

PAN TADEUSZ

**or the Last Foray in Lithuania:
a History of the Nobility in the Years 1811 and 1812**



By ADAM MICKIEWICZ

(written 1834)

Translated from Polish by Leonard Kress

HarrowGate Press, 2006

(Illustration by Franciszek Kostrzewski, 1860)

About Pan Tadeusz

Pan Tadeusz, or the Last Foray in Lithuania: A History of the Nobility in the Years 1811 and 1812 in Twelve Books of Verse (*Pan Tadeusz, czyli ostatni zajazd na Litwie. Historia szlachecka z roku 1811 i 1812 we dwunastu księgach wierszem*) was published in Paris, in June of 1834. It is thought to be the last great epic poem of European literature and is recognized as the national epic of Poland. It has long been required reading (along with memorization) in Polish schools and is the most widely known and read book in the country.

The story of *Pan Tadeusz* takes place over several days in 1811 and one day in 1812, during the Partition of Poland. Poland, at the time, had been divided up between Russia, Austria, and Prussia, and had literally disappeared from the political map of Europe. The specific events of *Pan Tadeusz* take place in the village of Soplicowo in Lithuania. The poem narrates the tale of two feuding noble families and the love story between Tadeusz and Zosia.

About Adam Mickiewicz

Mickiewicz was born on December 24, 1798 and died on November 26, 1855. He was born near the Polish town of Nowogrodek, into a family of the Polish nobility. At the time Nowogrodek part of the Russian Empire. Mickiewicz was educated at the University of Vilnius (Wilno in Polish), where he became involved in an underground Polish-Lithuanian freedom group. After his studies he worked as a high school tutor in Kaunas (Kowno in Polish).

Mickiewicz was arrested in 1823, at the age of 25, for his political activities. He had already published two highly acclaimed volumes of poetry, and when he was banished to Russia, and St. Petersburg, he was welcomed into the most important literary circles. He gained a reputation of his poetic improvisations and even traveled to the Crimea, where he produced his first major work—*The Crimean Sonnets*.

In 1823, he published *Konrad Wallenrod*, a heroic narrative about the conflicts between the pagan Lithuania warriors and the Teutonic Knights—which was seen by Poles as a thinly veiled tirade against Russian domination.

Mickiewicz remained in exile in Russia for five years, and when he was permitted to leave, vowed never to return to his native Lithuania as long as it remained under Russian rule. He traveled to Germany, met Goethe, visited Italian cities, and eventually settled in Rome. There he wrote *Forefathers Eve* (*Dziady*), which was based on various Slavic and Pagan religious rituals, though like *Konrad Wallenrod*, it was also profoundly political.

In 1832, at the age of 34, Mickiewicz moved to Paris. His early days there were full of poverty and despair, until he married Celina Szymanowski, a Polish woman living in exile—who interestingly came from a Jewish family that converted to Catholicism in the wake of the failed Jewish Messiah, Jacob Frank. Celina eventually went insane, but Mickiewicz managed to gain a position as professor of Slavic languages and literature at the Collège de France. This appointment lasted a mere three years, though, as Mickiewicz fell under the influence of the mystical philosophy of Andrzej Towiański, which was a strange combination of religion and politics.

After several failed journalistic ventures, in 1855 Mickiewicz ventured to Turkey during the Crimean War. His aim was to organize a Polish military brigade to enter the war to fight Russia. He was accompanied by his friend Armand Lévy, who was similarly attempting to organize a Jewish Legion. While visiting a military camp near Constantinople, Mickiewicz contracted cholera and died that same year.

About the translator

Leonard Kress is the author of three collections of poetry: *The Centralia Mine Fire* (Flume Press), *Sappho's Apples* (HarrowGate Press), *Orphics* (Kent State University Press). *The Orpheus Complex* (Main Street Rag Press), *Thirteens* (Aureole Press), *Braids & Other Sestinas* (Seven Kitchens Press), and *Living in the Candy Store* (Finishing Line Press). He has published poetry, prose, and fiction in journals such as *American Poetry Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Iowa Review* and *New Letters*. He has received grants in poetry, fiction, and playwriting from the Ohio Arts Council and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. He has studied Religion at Temple University, Polish literature and folklore at The Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, and received an MFA in Writing from Columbia University. In addition *Pan Tadeusz*, he has also translated several of Mickiewicz's *Ballads and Romances*, as well as the work of Jan Kochanowski (several of *Laments* appear in *Artful Dodge*--<http://www.wooster.edu/artfuldodge/poetsastranslators/kress.htm>), Szymon Zimorowic, Kazimiera Illakowiczowna, Tadeusz Borowski, and Czeslaw Milosz. Kress teaches art history, philosophy, literature, religion, and creative writing at Owens College in Ohio.

For more information: www.leonardkress.com

Czeslaw Milosz,

from *A Theological Treatise*

Mickiewicz—why dabble with him if he has been sufficiently
accommodated to every day use.

Changed into a can of preserves which shows, when opened,
a flickering film about old Poland.

.....

I always like Mickiewicz, though I didn't know why.

Then I realized that he was writing in cipher
And that this was a rule of poetry.
The distance between what we know and what we reveal.

It's what's inside the shell that matters.
And it's all right if readers play with shells.

*This translation is dedicated to the memory of Samuel Fiszman, 1914-1999, former Professor of
Polish at Indiana University.*

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BOOK 1

THE FARM

A Young Man Returns - Meeting in a Chamber, then at the Table - The Judge's Discourse on Courtesy - The Chamberlain's Remarks on the Politics of Fashion - Dispute Over a Bobtail Hound and Falcon - The Seneschal's Lament - The Last Tribunal Apparitor - The Current Political Situation in Lithuania and Europe -

O Lithuania, my native land,
you are like health--so valued when lost
beyond recovery; let these words now stand
restoring you, redeeming exile's cost.

Holy Virgin, defender of the Shrine
at Czestochowa, who illuminates
the Ostra Gate in Vilno, whose sign
revealed as one of her protectorates
the walled Novogrodek--who saved me once
with her miraculous glow. My tearful mother
entrusted me (it was her only chance,
I was near death) so when there was no other
cure, she helped to open up my eyes,
and once my lids were raised, though weak, I made
a pilgrimage to offer thanks and praise.

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This memory of resurrection has stayed
alive in me since childhood; it makes
me hope a homesick exile might return
to wooded hills, green meadows, and the lakes
spread round the River Nieman--that I'd be borne
back to that womb of gilded wheat and rye
turned silver, to the amber mustard row,
buckwheat snow, and clover, burning like a shy
girl's blush--to strips of turf, ribbons that show
boundaries with green. All this I see
so clearly, down to each blossoming pear tree.

A larchwood manor stood upon the banks
of a stream, dividing groves of birch, its stone
foundation propping up the solid ranks

of oak beams and whitewashed walls, which shone
in stark relief against the darker green
of poplars all around. A barn attested
to abundant stores of grain, unseen,
and more in fields waiting to be harvested.
Black earth, gridded from countless plows,
fallow land, flowerbed, and garden--
everything about the farmstead shows
its owner's lot is prosperous. Even
stranger would face, like guest, a welcome sight,
a gate, open by day, unlatched at night.

A young man raced his carriage through the yard,
halted his team by the porch and vaulted down.
His horses dragged the coach, and panting hard,
began to graze. The door was shut, the lawn
deserted--anxiously he rushed to greet
inhabitant and house alike, unlatched
the lock, dismayed he found no one to meet.

The youth was only recently dispatched
from a distant city where he'd gone to school.
Now finished with his studies, he relearns
the old floor planks, eager to roam and rule
halls hung with tapestries. Now he returns
to find that nothing is unchanged. The halls
all seem less grand, perhaps a little quainter.
The portraits he remembers still grace the walls:
Kosciuszko in Cracovian dress. (The painter 3
surely had in mind the time he swore,
clutching his sword, his eyes to heaven cast,
he'd drive the occupier from the door
of every Pole, or make this act his last.)
Rejtan was next, mourning his freedom's loss; 4
knife stuck in his own breast by his own hand,
(Plutarch's *Life of Cato* open across
his desk.) Next was Jasinski, his last stand: 5
the hero, young, handsome, and melancholy,
beside Korsak, comrades to the end. 6
(They stand in trenches aware of their huge folly:
dead Russians all around; they can't defend
Warsaw--engulfed by flames from the attack.)
Tadeusz sees the antique chiming clock,
recalling how he'd tug a string in back;
repeating it provides a pleasing shock,
the same *Mazurka of Dombrowski* plays. 7

He scours the house, searching for the room,
ten years unseen, where he had spent the days
of childhood. But now he must assume
that all has changed, finding that change quite bold.
What happened here? It seems someone rolled
a piano in, and songsheets--such disorder!
Clearly female hands had made this mess:
a hanger on the floor, a lace border--
half-draped upon a chair, an evening dress.

