpowicz (134, 119-20) says that Lesmian's stubborn faith in the unrepeatability of beauty and ugliness leads him to commit dazzling blasphemies, rebelling against the ecclesiastical revelation of resurrection. Any resurrection is fraudulent because it is repetition—anything which can be repeated is counterfeit from the very cradle. Real existences are not affected by resurrection; they do not die, only become illimitably lonely.

WSPOMNIENIE

Te ścieżyny, których stopą dziecięcą
Dotykałem... Co z nimi? Gdzie one?
Tak się kręcą, jak łyż się kręcą,
Z oczu w nicość stracone!

Budziła mnie poranku wilgoć świeża,
A słońce malowało mi na ścianie
Złote psy—złote wybrzeża,
Złote skrzypce—złote otchłanie...

Kto dość zaklinająco spogląda
W światło, nawidocznione milczeniem,
Musi w końcu zobaczyć słonecznego wielbłąda
I zbójcę słonecznego ze skrzywym spojrzeniem.

Przy śniadaniu patrzyłem w stół jak w pustynię,
Śniąc, że na wielbłądzie jadę... Zbójcą jestem...
A ojciec, jakby wiedząc, że wielbłąd go wyminie,
Czytał dziennik ze spokojem i szelestem...

Karafka naświetlała haftem troistej tęczy
Wąs ojca—i gzymszafy—i róg serwetki białej,
Osa w firankach pogmatwane brzęczy,
Jakby same firanki niemi w słońcu brzęczały...

Podłoga zwierciadliła, lśniąca sennym nabytkiem,
Palmy liść z jaśniejszym nieco spodem,
Ale tak, że mętniał w rozcieńczeniu płytkiem,
Jakby zieleń ktoś rozlał mimochodem...

Fotel, trawiąc ciszę aksamitną,
Ociężałe wygodniał i płowiał...
Cukier igrał skraj błękitną,
Bochen chleba—różowiał...

Zegar wytrząsał ze sprężynowych zwojów
Dłużącą się nutę w głąb sali.
W umeblowanym półśnie słonecznych pokojów
Wszyscy trwali i nie umierali.

A potem coś się stało... —Żle, że coś się stało...
Ten sam zegar w innych miastach bił nieśmieiej...
I dusza się potknęła o nieoględne ciało—
I kolejno umierać zaczęli...

REMINISCENCE

Those narrow paths my childish feet would touch—
 What happened to them, and where are they now?
 They convolute the way tears convolute
 When into naught the eyes have hurled them down.

The freshness and the damp would waken me
 At dawn, the sun would paint my walls with gold—
 Some golden dogs, and golden violins,
 A golden seacoast—golden canyon-holes...

Whoever peers conjuredly enough
 Into the light must wind up seeing there
 (Made visible by hush) a camel gold,
 A sunny bandit with a flashing stare.

 The table was a desert while I ate,
 A daydream camel-riding rogue was I;
 My father read his news in rustle-peace,
 As though he knew the humps had passed him by.

A jug'embroidered triple rainbow-light
 On dad's mustache—a cornice—napkin-edge—
 A buzzing wasp became embroiled in drapes—
 The buzzing seemed to come from sunny threads.

 The mirror-floor would glisten sleepy loot—
 The palm-tree frond whose lighter underside,
 Like greenery spilled by a passerby,
 Would dull, diluted shadow, rarefied.

The armchair would relax and flaxify,
 Lethargically digesting velvet hush;
 While sugar frolicked with an azure spark,
 A loaf of bread would pinkify and blush.

 The clock would shake a spreading note into
 The parlor from its springing coils up high;
 Amid the sunny dozing furniture,
 The people lived along and didn't die.

But something happened then. It wasn't good.
 That clock struck timid in our future towns;
 The people started dying when their souls
 Against their cocky bodies ran aground.

1 Those little-paths, which with-foot childish
 2 I-touched... What with them? Where they?
 3 So they circle, like tears themselves circle,
 4 From eyes into nothing hurled!
 5 Woke me in-morning dampness fresh,
 6 And sun painted to-me on wall
 7 Golden dogs—golden seashores,
 8 Golden violins—golden abysses...
 9 Who sufficiently exorcisingly looks
 10 Into light, bevisualized with-silence,
 11 Must at end see sunny camel
 12 And bandit sunny with sparky glance.
 13 At breakfast I-would-look at table like into desert,
 14 Dreaming, that on camel I-ride... A-bandit am-I...
 15 And father, as-though knowing, that camel him will-pass,
 16 Read daily-newspaper with calm and rustle...
 17 Carafe belighted with-embroidery of-threefold rainbow
 18 Mustache of-father—and cornices of-cupboard—and edge of-napkin
 white,
 19 Wasp in curtains embroiledly buzzes,
 20 As-though same curtains with-threads in sun buzzed...
 21 Floor mirrored, glistening with-sleepy acquisition,
 22 Of-palm leaf with lighter somewhat bottom,
 23 But so, that dulled in dilution shallow,
 24 As-though green someone spilled casually...
 25 Armchair, digesting silence velvet,
 26 Heavified comfortablized and flaxened...
 27 Sugar frisked with-spark blue,
 28 Loaf of-bread—pinkified...
 29 Clock shook-out from springed coils
 30 Lengthening-itself note into depths of-parlor.
 31 In furnished half-sleep of-sunny rooms
 32 Everyone continued and not died.
 33 And then something itself happened... —Bad, that something itself
 happened...
 34 That same clock in other cities struck more-shyly...
 35 And soul itself faltered against inconsiderate body—
 36 And sequentially to-die they-began...

NOTES

Pietrkiewicz (Leśmian and Czechowicz p. 339) indicates that Leśmian's sun never just shines in vague splendor: it brings out the veins in leaves, it paints golden dogs and violins on the wall, or lazily lies on its back in grass. Sandauer (Samobójstwo 30-1) says that the "zero action" resulting from stop-motion dynamics typical of fragmented memory results in a "formal action" of neutrality which gives freedom to fantasy; two complicated imaginative operations cancel each other out and have no effect on reality at all.

NOC

Takiej nocy nie było! —To noc —nietutejsza!
 Przyszła z innego świata i trzeba ją przeżyć...
 Już płaczą rzeczy martwe... Ale o to —mniejsza!
 Nie każdą śmierć dziś można wiecznością uśmierzyć...

Nic nowego za grobem! Nic —poza tą bramą
 Gdzie się duchy zlatują ku istnienia plewom!
 A cokolwiek się stanie —stanie się to samo —
 Złych zdarzeń powtarzalność ciąży nawet drzewom!

Po pajęczej z chmur nici zszedł śnitrupek biały,
 Stał w oknie i patrzy, komu spać przeszkodził?
 Krzyk słyszę! To —z Tarpiejskiej na księżycu skały
 W przepaść boga strącono, który się narodził!

THE NIGHT

Such foreign, otherworldly night has never been!
 It came in from outside —we must survive it —yes —
 Dead items are a-weeping —minor point —today
 Eternity can't deaden every kind of death.

There's nothing new beyond thegrave, except for how
 The spirits flock to life-chaff at this lonely gate.
 It's all the same —the repetitious nature of
 Disasters lingers on —trees groan beneath its weight.

A small white apparition silkened from the clouds
 And cobweb-wondered if he'd spoiled somebody's dreams?
 From Moon-Tarpeian Rock a newborn god's been hurled
 Into the traitor's chasm. I still hear the screams.

Line NIGHT (THE NIGHT)

- 1 Such night not was! That night—no:—hereish!
 2 Came from other world and necessary it to-survive...
 3 Already weep things dead... But for that—lesser!
 4 Not every death today can-be with-eternity defeated...
 5 Nothing new beyond grave! Nothing;—except this gate
 6 Where themselves spirits fly toward of-existence chaff!
 7 And whatever itself happens—happens itself the same—
 8 Of-bad occurrences repetitiousness weighs even on-trees!
 9 On spidery from clouds thread came-down dream-corpselet white,
 10 Stood in window and looks, to-whom to-sleep bothered?
 11 Scream I-hear!—from Tarpeian on moon cliff
 12 Into ravine god was-thrown, who was born!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 538, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), Warsaw, April 23, 1933. The texts are identical.

As in "Silvron" and "On Resurrection Day," Leśmian is giving expression to his pessimistic contention that life is completely pointless and that death offers no respite or consolation. With the wisdom of historical hindsight, one might even speculate that the poet was predicting the deadening horrors to come.

- 9 Snitrupek is a neologism, according to Papierkowski (p. 150); it is composed of the word for "sleep" and "dream" (the Polish is ambiguous) plus the word for "corpse," and a diminutive suffix.
 11-2 The Tarpeian Rock was on the Capitoline Hill in ancient Rome; condemned criminals were hurled to their death from atop it. Leśmian, however, feels that gods, not criminals, are being killed. His fearful disgust of contemporary populism was also expressed in "Pejzaż współczesny" (Contemporary Landscape, first published in Poznań's Dwutygodnik Literacki (Literary Bi-Weekly) in June of 1932), which satirically depicts soulless mechanization in terms so acerbic as to be worthy of Georg Grosz.

W TRWODZE

Idź w mrok po senną strawę, zgłodniały tułaczu!
 Cień każdy i mgła każda mogą ci się przydać...
 Lecz co znaczy łza w oku, gdy nie słychać płaczu?
 I co znaczy ten wszechświat gdy Boga nie widać?
 O, wszyscy, wszyscy przyjdźcie w trwodze i beładzie!
 Niech was będzie tak dużo, tak nieprzeliczenie,
 Bym się duchem zagubił w naszych snów gromadzie
 I bym nie mógł rozróżnić, gdzie wy, a gdzie cienie?
 Twarzy zewsząd zjawionych, jak najwięcej twarzy!
 I dłoni—i tej widnej na przestrzał ulicy!...
 Wszystko dzisiaj się skończy, nic się już nie zdarzy—
 I nie ma już od dawna żadnej tajemnicy!...
 Trzeba zejść się gromadnie, byle nie odwlekać...
 I pomówić o wszystkim... I przedsięwziąć kroki...
 I odtąd nic już nie mieć, i na nic nie czekać—
 I co prędzej—na oślep iść w smutek głęboki...

TERROR

Starved straggler, search for sleepy sustenance in murk!
 Each shadow, every mist may be of use to you...
 What is the sense of tears if weeping can't be heard?
 Infinity means naught if God is not in view.
 O come, you all, o come in craven disarray!
 Be you so plentiful-uncountable that I
 May lose my spirit in the cluster of our dreams,
 And not distinguish you from shadows if I try.
 I want to glimpse the street, and see a lot of hands—
 And lots and lots of faces passing single file.
 For nothing more shall happen, it's the end today—
 And there have been no secrets for a good long while!
 We've got to plan our steps and not procrastinate,
 Confer on everything, and cluster in a heap...
 We shall possess no more, and never wait again—
 Right now we must go groping in the sadness deep...

Line IN TERROR (TERROR)

- 1 Go into murk for sleepy food, famished homeless-wanderer!
 2 Shadow each and fog each may to-you itself be-usefu ...
 3 But what means tear in eye, if not hearable weeping'
 4 And what means that infinity when God not seeable?
 5 O, all, all come in terror and no-order!
 6 May you be so many, so uncountable,
 7 That-I myself with-spirit lose in our dreams' group
 8 And that-I not may differentiate, where you, and where shadows?
 9 Faces from-everywhere appeared, as many-as-possible faces!
 10 And palms—and that seeable in see-through street!...
 11 All today itself will-end, nothing itself already not will-happen—
 12 And not is already from long-time no secret!
 13 Necessary to-go oneself in-group, must not delay...
 14 And talk about everything... And enterprise steps...
 15 And from-now-on nothing already not have, and for nothing to-wait—
 16 And as soon-as-possible—in blindness to-go into sadness deep...

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 538, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), Warsaw, February 4, 1934.

This poem is a perfect example of the ethical humanism of the late Leśmian: death is an inescapable nothingness, and only human relationships can offer some consolation. Nature is no longer mentioned. The collective despair appears to be an eerie prefiguration of the deadened dynamics of a concentration-camp situation.

In "Oda do młodości" (Ode to Youth), Mickiewicz wrote "Chórem w światy spojrzycie, / zatrwożcie się chórem!" (Look into the worlds in chorus form, and become terrified in chorus form as well, i. e. in unison.) There is also a possibility that the title refers to the legal term "in terrorem," i. e. a testator's provision that his heirs will not inherit unless complete harmony as to his will prevails among them.

S.AMOTNOŚĆ

Wiatr wie, jak trzeba nacichać...
 Z oknem — mrok się kołysze.
 Nie widać świata, nie słychać,
 Lecz ja coś widzę i słyszę...

Ktoś z płaczem ku mnie z dna losu
 Bezradną wyciąga rękę!
 Nie znam obcego mi głosu,
 Ale znam dobrze tę mękę!

Zaklina, błaga i woła,
 Więc w mrok wybiegam na drogę
 I nic nie widząc dokoła,
 Zrozumieć siebie nie mogę!

W brzozie mgła sępi się wiotka,
 Sen pusty!... Wracam do domu...
 Nie! Nikt się z nikim nie spotka!
 Nikt nie pomoże nikomu!

LONELINESS

The wind knows how to hush, the murk
 Is rocking murk beyond the wall.
 The world cannot be seen or heard,
 But I can see and hear somehow.

Somebody's weeping in the depths
 And reaches for me in despair!
 I cannot recognize the voice,
 But suffering—yes, I've been there.

I hear the begging, calling oaths
 And run into the murky street.
 Then I can't understand myself—
 There's nothing here for me to see!

The birch is glooming limp with mist.
 An empty dream!... I go on home.
 Nobody'll ever offer help.
 There'll be no meeting. We're alone.

Line LONELINESS

- 1 Wind knows, how must hush...
 2 Beyond window—murk itself cradles/rocks.
 3 Not seeable world, not hearable,
 4 But I something see and hear...
 5 Someone with weeping toward me from bottom of-fate
 6 Despairing lifts hand-or-arm!
 7 Not I-know foreign to-me voice,
 8 But know well that suffering!
 9 Conjures, begs, and calls,
 10 So into murk I-run-out onto way
 11 And nothing not seeing around,
 12 Understand myself not can-I!
 13 In birch fog glooms itself limp.
 14 Dream empty!... I-return to home...
 15 No! Nobody self with nobody will not meet!
 16 Nobody not will-help nobody!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), Warsaw, February 12, 1933. A German translation has been produced by Karl Dedecius: "Einsamkeit," Mickiewicz-Blätter, Heidelberg 1958, rpt. Polnische Poesie, under the title "Der Wind."

Zdzisław Łapiński, in "Metafizyka Leśmiana" (Studia pp. 46-7), indicates that the poet alienates parts of the body from each other; for example, eyes look at something all by themselves.

Significantly, Leśmian's translation of Poe's "Telltale Heart" is titled "The Eye" (Oko).

According to Eugeniusz Czaplejewicz, "Gra miłości i śmierci w liryce Leśmiana" in Studia z teorii i historii poezji, pp. 252-264, this poem is a soliloquy at the abyss with no hope of being heard. In his pessimistic later poems, Leśmian presented death as a one-way abyss, not a temporary interesting trip to Hades and back.

Here, not even human relationships can offer consolation; the multiple negatives in lines 15-16 serve to underscore the desolation of nothingness.

Line ***

1 What for so-many candles above me, so-many faces?
 2 To-body mine nothing already bad itself not will-happen.
 3 All stand, and I single(male) alone lie—
 4 Regret notsincere, and to-die necessary sincere.
 5 I-lie just, stared-into in of-garland leaves,
 6 Festively—eternally—personally.
 7 Death, who hushed, again begins in head to-roar,
 8 But I-understand, that not is-necessary nothing to-understand.
 9 So to-me difficult familiarize self with (burial-) mound,
 10 So self not wants to-be something different, than self was!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 538, this poem was first published in "Kultura" in Warsaw, February 28, 1932, together with "Sarcophaboots." The Poznań library contains a manuscript, probably from the "Kultura" editorial archives.

Głowiński (Zaświat pp. 259-60) states that Leśmian's "fantastic empiricism" treats death as an immediate experience; this is funeral poetry without distance.

In "Lustro i trumna," p. 85, Jan Zieliński draws parallels to "Pogrzeb Don Żuana" (Don Juan's Funeral) and "Do Siostry" (To My Sister), which feature coffin claustrophobia and participation in one's own funeral; since the corpse is condemned to rot, time in the coffin is a transition, although it is a transition to nowhere. According to Zieliński, Leśmian was obsessed with "self-love" and death as a valuable essence and macabre feast. In mirrors and in coffins, the subject strips and loves himself. In "Dziewczyna przed zwierciadłem" (Girl Before a Mirror), death is the punishment for the pride of self-contained love.

Kiedy nędzarz umiera, a śmierć swoje broso
 Sypie mu na przynętę, by w trumne szedł bosy,
 Rodzina z swej ofiarnej rozpaczki korzysta,
 By go obuć na wieczność, bo zbyt jest ciernista—
 I, grosz trwoniąc ostatni dla nóg niedołągi,
 Zdobywa buty z łyka, tak zwane trupięgi.
 A gdy go już wystroi w te zbytki żebracze,
 Wówczas dopiero widzi, że nędzarz—i płacze!

Ja—poeta, co z nędzy chciałem się wymigać,
 Aby śpiewać bez troski i wieczność rozstrzygać,
 Gdy mnie w noc okradziono, drwię z ziemskiej mitręgi,
 Bo wiem, że tam—w zaświatach mam swoje trupięgi!
 Dar kochanki czy wrogów chytra zapomoga?
 Wszystko jedno! W trupięgach pobiegnę do Boga!
 I będę się chełpliwie przechadzał w zaświecie,
 Właśnie tam i z powrotem po obłoków grzbiecie,
 I raz jeszcze, i nieraz, do trzeciego razu,
 Nie szczędząc oczom Boga moich stóp pokazu!
 A jeśli Bóg, cudaczną urażony pychą,
 Wzgardzi mną jak nicością obutą zbyt lichy,
 Ja—gniewny, nim siędych mój z prochem utożsam,
 Będę tupał na Niego tymi trupięgami!

SARCOPHABOOTS

When paupers die, and death sows millet-bait
 To lure them barefoot into coffin crates,
 The families so enjoy despair forlorn
 They buy them shoes (forever's full of thorns)
 Composed of bast (I say sarcophaboots)—
 They squander their last dime on pedi-loot.
 When Klutz is dolled up in this tinsel cheap,
 He knows he's really poor, and starts to weep:

This poet tried to hide from misery
 In carefree song, and judge eternity.
 When burgled, I don't even give a hoot—
 You can't rob me of my sarcophaboots!
 It doesn't matter whom I got them from—
 A lover, or some sly and vicious scum—
 I'll swagger-strut around the great beyond,
 And go to God, and really carry on;
 Repeatedly I'll walk the clouds, and so
 Make sure He notices my pedi-show!
 Offended by my pride bizarre, then God
 May spurn me as a nothing, poorly shod;
 If so, I'll stomp all over Him before
 My spirit crumbles. That's what boots are for!