Fragrant plants were lined up in a row:
geranium, carnation, aster, and violet.
The young man spots new marvels down below:
right by the stream, where once there was a thicket
full of nettles, now a garden thrived,
criss-crossed by tiny paths, with clumps of mint
and English grass. There was a fencepost carved
with some initials, daisies and ribbons pinned
and marking it. The flowers were all slick
and wet; someone had sprinkled half the can
and left the garden, making such a quick
getaway, the gate still swung. Whoever ran
left shoeless footprints in the sand, though shallow,
as if these feet had barely skimmed the ground.

The traveler stood and mused beside the window,
inhaling all the scents. In his profound
confusion, he began to lean too far,
as if drawn to the garden and the path,
almost tumbling out. He began to stare
at something in the distance, taking his breath
away--a girl dressed in white, her slight
body almost uncovered, shoulders and
a swan-like neck revealed! Such a sight
is rare in Lithuania, a land
where modesty prevails. And though she thought
she was unseen, her arms were shyly crossed
to screen herself. Her hair was twisted taut
and wrapped around white paper strips--and lost,
for now, the ringlets coiled and dangling free.
And yet the rays of morning sunlight drowned
her in such a strange embellished glow, she
seemed to be a holy icon crowned.

At first she searched for something in the meadow.
He couldn't see her hidden face till she
began to run and skip. Thus he could follow
her movements, as she fell down joyously,
clasping her hands and laughing. Then she flew
up from the turf, a bird joining its flock,
over the fence, her white robe askew
and disappeared--much to the young man's shock.
He saw her next in quite a flutter, when
she hopped in through the open window, singing,
and gathered her skirt, disheveled from the run,
and approached the mirror wholly unsuspecting.
Imagine what she thought, spying the youth:
she dropped her mouth and then her hem in fright,
although she didn't turn away. His breath
left him red as a cloud in morning light.
Shielding his eyes and with apologies,
he bowed, and almost tripping, withdrew.
The girl just screamed as if some dread disease
had caused her pain, or some nightmare creature flew
into her dream. The youth peeked out once more,
almost as horrified, but she was gone.
Convinced that he'd committed some grave error,
his heart pounding his chest, flooding his brain.
When he calmed down, he couldn't make the choice--
to feel ashamed by this encounter or rejoice.

Meanwhile, the guest's arrival had been noticed,
and so the law of hospitality
demanded that the horses were enticed
with hay and oats of the best quality
and then stabled. The Judge abhorred the new
fashion of sending both the horse and guest
to board inside the tavern of a Jew.
Servants did not greet the youth, but lest
the reader think the Judge allowed such breach
of propriety, let it be known that they waited
until the busy Seneschal could reach
the door. This man, so distantly related
to the Judge, now his friend, was assigned the chore
of cooking up a special meal for him--
this youth they were eagerly waiting for.
Now he rushed to find his suit and trim,
and in his room, while glancing at the clock,
hastily removed his homespun frock.

The Seneschal could clearly recognize
the youth from far away; he shouted, waved
his arms, and rushed to gaze into his eyes.
Once they embraced, nothing could be saved
for later conversation. Everything
competed for the forefront of their tangled
discourse: years of history mixing
with sighs and renewed greeting. Gaps all filled,
the mutual cross-examination ceased,
the Seneschal announced the evening feast.

“It's good,” he said to Tadeusz, who bore
Kosciuszko's given name, since he was born
the very year the hero fought his war.
“It's good you chose this time for your return.
You'll find that we play host to quite a horde
of young ladies--so know, that in the end,
your uncle does expect you'll give your word
to one you find most suitable. Both friend
and foe have also gathered to convene
the District Court; the Count will soon arrive.
This ancient feud will play its final scene,
I hope, and settle, leaving all alive.
The Chamberlain has brought his wife and daughters; 9
the men are in the forest shooting quail.
Some women watch the harvest, some in their quarters--
your Uncle's busy with some last detail.”

The sun was setting--a broad red band
just like the glow upon some peasant's brow,
who trudges home across his fresh-plowed land.
It stretched across the whole horizon now,
and twilight mist was flickering through green
branches, like tiny fires of roofing thatch
ablaze, or like a candle briefly seen
through shutters. Soon darkness drenched the patch,
the final light extinguished. Then the rows
of scythes swishing in the grain, and rakes
dragging the meadow grass—soon all grows
quiet. And only then will the Judge make
the sign announcing that the working day
is done. The Judge's word on this estate
is sacred: “When the sun withdraws his final ray
the farmer can retire,” he'd pontificate,
“The Lord of Earth knows just how long to toil
before he leaves--and so we imitate.”

Although some carts were waiting on the soil
for sheaves of rye, there was one to hoist.
And while they made their way back to the barn--
the oxen with their lighter load rejoiced.

All were heading home from the forest,
gaily, but in order. Children ahead
rushed in front of their tutors, the rest,
beginning with the Chamberlain's wife, were led
by the Judge. Then came her family, and ladies,
somewhat older, preceding those who were still young.
Such order and these strict proprieties
seemed almost instinctual among
the groups--no one had told them to reserve
their certain spots, and yet in the household
of the Judge, all were careful to observe
ancient custom--and rarely was one bold
enough to disrespect its ways. "We must
honor one's age and birth, one's office and
one's intellect," he'd say, "and so we trust
that both nation and home will make this land
a place where celebration is bred in.
But try to do without these attributes,
then both will surely fester and grow rotten."
Rarely did these strictures cause disputes,
and visitors adapted without care,
as quickly as they breathed his household air.

The Judge greeted his nephew with a bow;
he gravely held his hand out to be kissed
and touched his cheek to young Tadeusz's brow.
It was clear to all--the youth was sorely missed,
for though the Judge remained silent and brief,
his tears provided evidence of grief.

Then everything followed in the tracks
of the host--from the forest, pastures, meadows,
and harvest. Bleating sheep with wooly backs
were raising clouds of dust, and next, in rows
a herd of Tyrolean calves strode
on thin, stiff legs, each clanging a brass bell.
Neighing horses galloped from the mowed
meadows--all met and gathered by the well,
waiting for the beam to creak and force
water into the trough. Although his guests
awaited him, the Judge felt no remorse:

he had his work, and a good farmer tests
his stables every night. To every sty
he went, trusting only his own sight--
The Horse is Fattened by the Master's Eye.

In the hall, loitering by lantern-light,
the Seneschal and Protazy the Steward
argued. The Steward had secretly changed
the Seneschal's stated plans, defied his word
about the old castle, and rearranged
the tables he'd earlier removed.
This castle, situated in the wood,
had long lain ruined by neglect, which proved
as damaging as years of attack withstood.
The outraged Seneschal apologized
to the Judge, because it was too late to change
things now and made excuses for the once prized
castle, which, in days of old, as strange
as it sounds now, protected the estate.
So while the Judge pressed on, he heard
his Steward Protazy attempt to state
his case: the manor lacked the space, he feared,
for such distinguished guests, while the great hall
inside the castle had been partially
restored. The vaulted roof was solid, the wall
had many of its stained-glass panes, surely
a minor problem, since it was now summer.
Proximity to smokehouse and root cellar
would make the tasks of cooks and servants easier.
Protazy faced the Judge, avoiding war
by winking, which, he felt, explained his treason,
though clearly he concealed some deeper reason.

More than a thousand paces beyond the manor
the stately structure stood, the most ancient
Horeszko legacy, whose last successor
perished during the nation's internment.
The whole domain had further been destroyed
by guardians who squandered its fortune.
Judicial interdiction further toyed
with it, until the greater part had soon
been passed to distant relatives, the rest
divided by creditors. And no one tried
to claim the castle, since even the best
intentions could not help the eager side
without great sums of cash. Until the Count,

a distant Horeszko, who'd come of age,
decided that he'd pay the full amount,
and wished to own both castle and its acreage.
He said he loved the Gothic architecture,
although the Judge, who hated all things Prussian,
located documents that could assure
its architect was Lithuanian.
Just as the Count announced his will, the Judge
developed quite a similar passion
for the castle. Since neither one would budge,
proceedings were begun--first in the District
Court, and finally brought before the Senate.
After great expense and numerous edict,
neither party could the courts placate.
And now, Protazy claimed, despite its fault,
the castle could hold all dignitaries
in its refectory, beneath a vault
bulging on pillars, with great tapestries
and prized trophies mounted on the wall--
the great antlers of conquered elk and stag,
heraldic treasures of the hunter's call,
the name of each inscribed upon a tag,
and finally, the proud Horeszko crest,
the half-goat, painted high above the rest.

The guests entered in order and then stood
in one great circle, while the Chamberlain
assumed his place, as one of his rank should,
for that and the privilege of age dictated the main
order. He bowed to ladies, old men and young.
The Judge waited while a Bernardine monk
intoned a prayer; a Latin hymn was sung.
Vodka, served to honored guests, was drunk.
The rest sat down because it was quite late,
and silently a cold beet salad they ate.

Though young, Tadeusz was an honored guest,
his proper place among the ladies, near
the Chamberlain, who had made this request.
Between Tadeusz and the Judge, however,
a space remained conspicuously vacant,
and more than once his uncle scrutinized
the empty seat, awaiting someone's prized
arrival. So Tadeusz, too, began to stare,
gazing from the door to untouched table setting.
How strange it was--right here among such fair

and highborn young ladies--he was letting them eat in peace, when even the pickiest prince would surely find several to his liking. Instead, Tadeusz searched for evidence of future occupation, barely striking up a conversation with the daughter of the Chamberlain, thus failing to remove her dirty plate, or charm her into laughter, or fill her empty glass with wine, or prove with proper conversation that he knew the ways of high society. The rest of them got even less of a review, because the youth's imagination dressed the unknown object in a charming manner, and filled with speculation what was blank--a thousand guesses, each bearing its banner now hopped like frogs out of their river bank after a storm, teeming across a meadow, drawn to their queen floating upon the lake; that is, the water lily's deep white brow.

Soon the Chamberlain began to take the offered plates, and filled one daughter's glass with wine, handing a dish of pickled cucumber to the other. "I see," he said, "that I must pass this food myself, though older and clumsier..." At once a crew of young men leaped to serve the young ladies. The Judge, arching his brow, gave his nephew a stare that could unnerve anyone, and straightened out his caftan to show he wished to speak. Pouring out some wine from Hungary, he began: "The latest fashion now dictates that our youth follow a line straight to the capital. Now all our sons, and grandsons, too, we won't deny, have more book-learning than the rest of us, but how they suffer for it--and how I decry this new practice! I'm bothered by this fuss over education; they can't teach the proper way to act out in the world. Back in my day, excuse me if I preach, a youth would go to live in the household of a noble. Yes, I myself was sent to the court of the father of our honored guest; he counseled me until he could present me to society, molded like the best

of men. He kept me till he thought me fit,
and we should praise his soul for his guidance,
for if this household did not benefit,
as others did, it's not from lack of chance:
Farming the land is what I clearly chose;
I never sought to rise up to the ranks
to which others, more praiseworthy, rose.
No one ever can reproach me, thanks
to him, who taught me never to offend
by lacking honesty or courtesy,
a science quite exact, but not an end
in itself. For even the most skillfully
executed clicking of the heels
or greeting smile, can signify no more
than ways in which a shopkeeper steals.
The ancient Polish code offers a store
of knowledge for each different situation.
No child can love by being impolite;
nor husband and wife. And for every station,
from master down to servant, there is one right
and proper way, and each encounter is
occasion for new honesty. A man
must listen to his elders, for this
is the only way to learn about one's clan
and family, the domestic annals
and history. Each nobleman could know
all things about his brethren and his rivals,
and thus, accordingly, know to show
respect, or guard his manner. Yet today,
we dare not ask what sort of man one is--
who bore him, with whom he spent the day,
or where he lived--nothing can be remiss.
We let in beggars, even former spies,
just like Vespasian the Roman, who
could sniff his filthy lucre as his prize,
no matter who had touched it, for all he knew
about were valid stamps, his sole concern--
friendship reduced to gold a Jew might earn.”

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The Judge surveyed his guests around the table,
for though he knew his speech was clear and fluent,
the patience of the young was questionable,
likely to be tried by even the most eloquent.
But everyone listened in deep silence,
and so he sought the Chamberlain's support,
who seemed at first to show indifference

to everything except refilling his port.
“So courtesy,” the Judge went on to say,
“is no small thing, for once one learns the customs
of another age, he can begin to weigh
the import of his own. His virtue comes
under scrutiny--at least he has a scale
on which to balance his errant behavior.
Especially when we send a young male
to the home of a female, the worthier
traits, if they are inbred, are apparent.
The path that leads from youthful flirtation
to marriage, likewise joins both parent
and house. Such was our elders' instruction.”
Thus the Judge concluded his speaking turn;
his glance at Tadeusz appeared quite stern.

The Chamberlain fingered his gold snuffbox,
tapping it. “It was,” he said, “much worse.
I don't know who to blame for this new pox
that now both young and old are want to curse.
But I remember times when all things French
became the rage, the country overrun--
young men like the Mongol horde--like some stench
from God knows where, the damage quickly done.
Custom, tradition, style of dress declined;
and no house lacked some sniveling young snot,
whining though his nose as he reclined,
his pockets stuffed--gazettes, brochures, such rot!
They lauded new beliefs, laws, and toilettes;
this rabble had us under such a grip,
surely God unleashed his wrath and threats,
and taking our good sense, he seemed to strip
us of our reason. Some, in fact, predicted
the nation's quick demise; for even honest
citizens were soon to be infected
by a plague that earlier had them distressed.
Once a dandy was no better than a germ,
a foreign sickness from across the border,
but soon they even ceased to make us squirm,
and rage only increased all the disorder.
Sadly, no one was trying to prevent
this masquerading carnival that enacted
that ushered in the slavery of Lent.
Even when I was young I was distracted:
one time when sitting in my father's yard,
a coach arrived, intent to make a visit,

and all, like swallows following a buzzard,
raced behind. It was his damned outfit
all were so curious to glimpse, as well
as the strange coach. Such overwhelming envy
for my house they felt, under the spell
of the two-wheeled chaise, anxious to finally see.
The French called it a cabriole, and in
the footman's seat, instead of a servant,
two puppies sat. And in the box, a thin
German, whose legs, if they had not been bent,
looked just like poles we use to stake our hops.
His boots with silver buckles dangled down.
The old men laughed at first and couldn't stop,
until a peasant proclaimed with a frown,
crossing himself, that in this German carriage
the Venetian Devil was crisscrossing the world.
And if you saw that German's equipage,
I'm sure you would agree. He wore a curled
wig, that he said was his golden fleece;
to us it seemed like matted hair for lice
to burrow in. His face was like a monkey's
or a parrot's, yet after looking twice,
do you think that anyone opposed this style,
saying that he preferred our Polish attire
to this pathetic aping? And so, while
first there wasn't either praise or ire,
soon the young embraced this prejudice
for all things French. And sooner or later,
they said, the old would see it was progress;
anyone opposed was called a traitor.
This man said he intended to reform us,
to civilize us and correct our ways.
All this newfound freedom--such a fuss--
as if the French alone began the craze
that all men are equal. As much is writ
inside the pages of the Holy Scripture,
or so we hear in sermons from the pulpit.
How could this doctrine gain in such stature,
when in the world such blindness does prevail?
Since no one believed in ancient verity,
it must have appeared in some French journal!
This man, unequally, was a Marquis,
a title that in Paris was the style.
And since fashion in Paris does not stagnate,
but changes, as it does, once in while--
he was a Democrat. And yet his fate

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shifted again with Napoleon's rise:
he is a Baron now, though he'd convert
again...and so would Poles. We take the prize--
for when a Frenchman sweats we change our shirt.”

“Praise God, that when our sons now go away,
it's not to buy new clothes or even pamphlets,
or learn by sitting in a Paris cafe,
the proper way the French run-up their debts.
But now we have our dear Napoleon,
who has no time for idle talk of fashions,
who cares less for a frock than for a weapon,
and wishes that Poland, of all nations,
become what it once was--The Republic!
From such laurels, the tree of freedom springs.
How sad our struggle still drags on, how sick
we have become of idleness and waiting
for even the scantiest of news. Robak,”
he said, turning quietly to the priest,
“Perhaps there is some word that you've brought back.
Do we have forces gathering--at least?”
“I know nothing,” the monk replied rudely.
“I'm bored by politics. If there's a letter
postmarked Warsaw, then most assuredly
it's news regarding my monastic order,
petty disputes that would most likely burn
the ears of a layman lacking all concern.”