Line CADAVERISMS (SARCOPHABOOTS)

1 When wretch dies, and death her millet
 2 Pours him for lure, so into coffin walks barefoot,
 3 Family of its sacrificial despair takes-advantage,
 4 To him shod for forever, for overly is thorny—
 5 And, small-coin wasting last for feet of-clumsy-one,
 6 Acquires shoes of bast, so known cadaverisms.
 7 And when him already dresses-up in these frills beggarly,
 8 Then finally sees, that wretch—and weeps!
 9 I—poet, who from misery wanted self to-elude,
 10 To sing without care and eternity to-decide.
 11 When me at-night robbed, jeer from earthly waste,
 12 For know, that there—in otherworld I-have my cadaverisms!
 13 Gift of-lover or of-enemies sly handout?
 14 All one! In cadaverisms I-will run to God!
 15 And will self proudly stroll in otherworld,
 16 Just there and in return along of-clouds back,
 17 And time again, and not-one, to third time,
 18 Not sparing eyes of-God of-my feet display!
 19 And if God, with-odd offended haughtiness,
 20 Will-scorn me like nothing shod overly badly,
 21 I—angry, before self spirit my with dust identifies,
 22 Will stomp onto Him with these cadaverisms!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 539, this poem was first published in "Kultura," Warsaw, February 28, 1932. Leśmian's letter to Kazimierz Wierzyński concerning the Adamowicz fraud cause some parts of this poem to appear autobiographical: the poet says that his deputy had caused him 20,000 zł. in tax debts and that the sequestrator had tried to vandalize the poet's apartment and library. According to M. Głowiński (Zaświat p. 261), Leśmian's "death poems" represent a triumph of nature over culture; man-made artifacts occupy a modest position. Here, however, this does not seem to be the case.

The word "trupięgi," according to Papierkowski p. 86, is a Kashub dialect word for a corpse's shoes. Trznadel (Twórczość p. 189) confirms this finding but points out that the word sounds like a neologism. In a peasant setting, a naive bumpkin is able to threaten God; in "Na krańcach" (Eseje wybrane p. 59), Jastrun calls the poem "a row with a great colleague."

Finding a translation for the title was a highly interesting endeavor. I called several funeral parlors to inquire whether the deceased receive any special shoes to wear in the coffin; all the responses were negative.

American corpses evidently wear the same shoes they wore while living, while Polish peasant corpses are given flimsy rattan slippers, presumably so the shoes they wore while living can be sold or otherwise recycled.

So since the things do not exist in English, I felt I could call them anything I wanted. Sleepers, Cloudhoppers, and Funeral Bast were considered and discounted in favor of Sarcophaboots, which is less enigmatic and also has a vague connection to Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Were Made For Walking." Incidentally, the red shoes in "Jan Tajemnik" are also a pivotal factor in that story, and Elija's defiance is "Eliasz" sounds very similar to the protagonist herein.

According to Stone (141-3, 286), God is indicted as uncaring; the bast shoes symbolize poverty and suffering. She feels the poem is based on a Russian folk-tale about lapti (bast shoes) and the traditional confrontation with the tsar (here, God): ritual defiance and challenge. The irreverence shown God is reminiscent of Urszula Kochanowska and Wyruszyła dusza w drogę: "The soul... does not delight in reaching heaven, on the contrary, it blasphemes before God, desiring His death." Similarly, in Białochoa (UR 168-75), a peasant dreams a king is spoiling her in his palace, granting her every whim, letting her ride in gold carriages eating cracklings, ordering his son to look like her boyfriend. Białochoa is as disappointed to find this is only a dream (caused by a stranger fondling her in a deserted barn) as Urszula is to find that the person visiting her is "only" God, not her parents. In "Ubóstwo" (Poverty) in Sipping Shade, the poet invites God to fight with him ("I'm human, I can stand anything"), and in a 1900 letter to Przesmycki (UR 238), Leśmian wrote, "I feel such strength and power within me that I could hurl at God these very words: I am strong!"

According to Miłosz pp. 222-3, Part III of Mickiewicz's Dziady ("Forefathers' Eve") contains the protagonist's defiant harangue against God, known as the "Great Improvisation;" since God, not the protagonist, is indifferent to human suffering, the latter is morally superior, and, encouraged "by evil spirits, he is ready to insult God: 'You are not the father of the world but a....' He is saved from pronouncing 'czar' by the intervention of good spirits." Cf. also Faust's "Weltfluch."

Pankowski (65-6) indicates that Leśmian's denial of the existence of God is "in form only," as God's presence makes the defiance more exciting; the above mentioned invitation in "Ubóstwo" is reminiscent of Jacob and the angel.

In Twórczość Leśmiana, pp. 350-354, Trznadel indicates that human life is purposeless and deprived by consciousness of any possible comfort. Death becomes tragic, not part of the rhythm of life; nothing is left except ethics and defiance.

Karpowicz (113-15, 61-76) states that every moment is precious, destructible, and unrepeatable for Leśmian. Life is an experiment, a rebellion, and a challenge against destruction; anything can be perfect in view of the inherent imperfection of all existences. Karpowicz' analysis of the relationship between God and man is fascinating:

Leśmian's God is dependent on human imagination and desires. If God is unacceptable, you war against him; if acceptable, you have a human relationship with him. But declaring war, whether on God or on distance, confirms the existence of the adversary. Man wants to rule without the delimitation of death and is irritated by God's desire to maintain superiority; a conflict is thus inevitable (God as a sublimation of evolution). Such a God, of course, rules out love and joy of the soul, but hate may be a higher form of love, as it is separated from the wish to possess the beloved person.

As man's thinking-partner and his projection of his own cryptic desire for immortality and human pride, God cannot be killed—that would be suicide. So the poet attempts not to humanize God, but to deify man (otherwise bragging with sarcophaboots would be impossible); however, the attempt betrays unease and is ultimately unsuccessful.

In my opinion, Leśmian's attitude to God and society (ambivalent at best, negative at worst) is a projection into the supernatural of child-rearing practices in his circles. Polish parents are often like Ogilvy's committees, critical without being creative: they tend to be demanding but unsupportive, and are hence perceived as negative.

PRZECHODZIEN

Zgony liliowe w pustce nad drogą,
 I nic—i bezbrzeż traw!
 Do traw bezbrzeży i do nikogo
 Wołałem: "Zbaw mnie, zbaw!"

A szedł przechodzień... Nie wiem, dlaczego
 Dłonią mi podał znak.
 Może pomyślał, że to do niego,
 Do niego wołam tak!

A była cisza, jakby świat minął—
 Trwał jeszcze słońca brzeg—
 A on na ciszę oczami skinął,
 Zrozumiał coś i rzekł:

"Nie mam ni chleba, ni sił, ni domu!
 Jak ty—bez jutra ikam.
 To—ja, nieznany z klęski nikomu!
 To—ja! Ten sam, ten sam!"

Śmierć moja w jarach namiot rozpina,
 Zagrodę—spalił wróg.
 Gdy przedostatnia bije godzina,
 Sny niszczy Bóg, sam Bóg!

Lecz ufam jeszcze jednemu snowi,
 Ze się wypełni w czas!
 Cokolwiek zorza w tym śnie zrózowi,
 Podzielę między nas!"

I przysięgi wierność mojej żalobie
 Na wszystkie życia dnie!
 I dłonie, dłonie podał mi obie
 I zbawił, zbawił mnie!

THE PASSERBY

Lily demise on the wilderness road,
 Nothing except boundless grass everywhere!
 So to the boundlessness, nobody else,
 I called, 'Redeem me, I'm in great despair!'

Then came a passerby. I don't know why,
 But with his fingers he gave me a sign.
 Maybe he thought I was calling to him,
 Maybe misheard me, or tried to reply.

Silence. It seemed like the world had gone down—
 Edge of the sun-ball was lingering still—
 He comprehended some item and said,
 Beckoning to this great silence distilled:

"Homeless and breadless and strengthless am I!
 Sobbing without a tomorrow—like you.
 I am the one who's defeated—the same
 Frustrated victim that nobody knew!

And now my death stakes her tent in ravines,
 Enemies burned down my house to the ground.
 Dreams will be crushed by no other than God
 When the penultimate hour resounds.

Yet I have confidence in one more dream,
 Trusting that it will come true just in time!
 I will share with you whatever the dawn
 Rosifies somehow in this dream of mine!"

Then to the end of his lifetime did he
 Promise to help me in my distress;
 And then he reached out his hands unto me,
 Thereby redeeming—redeeming me, yes!

Line PASSERBY

1 Demise of-lilies in wilderness above road,
 2 And nothing—and boundlessness of-grasses!
 3 To of-grass boundlessness and to nobody
 4 I-called: "Redeem me, redeem!"
 5 And walked passerby... Not know-I, why
 6 With-palm to-me gave sign.
 7 Maybe thought, that it to him,
 8 To him called-I thus!
 9 And was silence, as-though world passed—
 10 Lasted still of-sun edge—
 11 And he on silence with-eyes beckoned,
 12 Understood something and spoke:
 13 "Not have-I either bread, or strength, or home!
 14 Like you—without tomorrow sob.
 15 That—I, unknown from defeat to-nobody!
 16 That—I! The same, the same!
 17 Death my in ravines tent unfolds,
 18 Cottage—burned enemy.
 19 When penultimate strikes hour,
 20 Dreams destroys God, same God!
 21 But I-trust still to-one dream,
 22 That itself will-fulfill in time!
 23 Whatever aurora in this dream rosifies,
 24 I-will-divide between us!"
 25 And vowed faith to-my sorrow
 26 For all of-life days!
 27 And palms, palms gave me both
 28 And redeemed, redeemed me!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 539, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), May 3, 1933. (N.B.: May 3 is Constitution Day in Poland.) In Twórczość p. 363, the same author states that only ethical humanism can furnish redemption of a purposeless existence. Being saved by another person is the only chance, and the anonymous redeemer is usually a passerby.

Pankowski (77-9) adds that since God is "omnirotten," cruel, and impotent, solidarity with other people can help. In "Cmentarz" (The Graveyard"), this solidarity extends beyond the grave: a passerby recites the prayers requested on an epitaph.

Pierwszy upał wiosenny, skrząc się po murawach,
Ślepi szyby w chałupach i wodę na stawach.
Muchy ruchem celowym — a bez celu krążą.
W jeden powój miłosny dwie łąki się wiążą.
Świerszcz wznosił nogę — na łączność, a drugą — w sen dłuży...
Gardziel kwiatu drobnego zachłysnął bąk duży —
Tylko wół, co tej wiosny czad chłonie morderczy —
Jak rogata mogiła w pustkowiu pól sterczy!

Złe mu! Przemęczył żebra, przepracował płuca!
Pole w ślepiach koluje... Mrck do łba się rzuca...
Nigdy dotąd nie tracił ziemi pod kopytem...
Stracił teraz i runął!... Runął — całym bytem!
Za duży — dla litości, dla snu — zbyt brzuchaty...
A że zemdlął na wiosnę, zwie się Wiosnowaty.

Toć go znałem! Miał w pysku — woń mlecznej ciepłoty,
W której tchu źródłowieją ziól słodkie wypoty.
Lubił słuchać, jak woda, wargą ssana czujnie,
Na dno brzucha mu spada — dźwięcznie i niechłujnie...
Lubił wgniatać kurzliwie w piach, lśnistszy od złota,
Dreptające kopyta z przytwierdkami błota.
Nie wiem, jak się to działo — ale już o świcie
Wchodził z widnokręgami w obłędne współżycie...
Gdzie się zjawił — tam zawsze tkwił w snów bezokolu,
I bezdomniał w oborze — i daleczał w polu...

Oczami, co sie martwią, choć swiatu nie przeczą,
Patrzył we mnie jak w oddal — w mgłę ledwo człowieczą...
Wierzył w Boga, nie wiedząc, że to — Bóg... Na miedzy
Przystawał, by ciąg dalszy snuć owej niewiedzy.
A nie bratał się z ciałem, co marło w niedoli —
Żył sam w sobie — poza nim... A ono — niech boli...
I zadrwiły zeń nagle niegodziwe kości:
Nie zniósł wiosny — bez szczęścia, czaru — bez radości...
Poraziło go słońce. Przysniły się zgony...
Skroń chylę i całuję łeb, snem pomącony,
Twardy jak głaz, co cierpi z trudem — nie od razu...
Kocham upór męczyński — hej! — takiego głazu!...

A on leży i leży... Muchy grzbiet obsiadły.
Brzuchem w nicość się tłoczy, a wargi pobladły —
Jęzór z nich się w świat wywarł i na bok zwichnięty
Śmierć liże niby cukier dany dla przynęty...

Dzień przystanął opodal... Czas luzem się tula...
Jar pobliski brzmi osą jak pusta szkatuła.
Cisza stoi nad polem — żywa i gorąca,
Lecz nad tą ciszą, z istnień utkaną tysiąca,
Góruje tajemnica drętowego mozolu
Cisza — wezbrana w ciele zemdlonego wolu.

THE SPRING OX

293

First heat of spring is sparkling on the lawn,
It's fogging windows, misting steamy ponds.
Flies circle, resolute but purposeless;
Two dragonflies unite in one caress.
One cricket-leg salutes, the other won't;
Some beetle choked a tiny flower's throat.
A single ox in killer-heat remains,
A horny hill in desolate terrain.

He's sick. His lungs and ribs are overworked,
His dizzy head beset by maelstrom murk...
The earth was always underhoof—but now
He's lost it, tripped, and total-tumbled down!
Too big for pity, too obese to doze—
In Spring he fainted; that's the name they chose.

I knew him! Milky fragrance in his snout,
Warm breath with herbal sweetness oozing out.
He loved to lap the water with his tongue
And hear its belly-sloshing sloppy song,
And dustify in golden gleaming sand
With muddy leggings. I don't understand
Just how he'd patter out each day at dawn,
Horizon-watching madlife carry on,
And everyplace he'd stick in nowhere dreams,
No-home in stables, farring in the fields.

His worried eyes would never disagree,
Espying barely human fog in me...
Believed in God, not knowing He was God;
He'd stop to spin more nescience in the sod.
No fraternizing with his body's pain—
He lived without and hurtless, self-contained
Until his bones unworthy jeered at him:
He couldn't stand a spellbound joyless spring,
Lay blinded by the sun, with nightmares of
Demises. Stubborn martyrdom I love,
And stoop to kiss his head in dreamy murk;
He's like a rock whose suffering is work.

He's lying there. Flies settled on his back.
He's belly-flopping into void. A crack
Between his whitened lips, a broken weight
Emerges, licking death like sugared bait.

The field is silent with a living sear
That's woven from a thousand lives, but here
The day has stopped. Time loosely twirls away,
Nearby abyss abuzz, an empty box.
A secret stiffened toil looms over it:
The hush collected in a fainted ox.

Line OX OF-SPRING (THE SPRING OX)

1 First heat of-spring, glistening self on grasses,
 2 Blinds panes in huts and water in ponds.
 3 Flies with-motion purposeful—but without purpose circle.
 4 In one bindweed amorous two dragonflies themselves tie.
 5 Cricket lifted leg—at attention, and other—into sleep lengthens...
 6 Throat of-flower small choked bumblebee large—
 7 Only ox, which in-this spring gas drinks murderous—
 8 Like horny mound in emptiness of-field protrudes!
 9 Bad to-him! Oversuffered ribs, overworked lungs!
 10 Field in animal-eyes circles... Murk to animal-head itself throws...
 11 Never till-then not lost ground under hoof...
 12 Lost now and fell!... Fell—with-whole existence!
 13 Too large—for pity, for sleep—overly bellied...
 14 And as fainted in spring—calls self Of-Spring.
 15 Then I-knew him! Had in snout—fragrance of-milky warmth,
 16 In whose breath besource of-herbs sweet exusions.
 17 Liked to-listen, how water, with-lip sucked alertly,
 18 To bottom of-belly to-him falls—melodiously and not-carefully...
 19 Liked to-pack dustily in sand, more-glistening than gold,
 20 Pattering hoofs with attachments of-mud.
 21 Not know-I, how itself it happened—but already at dawn
 22 He-would-come with horizons into crazy living-togetherness...
 23 Where self he-appeared—there always stuck in of-sleep-or-dreams
 no-locationness,
 24 And without-housed in stable—and distanced in field...
 25 With-eyes, which self worry, although world not contradict,
 26 Looked into me like into distance—into fog barely human...
 27 Believed in God, not knowing, that that—God... On furrow.
 28 He-stopped, to continuation further spin of-that ignorance.
 29 And not brothered self with body, which died-away in woe—
 30 Lived self in self—beyond it... And it—let-it hurt...
 31 And jeered at-him suddenly unworthy bones:
 32 Not stood-he spring—without happiness-or-luck, charm—without joy...
 33 Blinded him sun. Dreamed-to-him self demises...
 34 Forehead I-lower and kiss animal-head, with-sleep-or-dream mixed,
 35 Hard like rock, which suffers with difficulty—not at once...
 36 I-love resistance martyrish—hey!—of such rock!...
 37 And he lies and lies... Flies back besat.
 38 With-belly into nothing self flops, and lips paled—
 39 Animal-tongue from them self into world came-out and to side sprained
 40 Death licks like sugar given for bait...
 41 Day stopped nearby... Time with-looseness self wanders...
 42 Ravine nearby sounds with-wasp like empty chest.
 43 Silence stands over field—alive and hot,
 44 But above that silence, from existences woven thousands,
 45 Towers with-silence of-stiffened drudgery
 46 Silence—brought-together in body of-fainted ox.

NOTES

According to Karpowicz (113-8), in the experiment known as life, everything is fleeting, unrepeatable, precious, pivotal, and dignified: in "The Zoo," "The Moths," and "Two Convicts," a camel-hump, a mouse, and a single person become irreplaceable, which means that the gap they leave behind cannot be plugged. The dying ox is also phenomenal, unique, and unrepeatable, with the most important of silences (death) nestling within and above him.

Kamińska, "Metafizyczny wół" (Od Leśmiana), says that almost every poem by Leśmian is like the bone of a paleontological animal: one can read and reconstruct the entire poetic organism, the entire system of poetic truth, from a single fragment. His nature is dense and real, and the form a calm 13-syllable rhythmical "epic" form reminiscent of Pan Tadeusz. Although it sounds like a miniature epic combined with folk gawęda style— I did not translate the peasantish "hey!"—it is actually a philosophical treatise: motionless lying is a laborious activity, and the hero is an animal, equal to man, and a solidarity between man and animal is established. She also indicates that a poem is a time-fragment stored in rhythm, and that this poem pants like an ox out of breath: we circle him with our thoughts like flies.

I found that nature herein became malevolent and destructive, especially when compared to the idyllic "In the Field" in the earlier Łąka: no more lazy sybaritic doze here, but rather a loss of control, passing out. I therefore used enjambments, particularly at the end, to indicate incipient decomposition; since Leśmian rarely used enjambments in his mature poetry, this is very much an exception.

- Title According to Papierkowski 102, a "wiosnowaty" or "zwiosnowaty" ox is a term straight from dialect, found by Leśmian in a dictionary. According to Kamińska, *supra*, it indicates an animal fainting during springtime work.
- 3 A tautological negation: with-purpose, but purpose-less. Since manner and teleology are contrasted, the verse translation attempted the same.
- 16 "Wypoty" is a neologism, according to Papierkowski 124. It seems to mean exhalation or sweat; "exusions" is vague enough to hold both.
- 20 Papierkowski 140 says a "przytwierdka" is something that stuck to a hoof.
- 23-4 "Bezokole" means "lack of location," a place not enclosed by a circle. (Papierkowski 117) Thus: no-home, farring, etc.
- 24-6 The ox "distances," i. e. is perceiver, not perceived; the same applies to his observation of the poet ("espying barely human fog in me"). Further, the word for human, not animal, eyes is used for the ox's eyes.
- 27 I capitalized "He" for God in the translation to distinguish from he, the ox.
- 33 Deaths in the plural dreamed themselves to him. (Cf. "Deaths")

Spałaś w trumnie snem własnym, tak cicho, po bosku,
Nie wiem, czy wszystkich na raz pozbawiona trosk?
W śmierci taka zdrobniała niby lalka z wosku...
Kocham ten ubożuchny, ten zbolały wosk!