This said, he looked askance at one new guest,
Captain Rykov, an old soldier from Moscow
quartered in the village, troops at rest.
He was invited by the Judge to show
his courtesy; but this Rykov devoured
his food and barely spoke, until they mentioned
Warsaw. “My friend,” the Russian spoke in lowered
tones, “Now please don't think me ill-intentioned
if I bring up this Bonoparte. I'm not a spy;
I understand how much you love your homeland;
you are Poles and I'm Russian, and that is why
we have an armistice, so we can stand
together and not fight, but drink and eat.
I often talked to Frenchmen at the post--
we'd toast with vodka--before we could repeat
the act again, the cannonballs were tossed.
We Russians say that anyone you fight
you first must like. Caress the bride before

the wedding--then you beat her every night.

I guess I'm saying that there will be war.
My Major Plut had visitors today;
they're all prepared to march, so I must go
against the French or Turks, but either way,
this Bonaparte will put on quite a show!
Without Suvorov--he'll just wipe us out.
I've heard them whisper in my regiment
that Bonaparte used magic when he fought;
and so did Suvorov. Inside his tent,
during a battle he once disappeared,
transformed himself into a baying hound
to chase this clever Bonaparte, who cleared
the way when he became a fox. When found,
he changed into a cat with claws. My source
claimed that Suvorov was a horse and boar.”
This sorcery was served with the next course;
When suddenly all heard a slamming door.

12

Someone appeared who was both young and fair;
and her entrance, her beauty and stature
surprised them all, so all began to stare.
Clearly, all except Tadeusz knew her.
She was slender with an attractive shape,
wearing a gown composed of layered silk,
low-cut, with a collar of folded crepe
and short sleeves. She held a fan she'd tilt
to hide her mouth, then twirl like a plaything,
causing sparks to flicker from its handle.
Her hair was circled into tiny winding
strands, braided with ribbons--while the sparkle
from an almost hidden diamond shone
much like a star within a comet's tail.
Such dress, the guests remarked in a hushed tone,
Was inappropriate in each detail.

Her dress was short, her entrance was so quick,
her legs remained unseen, almost gliding
like a puppet made to slide upon a stick
in Nativity plays, by young boys hiding
behind a sheet. But when she shyly curtsied,
and tried to sit down in the place reserved,
she found it very difficult indeed--
the rows of benches had her all unnerved:
should she disturb the row, or should she hop?
Skillfully, she slid into her place

(A billiard ball might score with such a drop),
but not before she brushed Tadeusz's face.
It seems she caught her flounce on someone's knee,
and lost balance; and so to keep from toppling,
she had to grab his shoulder, and politely
apologized for such an awkward cling.
She sat between him and the Judge; in place,
she didn't eat; she just surveyed the room and fanned,
adjusting her collar of Flemish lace,
and twirling ringlets with her tiny hand.

This interruption didn't last so long;
whispers began, then speaking, though subdued,
because the men reviewed the hunt. Soon strong
words flowed from the stubborn Notary, who argued 13
the hare was captured by his bobtail runt.
The outraged Sheriff, adding to the strife, 14
insisted that his *Falcon* led the hunt.
The feud increased in pitch, becoming rife
with threats and accusations from the bobtail's
boasting owner. When, finally, the rest
were asked, and when all of the hunt's details
were weighed, experts and viewers all expressed
the same judgment: it was the Notary's hound.
Meanwhile, the Judge was busily engaged
in conversation: "I offer my profound
apologies about the way we've staged
this meal, he told the lady at his side.
Our guests must eat; they're tired from the chase.
If I knew you'd be joining us, I'd have tried
arranging this in some more pleasant place."
He carefully replenished wine consumed,
while the fierce debate was once again resumed.

While others at both ends were occupied,
Tadeusz scrutinized the unknown face,
recalling how, at first meeting, he tried
to guess, after she left without a trace.
His heart raced as clues revealed the prize,
the mystery now solved, and even more,
he felt as though his wishes could materialize--
she was the one who'd startled him before.
True, she seemed to be somewhat taller,
but evening dress adds inches to one's height;
and though her hair, which had a golden color
and seemed shorter, now glowed raven in the light

reddening the hall... He hadn't really seen her face before, and so his mind composed one: eyes that were both black and steely. pale skin and cherry lips. And now he'd find the new face matched this made-up one. The age only seemed different--the garden maid had grown older, a more mature visage. And though Baptismal papers tend to aid in such inquests, he had to drop the case, for desire can fuse all ages into one, and youth is quite eager to find a place for innocence, even when there is none.

Tadeusz, twenty, surely not so old, had dwelt in Vilno since his childhood, raised by a priest with an old-fashioned hold over his ward, whose strict rule often stood to stifle his instincts. And so Tadeusz returned home to his family a pure soul, and thus in something of a hectic rush to put in action his imagined role, permission for his long forbidden freedom. He knew that he was handsome and vigorous, inheriting from his parents the sum of the Soplicas' strengths so various: he had a soldier's spirit and good looks, and like his kin, less interested in books.

In other ways Tadeusz resembled his ancestors: he rode well on horseback, was quick on foot, the envy of all assembled; it's just that he was bored by learning's lack of action. He preferred to shoot and fence, aware the army was his destination, according to his father's testaments. He marched to drums instead of education. But suddenly his uncle changed the rule; he was commanded to come home and marry, to take over the farm. And now, to fuel his interest, knowing youth is often wary, they placed a village under his control, the rest of the estate promised in whole.

Tadeusz's good qualities and virtue were not unnoticed by a certain guest, who studied him from varied points of view--

his strong shoulders, his height, and his broad chest.
But now, catching her scrutinizing stare,
he didn't blush, seemingly recovered
from his first timid look. Now he could dare
to return her gaze--as bold as a flame that shimmered.
And so between four eyes, a glow now passed,
like tapers set in place for Advent Mass.

At first in French she started with a question--
Where had he been and why had he returned?
And then about new books, her sole intention
was to discover what Tadeusz learned.
She was curious to find out everything--
music, painting, sculpture, even dance,
from brushstroke to quick pirouette, pressing,
until Tadeusz felt the siege of her advance.
Although he didn't want to seem a fool,
he stammered like a child in front of class.
Luckily, the teacher had a lenient rule
and changed topics, careful not to harass
his intellect. She talked of country cares,
how to amuse oneself and pass the day,
how to fill it with curious affairs.
Tadeusz grew bold--they began to play
and joke, quarrel in jest, head to head.
In little time they had become close friends;
she placed in front of him three crusts of bread,
demanding that he choose one of the ends.
When he picked out the nearest one, the daughter
of the Chamberlain frowned, turning aside,
guessing what was hinted at by laughter,
and what this chosen crust now signified.

A very different game was being played
far at the other end of the same table.
Suddenly adherents, who'd been swayed
to the side of *Falcon*, were no longer able
to defend, launching attacks mercilessly
at the bobtail's champion, both sides ignoring
the final course of food. Vociferously
they quarreled, drinking wine, imploring.
The Notary was the most obstinate:
he bellowed like trumpet without break,
using dramatic gestures to illustrate
(just like the lawyer that he was), to make
his case--for which he was nicknamed *Preacher*.

His hands were set apart, his elbows bent,
his manicured fingers became a creature,
while with his nail he tried to represent
the leash. "We were both head to head, I
and the Sheriff, one hand upon the trigger
of a double-barrel gun, ready to fly.
Then off they went, the hounds after the hare,
which flew across the field fast as an arrow."
As he was speaking, his thick fingers scurried
across the tabletop, trying to show
the motion of the hounds. "The pace was hurried,
and they caught up beside a flower bed.
So Falcon raised his tail for he was quick,
but too eager. And even though he led
my bobtail by an ear, that damn hare's trick
ruined it all! That hare was running straight,
leading the pack of wildly yelping hounds;
then like a little goat, it leapt--too late!
The dogs grew dumb, confused, they looked around
for no more than a second...with one hop,
the hare's off to the wood." Then with a whack
the Notary pounded the tabletop.
His voice exploded, causing the wood to crack,
which startled Tadeusz and his new friend.
Their heads flew back like trees in a fierce gale;
the youth withdrew his grip, preparing to defend;
faces reddened before they both turned pale.

Tadeusz tried not to betray his inattention,
proclaiming that the truth, without a doubt,
was that the bobtail fired the imagination
with his fine form and predatory snout.
"Predatory!" the Notary shouted,
"if not for that he wouldn't be my favorite."
Smiling, Tadeusz said he doubted
he'd seen a hound so free of bad habit.
"Regretfully, I came after the shoot,
and missed so much of his fine attribute."

The Sheriff's glass dropped from his trembling hand;
he cast at Tadeusz a serpenty look.
This Sheriff was a quiet soul, less grand
than the Notary; he rarely shook.
But at banquets, and in the District Council,
his burning wit had branded him a terror.
His jokes were so malicious and spiteful,

they often sent men running for the censor.
Long ago his property and wealth
he squandered--and his father's legacy,
his brother's fortune, not to his mention health,
prancing about in high society.
Later on he served the District Court,
holding on to some waning importance.
He remained fond of hunting, just for sport,
and blaring trumpets, beaters, all events
this day served to remind him of his past--
his pack of hounds and all his famous breeds.
His kennel now had dwindled to its last;
how dare they try to minimize the deeds
of his favorite! So stroking his mustache,
he spoke and cast a smile almost venomous:
"A tail-less dog--a banker lacking cash.
I'd say a tail that's cropped is spurious
evidence of a speedy good nature.
So I defer my judgment to your aunt
Telimena, whose knowledge is more sure
than what we hear from lesser hunters' rant."

This unexpected thunderbolt confused
Tadeusz, and he lost his power of speech,
eyeing his rival, as he felt abused.
Fortunate for all, a minor breach
of propriety was snuffed out in the crowd;
the Chamberlain sneezed loudly once, then twice.
Vivat! the whole room shouted as he bowed
his head, and sniffing, dried his teary eyes,
Tapping his gold snuffbox with its portrait
of King Stanislaw, diamonds inlaid,
a gift from the distinguished head of state
to his father, and which he now displayed.
His tapping signaled that he wished the floor:
"The evening meal is not the proper forum.
To rant and rave like this becomes a bore.
Why don't we meet again when hunters come;
then both of you can test this case once more.
And you, most honored Judge, along with Pani
Telimena, and the other guests,
will take the time to form a hunting party.
Our friend Protazy will inform the rest;
the Seneschal will come." He said enough,
coughed, and passed the older men some snuff.

The Seneschal was seated with the hunters;
he listened silently, squinting his eyes.
The young men often asked him for pointers
about hunting and valued his replies.
He measured out a pinch from the snuffbox,
and brooded for some time before he took it;
his sneeze rattled the chimes on several clocks.
He shook his head before smiling a bit:
“I'm shocked by this, and it truly grieves me
to sit and watch this noble gathering
argue like this about something so petty
as canine appendages--how disturbing!
What if Rejtan came back--deceased no more?

“I'm sure he'd rush back to his empty grave.
Or Niesiolowski, once our governor,
whose kennel of fine hounds we urge to save,
who maintains two hundred hunters in grand style,
and almost as many hunting nets on drays.
And yet he sits in monkish self-denial,
refusing to take part in hunts these days.
This current vogue appalls him--chasing rabbits!
Where's the glory? I would gladly name,
using the language of hunters, what's fit
to shoot: boar, wolf, bear, and elk are game,
while those without a tusk, a horn, or claw
are meant for servants, hired hands, that lot
of men who violate the hunter's law
by sprinkling into muskets their birdshot.
Of course, there was a time when some poor hare
might hop out from behind a horse's hoof;
then we'd unleash the dogs and let them share
the sport with younger boys, so they could prove
to their fathers that they could handle ponies.
We barely watched the game, and never quarreled.
Forgive me, but I hope it won't displease
the Chamberlain--to have the order annulled.
In such folly I never will set foot!
My family name Hreczecha derives its fame
from the great King Lech of legend; such pursuit
will only insult that illustrious name.”

16

17

While all the youths laughed uncontrollably,
those present rose in place around the table;
the Chamberlain was most deservedly
honored by all, and he put on his sable

cloak, then bowed to let the others stand.
The monk followed in line beside the host,
who gave the Chamberlain's dear wife his hand;
nodding to his aunt, Tadeusz crossed,
offering her his steady arm--after
the Notary leading the Seneschal's daughter.

Tadeusz walked the guests out to the stable,
morose, angry, he paused to analyze
the day's events--the first meeting, the table
games and arguments, the great surprise
of his aunt's arrival, for her very name
buzzed in his ear, annoying as a fly.
He wanted to discover why she came,
but couldn't find the steward Protazy,
who'd left with all the guests as was required,
preparing several manor rooms for night.
The old men and the ladies now retired;
servants busied about extinguishing the light.
Tadeusz reached the barn, showing the way
to other youths who'd sleep on piles of hay.

The whole manor was silent in an hour,
hushed as a cloister after evening prayer;
the only sound came from the watchman's tower.
It seemed that all were sleeping without care;
only the Judge refused to shut his eyes.
As master of the farm he had to plan
excursions to the fields, to organize
the banquet--giving orders to huntsman,
steward, scribe, as well as the grain keepers,
to check over the daily account book.
When he finally wished to join the sleepers,
he called upon Protazy to unhook
his belt from Sluck, which was finely embossed
with crimson flowers and rows of gold brocade
on its front--rich, black silk crisscrossed
with silver thread sewn on the other side.
The gold side could be worn on holiday,
the black for solemn occasion, to mourn.
Only Protazy knew the proper way
to unclasp it and fold, after it was worn.

18

The Judge asleep, Protazy found the hall.
He sat and lit a candle; from his pocket
he carefully removed a book he'd call

his *Golden Altar*, or devotions fit
for home as well as trip. It was, in fact,
the court record--in which he always wrote
on matters which the court was due to act.

19

So many of these cases he could quote,
because as Court Bailiff he'd called them out.
Although this book might seem mere registry,
to Protazy its names could bring about
fantastic scenes: He could see Oginski
now suing Wizigird; and the Dominicans
and Rzymsza; Rzymsza and Wysogird;
Radziwill's fight to stop Wysogird's plans;
Wareszczak versus Giedrojć, who was feared;
Rdutowski, Obruhowicz suing Jews;
Jaraha and Piotrowski, Maleski, face to face
with Mickiewicz; and then the latest news,
The Count Horeszko's long embattled case
against the Judge Soplica. He conjured
up the memory of courtroom and great trial;
soon litigant and witness both appeared.
And he was dressed in dark blue robes, a style
quite judicial--silent, with one hand
upon the bench, the other on his sword.
In his vision, Protazy might demand
order, but every now and then a word
of evening prayer slipped in. Fighting to keep
awake, he lost his courtroom scene to sleep.

Such were the many joys that could be found
throughout the Lithuanian countryside.
While the rest of the world horribly drowned
in blood and tears, the God of War now plied
his trade with clouds of regiments and arms,
his chariot harnessed to gold and silver
eagles. From northern Africa he swarms
straight to the soaring Alps, casting his thunder
at the Pyramids, Tabor, and Austerlitz.
Conquest and Victory in front and back,
advancing north, sending a roaring blitz
of glorious deeds, allowing knights to hack
their way up to the Nieman's craggy shore--
defended by Moscow in frightened rage,
building an iron wall to block out rumor
of a threat more dreadful than Bubonic plague.

20

From time to time stories might reach our land,
 in Lithuania, when some old beggar
 missing a leg or arm extends his only hand
 for bread. Accepting alms, he turns to stare
 with caution at the manor: If there is
 no Russian soldier, *yarmulke*, or red
 collar, then he shamelessly confesses
 there was Polish Legion he once led.
 Now he returns his old and weary bones
 to a homeland he can no more defend.
 The family welcomes him in tearful tones,
 beseeching him for stories--without end--
 to verify all the fantastic tales
 they've heard: about their General Dombrowski 21
 in Lombardy, with his army of Poles;
 about Kniazewicz, who in Rome still lags, 22
 because in victory he snatched from Caesars'
 descendants over one hundred bloody flags,
 cast in defiance at the French leaders;
 how Jablonowski still remains in tents
 in Africa, with his Danubian Legion--
 the air there full of sugar and pepper scents.
 Though springtime is eternal in this region,
 he longs for Poland--almost in despair.