Trup jest zawsze samotny! Sam na sam z otchłanią!...
A właśnie ja—twój brat—
Suknię Tobie sprawiłem za dużą i tanią,
Suknię—na tamten świat!

W każdym zgonie tkwi zbrodnia, co snem się powleka,
Chociaż zbrodniarza brak...
Wszyscy winni są śmierci każdego człowieka!
O, tak! Na pewno—tak!

Winnych wskazać potrafię!... I nikt się nie broni!...
I ten—i ta—i ów!...
I ja sam! Ja—najbardziej, choć wiem, że i oni!
I ja—i oni znów...

Wina wszystkich naokół—milcząca, zbiorowa,
A my mówimy: los!
Niech od złego Bóg żywych i zmarłych zachowa!
Módlmy się o to w głos!

Tak się lekam, że jesteś wciąż głodna i chora,
Że złą otrzymam wieść—
I że przyjdiesz z za grobu któregoś wieczora
I szepniesz: "Daj mi jeść!"

I cóż wtedy odpowiem? Nic mówić nie trzeba...
Niech mówi za mnie—Bóg!
Siostro! Już w całym świecie nie ma tego chleba,
Co by cię karmić mógł!

Trumna Twoja spoczęła w ciężarowym wozie,
Pamiętam nudny wóz.
A była niedorzeczność i drwina w tej zgrozie!
I był nieludzki mus!

Bąłem się, że Cię żywcem oddamy mogile
W złym, letargicznym śnie.
I ktoś wtargnął do wozu, i rzekł, że się mylę,
I uspokoił mnie.

Czekałem, aż wóz ruszy, by wlec Cię do miasta...
W skwar słońca skrzyknął wóz.
Drgnęła trumna, a była godzina dwunasta.
Żelazny zagrzemiał klus!...

I sam nagle w tym słońcu musiałem pozostać.
 Patrzyłem szynom w ślad...
 Świat się zmniejszył na zawsze o twą drobną postać
 I zmałał cały świat!

I myśl wątła do mojej wsnęła się żaloby,
 Niby pajęcza nić,
 Myśl, że nie ma na świecie tak drogiej osoby,
 Bez której nie można żyć!

Noc, przy zmarłych spędzona, nazywa się—pusta!
 Brak tego, o kim łkasz...
 Zgniją oczy—i wyraz tych oczu—i usta.
 Śmierć patrzy w kość, nie w twarz!...

Wiem, że gniesz nabożnie i że wśród ciemnoty
 Pośmiertny dźwigasz krzyż,
 Lecz nie śmiem do podziemnej zaglądać Golgoty,
 By sprawdzić, jak tam śpisz?

Trup trzeźwieje—wyzuty z krwi i upojenia!
 Już złudzeń—ani krzty!
 A może Bóg omija twój zgręz bez imienia
 I nie wie, że to—Ty?

Boże, odlatujący w obce dla nas strony,
 Powstrzymaj odlot swój—
 I tul z płaczem do piersi ten wiecznie krzywdzony,
 Wierzący w Ciebie gnój!

TO MY SISTER

All cares simultaneously left you alone;
 You slept in your coffin your hush-sleep divine.
 You're tiny in death, like a doll made of wax...
 I love this poor wax—paltry, bruised, and resigned!
 All corpses are lonely in Nothing's black hole,
 And here I, your brother, go buying a dress
 So you can have something to wear in that world—
 This baggy and quite inexpensive finesse.
 In every death lurks a sleep-covered crime—
 The criminal's not even here!
 And everyone's guilty of everyone's dying—
 I'm sure, for it seems very clear.
 I'm pointing my finger at culprits I know,
 And no one's defending himself—
 It's this guy—and that one—and this girl—although
 I know it was also myself...

Collective and silent, our guilt in the room—
 "That's fate!" Is that all we can say?
 Both living and dead should be spared evil too—
 Let's raise up our voices and pray!

I'm still apprehensive I got the wrong news—
 You're hungry and sick in your bed—
 You'll come here some evening, crawl out of your tomb,
 And whisper, "I need to be fed!"

And what can I say if that happens? May God
 Speak for me, for naught must be said...
 The world for some nourishment searching you plod—
 Oh, sister! There is no such bread!

I'll never forget where they carried your bier:
 A boring and ramshackle van.
 The horror contained both grotesqueness and jeers,
 Inhuman necessity, and

I fretted that you would be buried alive
 In vicious lethargic repose;
 Someone who pushed into the wagon contrived
 To calm my erroneous woes.

I waited. The train was to take you to town.
 At noon it was sunny and hot.
 The coffin—it shuddered when wheels creaked around
 And started their ironshod trot!

I stared at the tracks, feeling lonely, forlorn,
 Alone in the sunshine—oh, girl,
 The world was diminished by your tiny form—
 A shrunken and atrophied world.

A flimsy idea, like a spidery strand,
 Suggested itself to my grief:
 Perhaps there is no one so dear that you can't
 Continue alone when they leave!

Time spent with a corpse is an emptiness day,
 The one you're bewailing has flown.
 The eyes—their expression—the lips will decay—
 Death treasures not faces, but bones!

I know you'll devoutly and darkly decay,
 And carry a posthumous cross;
 I don't even dare to look in on your grave,
 This underground Calvary loss!

The corpses are brought to their senses, deprived
 Of blood and illusion and drink;
 Your dregs have no name, therefore God passed them by—
 Not knowing it's you—so I think.

O God, please stop flying to spots we can't see,
 And cuddle us close with a sob!
 Forever mistreated manure may we be,
 Yet we still believe in you, God!

Line TO SISTER (TO MY SISTER)

1 You-slept in coffin sleep own, so quietly, in divine-manner,
 2 Not know-I, if of-all at once liberated worries?
 3 In death so smallified as-though doll of wax...
 4 I-love that poor, that sore wax!
 5 Corpse is always alone! One to one with abyss!
 6 And exactly I-your-brother—
 7 Dress to-you acquired too big and cheap,
 8 Dress—for the-other world!
 9 In each death lurks crime, which with-sleep-or-dream itself covers,
 10 Although criminal lacks...
 11 All guilty are of-death of-each person!
 12 Ch, yes! For certain—yes!
 13 Guilty-ones point-to I-can!... And nobody self not defends!...
 14 And that--and that—and that!...
 15 And I myself! I—most-of-all, although I-know, that also they!
 16 And I—and they again...
 17 Guilt of-all around—not-speaking, collective,
 18 And we say: fate!
 19 May from evil God living-ones and dead-ones keep!
 20 Let-us-pray ourself for this in voice (= out loud)!
 21 So I fear, that you-are still hungry and sick,
 22 That bad I-will-receive news—
 23 And that you-will-come from-beyond grave some evening
 24 And whisper, "Give me to-eat!"
 25 And what then will-I-reply? Nothing to-say not is-necessary!
 26 May speak for me—God!
 27 Sister! Already in whole world not is that bread,
 28 Which could have you nourished!
 29 Coffin your rested in heavy-duty wagon,
 30 I-remember boring wagon.
 31 And was absurdity and jeering in that horror!
 32 And was inhuman necessity!
 33 I-feared myself, that You alive we-will-surrender to (burial-)mound
 34 In bad, lethargic sleep.
 35 And someone barged-into wagon, and spoke, that myself I-err,
 36 And pacified me.
 37 I-waited, until wagon moves, to drag You to town...
 38 In heat of-sun creaked wagon.
 39 Shuddered coffin, and was hour twelfth.
 40 Iron thundered hoofbeat!...
 41 And alone suddenly in this sun I-had-to remain.
 42 I-looked tracks in trail...
 43 World itself shrunk for always by your small form
 44 And smallened whole world!

Line (Sister cont'd)

45 And thought flimsy to my in-spun itself mourning,
 46 As-though spidery thread,
 47 Thought, that not is on world so dear person,
 48 Without whom not can-one live!
 49 Night, near dead-ones spent, calls itself—empty!
 50 Lacks he, for whom you-sob...
 51 Will-decay eyes—and expression of-those eyes—and lips.
 52 Death looks into bone, not into face!
 53 I-know, that you-will-decay piously and that among dark
 54 After-death you-drag cross,
 55 But not dare-I to underground peek Golgotha,
 56 To ascertain, how there you-sleep?
 57 Corpse sobers—deprived of blood and inebriation!
 58 Already of-illusions—not an-iota!
 59 And maybe God passes-by your precipitation without name
 60 And not knows, that that—You?
 61 God, flying-off into strange for us parts,
 62 Halt flight your—
 63 And hug with weeping to chest that eternally mistreated,
 64 Believing in You manure!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript pp. 540-1, this poem was first published in "Wiadomości Literackie" (Literary News), Warsaw, December 24, 1933. It is probably autobiographical: Leśmian's sister Aleksandra died of tuberculosis June 20, 1921, and lies buried in the same Powązkowski Cemetery in Warsaw which was to house her brother's remains as well. Her epitaph reads "she lived 34 years," and at some unknown time, her name (Lesman) was changed to "Leśmian" on the epitaph, as evidenced by the narrow space between the m-i-a letters. According to Literatury pozytywizmu i Młodej Polski, vol. G-Ł, p. 623, B. Pasternak translated this poem into Russian.

In LMP 851, Trznadel mentions that this poem represents Leśmian's fascination with the fantastic medieval "dance of death" motif and the Baroque macabre: decomposition of form and a feeling of chaos is what grotesqueness is for, since it also decomposes the certainty that poetry and its forms are clean reflections of some essence of existence. Repeated death is one of the poet's favorite hyperboles for the horror of death. (In "Cmentarz," the epitaph of a dead ship which trusted it would only die once reads as follows: "The corpse is not happy!")

Głowiński (Zaświat pp. 257-8) says "To My Sister" is the closest thing to an ode Leśmian ever wrote (an elegy only concerns itself with the "hero" of the poem). Leśmian's idea of death is an irreversible process without hope or consolation; as we have seen in "On Resurrection Day," there is no hope of an afterlife either.

Pankowski (67-9, 76-81) says that in the face of such despair, dignity and solidarity with earth and humanity is the only thing left. The poet blames God for the responsibility of people's death; God is responsible for the drama without being its playwright. On pp. 207-9, he indicates that the occasional surprising vulgarity or intellectualism constitute an anti-poetic explanation of a phenomenon. "Gnój," "manure," in the very last line—in fact, the last word in the poem in Polish—is so vulgar as to be sacrilegious, a repugnant evocation of the human condition.

Other poems echo some of these motifs. In "To My Sister," the corpse continues to do things (e. g. decay devoutly). In "Don Kichot," Don Quixote dies a second time after receiving a kiss from the Virgin; in "Ballada o dumnym rycerzu" (Ballad of the Proud Knight), corpses are said to have such power that they can experience a good deal in the grave. ("A wszak ci w trupach taka moc bywa, / Że trupi w grobie wiele przeżywa!") In "Jadwięga," a girl's live skeleton dances in rebelliousness against God's cruelty; in "Marcin Swoboda," God opens an abyss for the puddle (which used to be the protagonist before he was squashed) to fall into. "Pantera," the Panther, was expressly created for killing by what Pankowski (69) calls the "omnipresent jaguar." In "Majka" (Klechdy polskie, p. 82), Leśmian puts the following words into a character's mouth: "A łatwo się tęsknocie zdarzyć po śmierci, bo lubi bezpowrotność i nie znosi odszkodowania." (Longing can easily happen after death, as it loves unrepeatability and cannot stand amends.) Leśmian's "Don Zuan" (Don Juan), like the Sister's brother, is afraid of live burial.

Line

- 5 Abysses are now perceived as malignant and negative; death is no longer an interesting possibility or a consolation.
- 11-7 Ethical humanism and responsibility are evident here; guilt is collective, and "fate" has become a lame excuse.
- 43-4 As in "Two Convicts," the space of a single body is subtracted from the world, which is thus impoverished.
- 45 As in "In the Evening" and "In the Dark," "wsnuć się" is a neologism (Papierkowski 162) denoting that something insinuates itself into something else like a thread. Here: spidery strand, suggested itself.
- 49 I am grateful to the Sixties for the freedom to call such a stretch of time an "emptiness day."
- 59 "Zgręź" is dialect for a thick precipitate on the bottom of a dishful of liquid; the word "dregs" was used in the verse version.
- 61 God appears here in the guise of a corporate-executive father frequently travelling on business, whose children feel deprived by his absences and who apparently receive insufficient love even when he is at home. The last word, "manure" (almost as explosive as John Donne's "For God's sake hold thy tongue and let me love"), is what irritated Polish parents often call their children.

DZIEJBA LEŚNA (1938)

FOREST CHRONICLE

ACTIONNESS FORESTY

NOTES

According to Papierkowski (pp. 39, 151), the word "dziejba" is not in any dictionary; Parandowski says it was invented by Lelewel as a folksy analogy to words like "liczba" (number, host of), "służba" (all the servants combined), etc. "Dziejać" is ancient Polish for "dziać," to happen or do; the modern word pluralized also means "history" (dzieje, = a compilation of things which have happened).

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 543 ff., this collection of poems was published posthumously by Alfred Tom in 1938, which presents several problems. Some of the poems were reprints, some had intentionally been left out of previous collections by the author himself (why?), some appear to have been unfinished and had no title. Whether Leśmian collaborated in correcting the galley proofs is also an unknown.

Alfred Tom, rather than interpreting the material, classified it loosely by subject matter, which means that many historically disparate poems are lumped together arbitrarily. (Especially in the case of manuscript works or poems published in newspapers, it was not unusual for two decades to pass before "final" publication in Leśmian's case.) The poet himself had planned to publish such a collection under this title, and Alfred Tom claimed to have followed his "general" wishes; however, precisely what Leśmian had envisaged is nearly impossible to determine now.

Dziejba leśna appeared in late 1938 and was registered in the administrative listing of publications (no. 38, November 27-December 3). The publisher, as usual, was J. Morkowicz/Pod Znakiem Poetów, and 1200 numbered copies were produced.

KRZYWDA

Zamknij okno... W ogrodzie—zbyt śpiewno.

Oczy do snu lub do śmierci zmruż.

Krzywdą naszą kończy się na pewno!...

Życie—mija... Wolno spocząć już...

Dzień się nowy na obłoków bieli

Nie zatrwoży, że ciał naszych brak...

Lecz to wszystko, cośmy przecierpieli,

Niechaj we mgle ma choć drobny znak!

Bo czym zgrozę odkupić zagłady,

Leż wysiłek i ten pusty czas,

Gdy śmierć zniszczy nawet ran tych ślady,

Ran, co niegdyś tak bolały nas?

THE INJUSTICE

Close the window—the garden's too tuneful,

And for sleep or for death close your eyes.

This injustice we've suffered is ending!

We can rest now—and life passes by.

New day dawning on whiteness of cirrus

Won't be frightened our bodies are gone—

May the agony that we have suffered

Leave some trace in the fog to go on.

We can't ransom the ruin of horror,

Toil of tears, empty time that's no more;

Death destroys every trace of those traumas

Which did hurt us so badly before!

Line WRONG (THE INJUSTICE)

- 1 Close window... In garden--overly melodious.
 2 Eyes for sleep or for death blink-shut.
 3 Wrong our ends itself for sure!
 4 Life-passes... Allowed-is to-rest already.
 5 Day itself new on of-clouds whiteness
 6 Not will-fear, that bodies ours lack....
 7 But that all, what-we suffered,
 8 May in fog have some small sign!
 9 For with-what of-horror redeem extermination,
 10 Of-tears effort and that empty time,
 11 When death will-destroy even wounds these traces,
 12 Wounds, which once so pained us?

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 547, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), Warsaw, April 18, 1937. The texts are identical.

Line

- 1 Polish has no articles, so "the" or "a/an" are lacking in the literal version.
 2 The eye-closing referred to is the process of narrowing one's eyes progressively.
 3 Although the verb "to end" is reflexive in Polish, it does not denote that the item is contributing to its own ending.
 5 In his childhood, Lesmian once had to survive a day of horror, and the day knew it.
 6 Cf. "To My Sister" and "Two Convicts," wherein the space formerly occupied by a missing body has positive value.

Com uczynił, żeś nagle pobladła?
 Com zaszeptał, żeś wszystko odgadła?
 Jakże milcząc poglądasz na drogę!
 Kochać ciebie nie mogę, nie mogę!
 Wieczór słońca zdmuchuje rozniechę.
 Nie te usta i oczy już nie te...
 Drzewa szumią i szumią nad nami
 Gałęziami, gałęziami, gałęziami!
 Ten ci jestem, co idzie doliną
 Z inną—Bogu wiadomą—dziewczyną,
 A ty idziesz w ślad za mną bez wiary
 W lez potęgę i w oczu swych czary—
 Idziesz chwiejna jak cień, co się tuła—
 Wynędziała, na ból swój nieczuła—
 Pylną drogę zamiatasz przed nami
 Warkoczami, warkoczami, warkoczami!

What did I do? You're suddenly paling.
 What did I whisper? You just read my thoughts.
 You gaze in silence down at the pathway—
 I cannot love you—can't love you—cannot!
 Over our heads the branches are rustling,
 Sunset has blown out the rekindled flame;
 Branches are swishing, branches are swishing—
 Neither the eyes nor the lips are the same.
 I am the one who strolls in the valley;
 Some other girl is with me—God knows who—
 You follow me, no longer believing
 In any charms that you might have had. You
 Totter and reel, a wandering shadow,
 Squalid, insensible to your own pain—
 With your own braids you're sweeping before us,
 Cleaning the path for us with your own braids!

Line ***

1 What-did I-do, that-you suddenly paled?
 2 What-did I-whisper, that-you everything guessed-out?
 3 How in-silence you-gave at roadway!
 4 To-love you I cannot, I cannot!
 5 Evening of-sun blows-off inflamingness.
 6 Not those lips and eyes already not those...
 7 Trees swish and swish above us
 8 With-branches, with-branches, with-branches!
 9 That-one to-you I-am, who walks by-valley
 10 With another—to-God known—girl,
 11 And you go in track after me without faith
 12 In of-tears power and in of-eyes your charms—
 13 You-go staggeringly like shadow, which self wanders—
 14 Bewretched, for pain your not-sensitive—
 15 Dusty way you-sweep before us
 16 With-braids, with-braids, with-braids!

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 547, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), Warsaw, October 11, 1936. The texts are identical.

- 1, 2. Polish pronouns are usually "folded into" the verbs, hence the hyphens. (They are occasionally added for emphasis, however.) The same applies to lines 9 and 13.
- 11- The poet appears to be marvelling at the self-abnegating devotion, bereft of all self-respect, indicated by his abandoned wife (or girlfriend).