The old man's talk spreads round the countryside;
 a youth who overhears might disappear,
 and sneak through forest, bog, and plain, to ride,
 chased by Russian soldiers drawing near.
 He dives into the Nieman's icy waters,
 swimming to the Warsaw Duchy's shores, 23
 greeted with kind words and safe quarters.
 And yet, before he enters through their doors,
 he mounts a hilly bank to taunt the Russians
 breathlessly: "We'll meet again some day!"
 So many like him fled across partitions:
 Gorecki, Pac, Piotrowski stole away,
 Obruchowicz, Janowski, Rozycki,
 Brochowski and the Mierzejewski brothers,
 Gedymin, Berentowicz, Obolewski,
 forced to abandon all. And there were others,
 who left their family and homeland far
 behind, their money plundered by the Tsar.

And then one day a wandering monk appeared
 collecting alms. When he was satisfied

the manor harbored no one to be feared,
he removed papers that he'd sewn inside
his scapular--coveted information,
number of troops, the name of every legion
commander, then victorious description,
or else obituary. After uncertain
years, a family might gain news of the glory
or death of sons. If so, the house would mourn
in secret, and dare not reveal the story.
Neighbors could only speculate from forlorn
expressions or smiles restrained--dead,
alive. Faces were scrutinized and read.

Father Robak was such a monk. He tried
to catch the Judge in private; afterwards,
fresh news dispersed throughout the countryside.
His bearing, though, was unlike Saint Bernard's;
new to the cowl, he hadn't grown so old
in cloistered halls. A scar above his ear
extended to his brow; there was a bold
lance-gash upon his chin, and it was clear
he wasn't wounded reading his psalter.
His gestures suited life lived in a camp:
when serving mass, and turning from the altar,
his movement had a military stamp,
a right face executed on command.
The way that he pronounced the liturgy
a disciplined squadron might understand;
even the altar boy felt like an inductee.

24

This monk cares less about the intercession
of the Saints, preferring politics;
and he is known to linger at the station,
receiving letters that he quickly sticks
inside his hood--dispatching messengers.
At night he often sneaks out in the dark
to nearby manor houses, where he whispers.
Peasants drinking in taverns remark
about his talk. The Judge will not refuse
to let him in--surely he has some news.

BOOK 2

THE CASTLE

Choosing the Best Hound - A Guest in the Castle - The Last Retainer and the History of the Last Horeszko - A Glance into the Orchard – Breakfast - Pani Telimena's Petersburg Anecdote - The Seneschal's Fly Swatter - More Quarrels Over Bobtail and Falcon - Father Robak Intervenes - The Wager – Mushrooming -

Who doesn't miss the time when he was young?
Wandering through fields, alert, carefree,
whistling--over his shoulder a rifle slung.
A time when no rampart, fence, or boundary
could halt his stride, forest and field un-owned.
Because in Lithuania, a hunter,
like a ship at sea, feels free to roam round
the world. He looks to the heavens like a seer,
at clouds whose meaning he alone divines,
just like a wizard in the woods, searching for signs.

Look, in the meadow, a corncrake shrieks,
darting about like a pike in the water;
a lark, caught in the deepest sky, soon breaks
free; an eagle spreads its wings for slaughter--
into the wind—terrorizing the sparrow,
like a shooting star that haunts the Tsar.
A hawk, suspended in the undertow,
wings extended to halt its peaceful soar,
comes crashing down wildly to earth to snare
some unsuspecting field mouse or hare.

Oh, when will our poor martyred exile end?
And when will we regain ancestral fields,
to serve a cavalry that will defend
against gray hares only; as soldiers to wield
our swords against game birds; to use
no other weapon than the plow, watering can
and scythe--while late at night we peruse
the household ledger--not some battle plan.

Dawn was already appearing in the back
of Soplica Manor--through the old roof thatch
and chinks, into the barn, streaking the stack
of hay, the pungent bed, making it catch
the light, much like a ribbon in a braid.
The beams of light were teasing dreaming boys,
as if some giggling village girl had laid
sprigs of wheat upon their cheeks. The noise
began as sparrows twittered in the eaves,
perking up a goose, whose honks would rouse
opposing choruses of ducks and turkeys,
echoed by the bellowing of cows.

While the others awoke, Tadeusz slept,
because he'd been the last one to retire.
Crowing cocks and preening hens kept
him anxious and disturbed, as though a fire
blazed inside the hay. Towards dawn his torment broke
and he slept soundly, till a windy draft
opened his eyes, and the barn door creak
roused him, just as Father Robak rushed past.
“*Surge Puer*, time to get up! “ he yelled,
and jokingly flailed his knotted hemp belt.

The hunters' cheers already could be heard;
the horses led and all the wagons hitched,
so many crammed inside the penned-in yard.
Kennels spring open and brass horns pitched
fanfares; a pack of wild yelping hounds
rush out to see the leashes and the whips.
They scamper in a frenzy all around
the yard, until each one finds a man who slips
the collar on--and so it is decreed
by the Chamberlain: the hunt shall proceed.

The horses cantor slowly, single-file,
and once they pass the gate break into trot.
The Sheriff and the Notary cast vile
glances back and forth, each like a shot.
They speak like friends, prepared to duel, restrained,
their honors sullied in mortal dispute.
Both of their hounds follow on leash, well-trained;
next come the ladies, young men in pursuit,
who chat, then gallop across the ground.

Father Robak walked across the yard.
As he concluded morning prayers, he frowned
at Tadeusz, then smiled. He stayed and stared
a while, before he waved his hand and crowned
his enigmatic gesture with a threatening
finger to the nose--as the youth approached.
In spite of Tadeusz's questioning
entreaties, he remained there, unreprieved,
as the monk strode off, drawing up his cowl.
Tadeusz left, confounded by his scowl.

Just then the hunters tightened up their grip
and the whole party halted in its place.
Someone held a finger to his lip,
and silently the others turned to face
the Judge, whose hand offered explanation.
All understood that he had spotted game;
the Notary and Sheriff left their station
trotting, while Tadeusz did the same.
It had been long since he had ridden there,
and it was hard to spot, in the gray expanse,
amid gray field stones, the gray hare.
The Judge was pointing to a rock in the distance:
a frightened hare was crouched beneath, its ears
stuck out, its red eye watched the hunters ride.
Spellbound, aware of its grim fate, its fears
kept it in place; it was now petrified.

The air grew thick and dusty as the runt
tugged at his leash, Falcon following close.
The owners' shrieks mixed with canine grunt;
neither could find his hound amid such chaos.

The Count arrived after the chase began.
He showed up in the castle woods—always late
by reputation, though he did have plans
to be on time. It was his wretched fate
to oversleep. So with his servants well-scolded,
he rushed to find the hunters all dispersed,
and galloped after them, his coat unfolded
and flapping in the wind. The Count rode first,
followed closely by his mounted servants,
with slick black caps, short coats, colored hankies,
white pantaloons, dressed up for these events,
and named by him, his *little English Jockeys*.

This colorful swarm galloped through the pasture;
the Count spotted the castle and he halted,
insisting to himself that all the grandeur
he saw, restored and beautified--the vaulted
roof, turrets, and walls--was some new sight.
The tower, he marveled, was twice as tall,
protruding through the mist to dizzying height;
the roof was gilded now above the hall;
behind the iron grates, the chipped glass panes
glittered from the eastern light. The lower
floors were cloaked in morning mist, the stains
and nicks and cracks were hidden in this bower.
The wind picked up the hunters' distant cries,
whipping them against the castle's side;
the Count could swear this coveted old prize
was secretly restored and occupied.

The Count was always fond of new landscapes.
He called such views sublime, and he considered
himself Romantic, although his flowing capes
concealed a nature many called absurd
or eccentric. When he would hunt a hare
or fox, he'd often halt before he fired--
to gaze up at the sky, like a cat aware
of a sparrow above the pines, sad and tired.
Often, like a young recruit, he wandered
off, as if deserting the field of battle,
and hunted with no hound or gun, or squandered
lazy afternoons beside the cattle,
lying by a stream, head bowed and mute,
still as a heron eyeing fish to be
consumed. The Count's habits were so acute,
that people thought him touched by lunacy.
They honored, though, his ancient line and views,
enlightened, even in respect to Jews.