TWÓJ PORTRET

Twój portret z lat dziecinnych... Ten uśmiech niecały,
 Co dziś mi zapowiada pieśczętę gołębną—
 Też nogi, które grzeję wargami, gdy zziębna—
 Lecz skaczące w ogrodzie przez mur rozbujały.
 Piers—jagoda znikliwa i nie do ujęcia,
 W biegu wklęta w ramiona, jak łódź między wiosła,
 Serce czuć w niej jak w gnieździe ciepły leb pisklęcia:
 Długo siebie nie znało, nim w pełnię urosła!
 Na dwie siostry w rozłące—patrzę na przemiany
 I czarem, podobieństwa w milczeniu się poję—
 Którąż dzisiaj posiadam, żądzą opętany?
 Jednąż kocham dziewczynę, czyli dziewcząt dwoje?

YOUR PORTRAIT

I have your childhood portrait here—that unformed smile
 Foreshadowing the dovelike hugs you give today—
 Those are the feet my lips now warm when chill sets in,
 But here they're skipping rope in billowed garden play.
 Wedged into shoulders like a boat between its oars,
 A slippery and elusive berry is your breast.
 Your heart was unfamiliar with itself back then;
 I sense it, though: a chick's warm head within its nest.
 The metamorphoses of sisters split apart
 I see, and drink the spell of similarity—
 Possessed by lust, which sister do I own today?
 And do I love one girl, or are there two for me?

Line YOUR PORTRAIT

- 1 Your portrait from years-of childhood... That smile not-whole,
 2 Which today me promises hug dovey—
 3 Also feet-or-legs, which I-warm with-lips, when they-chill—
 4 But jumping in garden through rope billowed.
 5 Breast -berry elusive and not to be-grabbed,
 6 In running wedged in shoulders, like boat between oars,
 7 Heart can-be-felt in it like in nest warm head of-chick:
 8 Long self not knew, before into fullness it-grew!
 9 On two sisters in separation—I-look in turns
 10 And with-spell of resemblance in silence myself give-drink—
 11 Which today I-possess, by-desire obsessed?
 12 One I-love girl, or of-girls two?

NOTES

According to Głowiński (Zaswiat przedstawiony), this poem is an erotic elegy containing an amorous confession "mined out of the past. It appears simultaneously to exist and not to exist; for this reason it is probably expressed in negative formulae."

Ireneusz Opacki ("Pośmiertna w głębi jezior maska" in Studia o Leśmianie pp. 328-9), on the other hand, considers this a picture attempting to eternalize or recreate the former state. He believes the question concerning the identity of the two forms presented—e. g. the "unfinished smile" in a state of becoming—is an allusion to Bergsonism.

Janusz Sławiński, in "Semantyka poetycka Leśmiana," pp. 101-5 in the same Studia, indicates that this is an example of the poet's predilection for paradoxical descriptions: the contrast is reconciled, the meanings contain one another. The point of departure is the beloved, both present and past, with temporal distance allowing juxtaposition of the two "states" into synchronic projection, sisterly parallelism alternating within the lyrical present. Both variations on the second person unite on the content-plane of the "I" which creates the basis for the juxtaposition. (Note that in line 10, the poet is serving himself this "drink"!)

The subjective point of view (erotic fascination with the little girl intimating the grown woman within whom the memories of the child are still there) creates a tension in terms of viewpoint.

I consider this stereoscopic reconciliation similar to many of the poems of Goethe, especially those dealing with unity in diversity.

SZCZĘŚCIE

Coś srebrnego dzieje się w chmur dali.
 Wicher do drzwi puka, jakby przyniósł list.
 Myśmy długo na siebie czekali.
 Jaki ruch w niebiosach! Słyszysz burzy świst?
 Ty masz duszę gwiezdną i rozrzutną.
 Czy pamiętasz pośpiech pomieszanych tchnień?
 Szczęście przyszło. Czemuz nam tak smutno,
 Że przed jego blaskiem uchodzimy w cień?...
 Czemuz ono w mroku szuka treści
 I rozgrzesza nicość, i zatracą kres?
 Jego bezmiar wszystko w sobie zmieści
 Oprócz mego lęku, oprócz twoich łez....

HAPPINESS

There's something silver happening in the distant clouds.
 The wind is knocking like it brought a letter. Why?
 And we've been waiting for each other much too long!
 Some raging storm! You see the tumult in the sky?
 Remember former hurry, intermingled breath?
 Your soul is starry and extravagant, my dear.
 Why do we hide from brilliance in the murky shade?
 Why are we still so sad if happiness is here?
 Why does the bliss look for material in the dark,
 Absolving nothingness and smudging boundary-lines?
 Except for my alarm and for your tears, it can
 Contain infinity within its non-confines.

- Line HAPPINESS-OR-GOOD·LUCK (HAPPINESS)
- 1 Something silver happens self in of-clouds farness.
 2 Wind to door knocks, as-though he-brought letter.
 3 We-have long for ourselves waited (= for each other).
 4 What movement in heavens! You-hear of-storm whistle?
 5 You have soul starry and our -throwing (= wasteful).
 6 Do you-remember hurry of-mixed breaths?
 7 Happiness-or-good-luck came. Why to-us so sad,
 8 That before its luster we-escape into shadow?
 9 Why it in murk seeks contents:
 10 And absolves nothingness, and loses boundary?
 11 Its boundlessness all in self will-fit
 12 Except-for my fear, except-for your tears...

NOTES

- Title The word "szczęście" in Polish (just like the German "Glück") means both happiness and good luck. In this poem, the content appears to favor the former, although the alleged happiness is so tinged with regret and nostalgia that it sounds like a pessimistic bruise being squeezed.
- 1 "To happen" is reflexive in Polish.
 2 "The wind" is of masculine gender in Polish.
 5 Cf. "Has separation changed you..." in the Raspberry Brushwood cycle in "The Meadow," wherein the lover prays for the immortality of his beloved's body and expresses skepticism as to the survival of the "presumptuous" soul "lost in starry storms."
 8 The implication is that the lovers are shying away from happiness the way people accustomed to darkness shy away from light.
 9 The "bliss" is looking for "meaning, content, material," i.e. raw material for its form.
 11-2 These two lines were reversed in the verse version for purposes of rhyme.

TANGO

Ogień nasturcji—w ślepiach kota.
 Mgły czujnej wokół ciał zabiegi.
 Łódź, co odpływa w nic—ze złota!
 Żal—i liliowe brzegi.

Suśmy się ruchem dwóch gondoli
 Nie patrząc w lśniące dno podświetów—
 Niepokojeni z własnej woli
 Tajemną wiedzą kwiatów.

W zwierciadłach—świateł piętrowanie,
 A w szybach—zmrok posępny—
 I nieustanne zanurzanie
 Stopy w ten dźwięk następny...

A dźwięki z tańcem snując znowę
 Mgławieją—byle mgławiec,
 Tango bezwiednie purpurowe
 Zaczyna—nie chcąc—błękitnawiec...

Stopę, co szuka mgły wygodnej,
 Ostatni dźwięk wyminął—
 I nieużyty—i swobodny
 Chce ginąć... I już zginął.

THE TANGO

Nasturtium fire in feline eyes,
 Alert and body-careful haze,
 A nowhere sailing golden boat,
 A lilac shore—and my dismay.

Let's glide in tandem, like two ships,
 Not looking at the gleaming floor—
 We know the flower-truth and are
 Uneasy of our own accord.

A sullen dusk in windowpanes,
 A multi-storied light cascade—
 A foot immersed in notes to come,
 A musical and ceaseless wade.

Conspiracy of dance and sound:
 They mistify to mistify!
 Unconscious tango purple starts
 Reluctantly to bluiify...

The final sound has second-guessed
 The foot in search of cozy fog...
 Unused and free, it wants to die—
 And dies in music-dialogue.

| <u>Line</u> | TANGO (THE TANGO) |
|-------------|--|
| 1 | Fire of-nasturtium—in (animal-) eyes of-cat. |
| 2 | Of-fog alert around of-bodies solicitousness. |
| 3 | Boat, which off-swims into nothing—of gold! |
| 4 | Regret—and lily shores. |
| 5 | Let's-glide self with-movement of-two gondolas |
| 6 | Not looking into glistening bottom of-underworlds— |
| 7 | Uneasy from own will |
| 8 | With-secret knowledge of-flowers. |
| 9 | In mirrors—of-light storeying, |
| 10 | And in panes—bedusk gloomy— |
| 11 | And unceasing immersion |
| 12 | Of-foot in this sound next... |
| 13 | And sounds with dance spin collusion |
| 14 | Fogify—just-to fogify. |
| 15 | Tango unknowingly purple |
| 16 | Begins—not wanting—to-bluify. |
| 17 | Foot, which searches-for fog comfortable, |
| 18 | Last sound has-passed— |
| 19 | And not-used-up—and free |
| 20 | Wants to-perish... And just perished. |

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript, this poem was first published posthumously in "Epoka," Warsaw, May 3, 1938, together with a few other posthumous Leśmian poems.

According to Ireneusz Opacki ("Pośmiertna...maska," Studia pp. 311-27), this poem indicates how things pass quickly, unrepeatably. Janusz Sławiński ("Semantyka Poetycka Leśmiana," pp. 111-12), in the same book, mentions that the "-ifications" of color refer to the point at which the characteristic separates from the object and returns to nonexistence. (My impression is that it recreates an artistic sine curve, like Indian ragas in which notes lap around a constant like honeyed waves.)

In "Na Stepie," an 1897 work in UR p. 12, Leśmian says that the night is bluifying, and in "Spowiedź" (The Confession), a 1915 work on p. 111 of the same collection, blood also bluifies.

The "underworlds" in line 6 of course have nothing to do with crime, but with the unseen spaces beneath the dancers. That is why I opted for "Not looking at the gleaming floor" in the verse version.

Śnią się lasom — las,
 Śnią się deszcze.
Jawia się raz w raz
 Znikłe maje.

I mijają znów,
 I raz jeszcze...
A ja własnych snów
 Nie poznaję.

Forests dream of woods,
 And of rains;
Revelations of
 Bygone Mays.

And they pass on by,
 Twice, it seems...
I don't recognize
 My own dreams.

| <u>Line</u> | *** |
|-------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Dreams itself to-forests—forest, |
| 2 | Dream themselves rains. |
| 3 | Reveal themselves time in time |
| 4 | Disappeared Mays. |
| 5 | And they-pass again, |
| 6 | And once again, . . |
| 7 | And I my-own dreams |
| 8 | Not recognize. |

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 549, this poem was first published in "Bluszcz," Warsaw, December 9, 1933. The texts are virtually identical except for punctuation variations and a capitalization of the month of May (which is unnecessary in Polish).

Karpowicz (pp. 197-205) indicates that for Leśmian, dream and reality are a cognitive unit and can be used to confirm each other. A poet's only worthy endeavor, according to Leśmian's introduction to his translation of Poe, vol. 1, p. xxviii, cited in Karpowicz p. 202, is seeing his own dream and conquering for that dream the miraculous right to be. For Leśmian, the dream is a partner in penetration into simultaneity and the dazzling epiphany of the essence of things.

It must be repeated that "to dream" is reflexive in Polish, which confers grammatical and therefore symbolic existence upon the items being dreamed ("dreaming themselves").

Mrok na schodach. Pustka w domu.
Nie pomoże nikt nikomu.
Ślady twoje śnieg zaproszył,
Żal się w śniegu zawieruszył.
 Trzeba teraz w śnieg uwierzyć
 I tym śniegiem się ośnieżyć—
 I ocienić się tym cieniem,
 I pomilczeć tym milczeniem.

Dusky stairwell. Empty house.
No one helps a body now!
Snow has dustified your trail,
Sorry's blown away in hail.
 Now we must believe in snow,
 Make a snow-job of our own—
 Shade ourselves in shadow-hull,
 Hushify in silence-lull.

| <u>Line</u> | *** |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Murk on stairs. Emptiness in house. |
| 2 | Not will-help nobody to-nobody. |
| 3 | Traces yours snow dusted-over, |
| 4 | Regret itself in snow whirled. |
| 5 | One-must now in snow dream |
| 6 | And with-this snow self besnow— |
| 7 | And beshadow self with-this shadow, |
| 8 | And be-silent with this-silence. |

NOTES

Pankowski (75-81) mentioned Leśmian's solidarity with man and earth and nature in combat against God (To My Sister, The Horse, Asoka, Two Humble Humans, People). Here, however, even that is lacking; complete nihilistic pessimism is the result.

Trznadel, in LMP p. 849, indicates that this poem contains a deepened and immediate sensuality which is less vital and more humanistic than Leśmian's other poetry. Its classic simplicity is elegiac in tone.

Line

- 2 Polish multiple negatives reinforce each other instead of canceling each other out.
- 6 We must cover ourselves in snow. My interpretation is that "we need another illusion," which is why "snow-job" in the verse version is probably not too much of a liberty.
- 8 "To be silent" is a verb in Polish, much like "callarse" in Spanish or "se taire" in French. A negative activity thus has a positive verb to denote it.

Słyszę, jak deszcz po liściach coraz gęściej pluska.
Tak mnie nuży zwłok moich w zaświaty wywózka
Na kołach, co się krecą, choć nie wiedzą drogi!...
Dla mnie już tylko—mroki i mroków rozłogi!
Boże, czemuś dał duszę, co snu musi żebrać—
I życie, które można tak łatwo odebrać?
I czemuś mnie z takiego utworzył marliwa,
Że mnie w tę obcą ciemność byle noc porywa?
Czemu nieśmiertelniejsz na moim pogrzebie?
Czemuś zabił mnie jadem, co nie truje Ciebie?
Czemu nuży mnie zwłok mych w zaświaty wywózka,
A deszcz po żywych liściach coraz gęściej pluska?...

THE FUNERAL

I hear the raindrop-patter densify on leaves;
The carting of my corpse to Outworld wearies me!
The wheels continue turning, though they don't know the way!
There's nothing left for me but endless murky gray.
O God, why did you force our souls to beg for sleep?
Why did you make our lives so difficult to keep?
And why did you create me from such shoddy stuff
That in this foreign dark, one night can whisk me off?
You poisoned me with venom that affects you not,
Immortified yourself upon my burial-plot.
Why does this carting of my corpse so weary me
And raindrop-patter densify on living leaves?

Line FUNERAL (THE FUNERAL)

- 1 I-hear, how rain on leaves ever more-densely plashes.
- 2 How-much me fatigues of-remains my into otherworlds out-carrying
- 3 On wheels, which themselves turn, although not know way!...
- 4 For me now only—murk and of-murks expanses!
- 5 God, why gave-you soul, which sleep must beg—
- 6 And life, which can-be so easy to-take-away?
- 7 And why-you me from such create defectuousness,
- 8 That me in this foreign darkness any-old night kidnaps?
- 9 Why you-immortalize at my funeral?
- 10 Why-did-you kill me with-poison, which not poisons you?
- 11 Why-does fatigue me of-remains into otherworlds outcarrying,
- 12 And rain on living leaves ever more-densely plashes?

NOTES

According to Trznadel Postscript p. 549, this poem was first published in "Gazeta Polska" (Polish News), Warsaw, November 8, 1936. The texts are identical.

According to Karpowicz (82-3), Leśmian's heroes easily cross the threshold of death and are reborn on the other side, living on in "intensified self-reflection," observing their own funeral or their own remains, becoming their own doubles. In "Don Żuan," for instance, the protagonist anticipates his second funeral, when he will die for himself.

According to Papierkowski (138, 153-4), "marliwo" (defectuousness) is a neologism for very poor material and is an analogy to "paliwo," firewood. In making a noun into an adjective, it reifies a description.

The reproach to God could, in my opinion, be interpreted as ambivalent love for a parent who appears to feed on his own child and expects unconditional authority without being willing to take on responsibility.

CHRONOLOGICAL (BY DATE OF PUBLICATION IF POSSIBLE) LIST
OF LEŚMIAN'S WORKS

- 1895: poems published in a weekly Warsaw newspaper
 1898: honorable mention for a sonnet in a contest
 1906: "Pesni Vasilisy Premudroi" (Songs of the Overwise Vasisilla), in Russian: Zolotoe Runo, no. 11-12.
 1907: "Lunnoe pokhmel'e" (Moon Intoxication), in Russian: Vesy, no. 10, pp. 7-18.
 1912: Sad rozstajny (The Crossroads Orchard). Warsaw: Pod znakiem poetów (Mortkowicz). Contents include reprints of poems from publications such as Bluszcz, Kurier warszawski, Tygodnik ilustrowany, Literatura i sztuka, Chimera, and Nowa gazeta.
 1912: Klechdy sezamowe (Sesame Stories). Warsaw: Mortkowicz, 1913 (probably a 1912 Christmas gift), rpt. Warsaw, Czytelnik, 1954.
 1913: Przygody Sindbada żeglarza (Adventures of Sindbad the Sailor). Warsaw: Mortkowicz, rpt. Warsaw, Czytelnik, 1950.
 1913- Translation of Edgar Allan Poe, Opowieści nadzwyczajne (Uncommon 14 Stories) from Baudelaire's French translation. Warsaw: Muza.
 1920: Łąka (The Meadow). Warsaw: Pod znakiem poetów.
 1926: Ballady (Ballads). Zamość.
 1936: Napój cienisty (Sipping Shade, lit. Shady Drink). Warsaw: Pod znakiem poetów.
 1938: Dziejba leśna (Forest Chronicle), compiled and edited posthumously by A. Tom. Warsaw: Pod znakiem poetów.
 1956: Klechdy polskie (Polish Stories), ed. and introduced by Brónisław Przyłuski. London: Veritas, rpt. Warsaw: P.I.W. Pax, 1959.
 1959: Szkice literackie (Literary Sketches), a compilation of literary essays written by Leśmian during the period beginning just prior to World War I. Ed. by Jacek Trznadel. Warsaw: P.I.W..
 1962: Utwory rozproszone, listy (Scattered Works, Letters), compiled and edited by Jacek Trznadel. Warsaw: P.I.W.

Posthumous republications of selections of Leśmian's poetry:

- 1946: Wybór poezji (Selection of poems), edited and introduced by Leopold Staff. Cracow: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza Książki.
 1955: Wiersze wybrane (Selected Verses), edited and introduced by Mieczysław Jastrun. Warsaw: Czytelnik.
 1957: Poezje zebrane (Collected poems, including Treatise on Poetry). Warsaw: P. I. W.
 1964: Poezje (Poetry). Warsaw: Poeci Polscy, rpt. 1967.
 1965: Poezje (Poetry), edited by J. Trznadel. Warsaw: P.I.W.
 1967: Poezje wybrane (Selected poems), edited and introduced by J. Z. Jakubowski. Warsaw: Bibl. Poetbw XX wieku.
 1974: Poezje wybrane (Selected poems), ed. and introduced by Jacek Trznadel. Wrocław: Ossolineum.

Unpublished manuscripts:

Vasilii Buslaev, a lost drama manuscript in the Russian language.

Bajka o złotym grzebyku (Fairy Tale about a Golden Comb), a "scenic farce."

Ręce białej Iseult (White Isolde's Hands).

Satyr i nimfa (The Satyr and the Nymph), a ballad.

Skrzypek opętany (The Crazy Fiddler), a "scenic fairy tale."

Zdziczenie obyczajów pośmiertnych (Posthumous Customs Gone Amok), an unfinished work originally destined for inclusion in Dziejba leśna.

Życie snem (Life As a Dream), a theatrical-supplement feature.

Pierrot i Kolombina (Pierrot and Columbine), a ballet.

Kołysanka (Lullaby), an unfinished novella.

Zegar (The Clock or The Watch), a radio play.

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