Suddenly, the Count's horse veered and crossed
the path, trotting to the castle walk;
fearing that his vision might be lost,
the Count began to sketch it with some chalk.
While making his *etude* he glanced inside
and saw a man examining each stone,
seeming to count, displaying such odd pride
in his upturned head, standing alone.
At once the Count recalled and shouted out,
although it took a minute till Gervazy

could respond. It was, without a doubt,
the last Horeszko retainer, a crazy
old man, whose ruddy face was ridged as from
a plow. Now gloomy and severe (his wit,
once treasured by the gentry who would come
to the castle, had hidden its habit).
Since his master had fallen in bloody battle
years before, he'd kept his humor locked
away, and rarely ventured in the saddle
to fair or wedding feast--all smiles blocked.
And yet, there are some things that never change:
he dressed in the Horeszko livery,
an ancient noble style that might seem strange
today--a yellow greatcoat with embroidery,
trimmed with a golden braid, with the *half-goat*
heraldic crest in silk. He wore this old
rag constantly, and neighbors seeing the coat
would yell, *half-goat!*-- although he also told
scores of ancient proverbs, and so replied,
when others called, to *Milord*. They likewise called
him *Nick*, because across the top and side,
swords had scratched his head, completely bald.
His proper family name was Rembajlo;
his crest was little known, although the title,
Warden, fits him perfectly--he'll go
about tending the locks, a job vital,
a great key ring still dangles from his belt.

Gervazy and the Count entered the hall;
the old man spoke, his words so deeply felt:
“So many castle stones you see--yet all
of them are fewer than the casks of wine
opened in celebration when the gentry
came to this castle, invited to dine.
After every District Assembly,
name-day feast or hunt, we'd drag the kegs
up from the cellar, belted to our waist.
At banquets we would drain them to the dregs,
while in the gallery, musicians raised
a song, sung to the organ's thunderous tones.
During each toast, the trumpets bellowed out,
as if the Judgment Day were raising bones;
and then a host of vivats--one grand shout!
First, of course, the Polish King was praised,
the Archbishop, and then the health of the Queen,
the nobles, the Republic. When we raised

cups a fifth time, while heads began to lean,
someone always proclaimed, Let us love
one another! Then we'd all repeat
these words unceasingly, until above,
we'd catch the morning sun and rush to meet
wagon and driver lined-up to take us home.”

Gervazy silenced; then they began to roam
through rooms, although he always seemed to gaze
up to the vaulted ceiling--memories
clearly welling up within, from days
long past, joyous and sorrowful stories.
He fought them off, and bowing, seemed to say:
it's all over. And this was such torment,
these things he couldn't see or drive away,
although he waved his arms, remaining silent.
Inside the mirrored hall, the shiny glass
was gone or cracked inside the ornate frame.
The old man walked beneath the arch to pass
onto the balcony, head bowed in shame
and buried in his hands--such great despair.
The Count knew nothing of this history,
but nonetheless was moved, able to share
Gervazy's suffering over past glory.
The old man trembled, raising his right hand:
“Never, never can there be agreement
between Soplicas and the Horeszkos!
And you, dear Count, should clearly understand:
that same Horeszko blood inside you flows--
the Pantler's kin descended through your mother, 26
born to the Castellan's second daughter, 27
who was the uncle of my Lord's brother.
So listen to this heinous tale of slaughter
that took place on the very spot you stand.
The Pantler, my deceased dear Lord, the head
noble in the district owning land,
had a single daughter, and it was said
she was an angel courted by young devils.
Among them was a certain wild brawler,
Jacek Soplica, called in jest for his revels
and arrogance, the Senator-caller,
though in reality, his influence
was vast--his family held three-hundred votes.
Jacek had just a small inheritance,
possessing just a plot of land, dovecotes,
a saber, and mustaches, ear to ear.

My Lord, the Pantler, often summoned him,
asking this troublemaker to appear
when he would entertain--it was his whim
to be well-liked by all his countrymen.
You can imagine the pride and arrogance
bristling the bully's mustache when
my Lord would greet him making his entrance.
He thought he might become the son-in-law
of my dear Lord, because he was received
so graciously; but when the servants saw
his true intent, how quickly they relieved
him of his urge to roost; quickly they served
the black soup, signifying refusal. 28
But still she'd gaze at Soplica, unnerved,
afraid her father might catch her perusal.

It was back in the time of Kosciuszko,
back when my Lord supported the Constitution
of the Third of May, wishing to show
his solidarity for the Confederation. 29
Russian troops had just surrounded the castle;
there was no time to fire the alarms;
we couldn't bar the gate, it seemed futile:
the castle was not stocked and we lacked arms.
Besides the Lord and lady, only the cook
and his helpers, all inebriated,
the Parish priest and the lackey he took
with him, and four brave servants. Thus we waited
with guns by windows, till they swarmed across
the terrace, whooping and screaming, then picked
them off. We couldn't tell who took the loss;
the servants kept firing, though all were nicked
by bullets, and my Lord and I defended
the balcony. Amid the noise and terror,
the parish priest and the ladies tended
the twenty emptied muskets on the floor.
We fired one; the next was quickly brought,
then laid down and reloaded. Yet a hail
of bullets from the Russian soldiers caught
us by surprise--but they were doomed to fail--
we were better marksmen. So three times they
reached the entrance, and every time we shot
their legs right out from under them. Away,
behind the shed they flew, that cowardly lot!
Dawn was breaking, so the Pantler snuck
out to the balcony, and when he'd catch

a Muscovite raise up his head, he struck--
a black visor would roll across the path.
They didn't even try to steal away
behind the wall. Seeing his enemy
confused, the Pantler improvised a play,
an incursion. Raising his sword, he
commanded the servants and turned his face
to me, when suddenly, a shot rang out
which sent him stumbling all over the place.
The Pantler turned quite red and tried to shout,
but coughed up blood. A bullet lodged inside
his chest, and yet he still staggered--I don't
know how he could--clutching his breast he tried
to point. I recognized, standing in front
of the gate, that same Soplica, that scoundrel,
his face and long mustaches, and I knew
he was the one that killed the Pantler. The barrel
of his raised gun was still smoking. I drew
my pistol--that brigand was my target.
It discharged twice. Though he stood petrified,
I missed--I was too angry and upset.
The women screamed. I knew my Lord had died.”

Gervazy silenced, bursting into tears,
and then concluding: “Russians had already
broken down the gate; and all our fears
came true--my Lord had died, and me, unsteady.
Luckily, Parafianowicz came to aid,
with two-hundred Mickiewiczzes riding
behind, all eager to arrange a raid
on Soplicas, hatred no more in hiding.

“And thus a strong, pious, and just man perished,
a man elected to a Senate seat,
who held the staff, a man who even cherished
his peasants, yes, a man who'd always treat
nobles as his brothers. He lacked a son to swear
vengeance, although his faithful servant would.
Into his fatal wounds I dipped my rapier,
and when my pocket knife was drenched in blood,
I swore I'd thrust it in Soplica's neck.
Surely you've heard about my pocket knife--
meetings and fairs, always poised to wreck.
I tracked them down with it for my whole life,
and hewed down two of them on horseback, shaking
two more in duels. And then I set on fire

a wooden building, just to set one baking
like a mudfish, though I have no desire
to count his ears among the ones I severed.
So only one remained without reminder
of my vengeance--only his brother weathered
the years, a wealthy boasting man whose manor
fields abut this castle ground. And yet
he is respected as a judge. Will you
give him this precious floor so he can set
his bloody feet on it, to wipe them too?
No, not as long as I have strength to raise
one finger on my hand; I won't be docile!
My penknife is still worthy of its praise:
Soplica will not occupy this castle!"

"Oh yes," shouted the Count, raising his fist,
"I had forebodings that I loved these walls.
How could such treasures be so long dismissed?
So many lively scenes, so many tales.
When I seize back this castle of my ancestors,
you will be placed in charge, because your story
moves me. It is a shame these misadventures
could not be told at midnight in its glory:
I see myself draped in an overcoat,
sitting amid ruins, hearing these deeds,
bloody and vengeful--how they cruelly smote
your Lord. What poetry!--I hear the seeds
of some great epic tale. I've heard legends
from England, Scotland, Wales and Germany,
how, in castle and manor, murder sends
both lord and count and powerful family
to bloody end. And then how the revenge
of crimes is passed on like inheritance.
I know Horeszko blood flows through my veins;
I know who bears the guilt for this violence;
I must break off this agreement with the Judge
because honor demands it." Thus he strode
away, although Gervazy did not budge.
The Count glanced back, mounted his horse, and rode.

Alone again, the Count grew more excited:
Too bad Soplica doesn't have a wife
or daughter--then I could love, unrequited.
All this from unresolved and ancient strife,
for she might make the plot more intricate:
here lies the heart, and there, vengeance and valor,

thwarting love with their eternal debate.
He spurred his horse and galloped to the manor,
arriving as the hunters left the road.
He barely caught a glimpse of their bright banner,
when he forgot his vow and ancient code
of chivalry. He leaped over the gate,
but feeling faint, he had to stop and wait.

He spies an orchard--fruit trees all in rows
casting their shadows on a broad green field,
where cabbage meditate on the woes
of vegetables, their bald gray heads a shield
for weeping husks that mingle with the green
carrot leaves. The beans, with all their eyes,
look on, as golden tufts of cornsilk preen
and corpulent melons increase in size,
stretching their stems with all their mighty weights,
rolling over to visit the purple beets.

The garden was divided by straight furrows,
and guarding every row were huge hemp plants,
the patch's cypresses, because they rose
up straight and green, defending the entrance
with leaf and scent, for no serpent would dare
venture, no caterpillar or insect
survive. Whitish poppy stalks stood there,
their tips so colorful and almost flecked,
resembling flocks of perching butterflies
or precious stones whose glittering might stun
the eye. And then, a giant sunflower tries,
leaning from east to west, to reach the sun.

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Along the fences were long, rounded hillocks
lacking trees, flowers, or shrubs--a cucumber
patch, complete with giant, leafy shocks
all draped across the garden like a banner.
A young girl walked between the verdant rows;
dressed in a linen shift, sunk to her waist,
stooping amid the freshly dug-up furrows,
swimming through the leaves, as if she chased
something in the deep. Her head was shaded
by a straw hat with ribbons from the brim,
where ringlets of unbraided hair cascaded
down. She clutched a wicker basket's rim
with one hand, while the other one would seize,
like a young child bathing in a pond,

the tiny fish nibbling her feet. With ease,
she would bend down--or pirouette around,
as cucumbers tickled her from the ground.

The Count, admiring this miraculous sight,
stood quietly. Hearing his entourage
tramping behind, he signaled to hold tight
to the reins; and like a stork about to forage,
stretching its long bill, standing apart
from the flock and vigilant without break,
balancing on one foot: only its eyes might dart,
clutching a stone. Thus he tried to keep awake.

He stared until startled—and then he felt
a slap on one shoulder. Robak the priest
passed by, his fist wielding a thick rope belt.
If you want cucumbers, then here's your feast!
Hands off this fruit unless you want some harm,
it isn't yours and never will it be!
Then he pulled up his hood and shook his arm,
striding off. The Count lingered to see,
laughing, then cursing at this unexpected
intrusion--though the garden was now empty.
The girl was flashing by and he detected
her pink ribbons and linen shift. Only
green leaves, brushed by her quick, fleeing feet,
rose up, trembled a moment, and then settled.
And so the only sight his eyes would meet--
a basket overturned, as if meddled
with by small animals. The fruit was spilled,
the wicker rocking, till the green waves stilled.

In an instant all was silent and deserted.
The Count turned to the house, straining his ear,
and then back to his musings he reverted.
The hunters were motionless, only a murmur
came from the house, then a joyous shout,
a sound more like the buzzing of a hive
when swarming bees fly home. Hunters, about
to return, servants beginning to arrive
with food--tremendous bustling ruled the hall.
Bottles and silverware distributed,
as men entering in green outfits, all
juggling plates and glasses, contributed
to the confusion, as they ate or drank,
leaning against window casements, discussing

gun, hound, and hare. The Judge sat at the flank of the Chamberlain's family; amid this fussing the girls were whispering to one another-- unknown to proper Polish etiquette! Such chaotic scenes would surely bother the Judge, who'd rail to show he was upset.

Various dishes were brought to this company by servants balancing immense trays painted with colorful flowers. Slowly, they walked through steamy, aromatic haze with tiny pots of coffee and Dresden China, each cup with its own jug of cream. For Poland has coffee like no other nation, its preparation a custom held in esteem in all respectable homes. Typically, a special woman, the *coffee-maker*, has the chore of going to the river barges to haggle for the best beans. She alone knows the lore for brewing such a drink that's black as coal, translucent as amber, and thick as honey. And then the finest cream has its role in the preparation. In the country it is not difficult; after the pot is set atop the fire, it's off to the barn to skim the milk. The richest of the lot poured in each jug, shaped like a tiny urn.

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The ladies sipped their drinks and then prepared, by warming beer on the stove, a new dish, mixing in cream and bits of floating curd. The men picked at fatty smoked goose, and fish, sliced tongue and ham--all quite tasty and home-made, smoked over juniper, fired in the chimney; finally rashers, called *zrazy*. Such were the breakfasts that the Judge required.

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The guests divided up into two groups-- the elders remained seated at the table and spoke of farming matters, as well as troops, and new stricter Tsarist edicts, unable to agree. The Chamberlain, however, valued these rumors and drew his conclusions based on them, while the Seneschal's daughter, wearing blue spectacles, told the fortunes of his wife by reading cards. In the next

room, the young were mired deep in hunters' talk, more restrained than the usual guest; for the Sheriff and Notary, such orators, hunting experts, and marksmen, sat across the table and angrily muttering, both convinced that their own hound owed the loss of the prize hare, not to its own faltering, but the sudden appearance of some patch of unmowed grain, left by some lazy peasant, into which the hare fled, about to meet its match-- for the Judge rode up and halted the hunt. Though angered, both dog and master had to obey, but still the fierce argument continued: Falcon or bobtailed runt, none could say by which snout the hare might have been subdued.

The old Seneschal paced from room to room looking distractedly at either side; but he was careful to avoid the gloom of the elders and the hunters' fierce pride. His mind, occupied elsewhere, he stood in the hall meditating and swatting flies on the wall.

Tadeusz and Telimena were standing in the doorway, conversing alone. without partition, discretion demanding they whisper. Tadeusz discovered unknown facts: Telimena possessed great wealth, and he clearly wasn't so closely related to her that canon law might lead to stealth, for their blood connection could be debated. His uncle called her *sister* for the sake of some old familial bond, and despite the difference in age, and a parental break that sent her to Petersburg to reside, they remained close. She performed inestimable service from the capital, and he respected her for that. She was capable of charming behavior in society, and this appealed directly to his vanity.

In the other room the Sheriff was baiting the Notary, and he remarked casually: "Yesterday I said we should be waiting much later till we hunt. Habitually our peasants leave patches of unmowed grain,

and knowing this, the Count did not appear,
despite our invitation. He knows the main
tenets for proper hunting; so very clear
are his discourses about the place and time
proper for the chase. He grew from childhood
in foreign lands; to him our ways are signs
of barbarism, without regard for good
statutes or regulations, without respect
for boundary line or property. We trespass
without the owner's knowledge and expect
to ride in spring before winter can pass.
We exhaust the hungry fox while it still molts,
and set the hounds to torment pregnant hare
or harm some other game. You see, these faults
cause the Count to regretfully declare
that Moscow is more civilized, for their
forests are supervised and there the rules
the Tsar proclaims--obeyed by all but fools.”

Telimena turned to face the men,
fanning herself with a batiste kerchief.
“The Count,” she said, “is surely not mistaken.
I know Russia. You men cause me such grief
when you refuse to take me at my word:
their government is worthy of our praise
for its strict rule. I was in Petersburg
two times; such memories of those fine days,
such images now past. Gentlemen,
if you don't know the place, I'll be your guide:
all Petersburg would go--of course I mean
when summer came--to country homes a boat ride
up the River Nyeva. I lived for a time
in one dacha, not far from the city,
built on a man-made hill. What a fine home
it was--I have a sketch of it--but pity
my situation, when adjacent grounds
were rented by some very minor official,
serving an inquest. He owned some hounds--
imagine my torment from this kennel
each time I entered my garden to read
or else enjoy the moon and evening cool.
These dogs began to charge, suddenly freed,
tails wagging and ears pricked--I thought they'd drool.
So terrified I was, my heart foretold
some misfortune, and sure enough, one morning
I went to my garden and found the bold

hounds at the legs of my beloved, biting!
 My poor Bonoczyk, an exquisite pup, 33
 keepsake from dear Prince Sukin, and lively 34
 as a squirrel; I have her portrait up-
 stairs. Seeing her strangled, I could barely
 breathe: spasms, nausea, palpitations.
 I think I nearly died, but at that time
 Kirylo Gavrilich just happens
 to visit, and seeing the hideous crime,
 investigates the horrid hounds' ill-humor,
 and drags the magistrate in by his ears,
 trembling and pale and barely alive--for
 Kyrilo the Grand Huntmaster thunders:
 The Czar demands to know why you'd kill
 a pregnant doe! So this astounded policeman
 begins to swear that though it's spring, he still
 has yet to hunt. And he beseeches the pardon
 of his honor--This carcass seems to be
 a dog's and not a deer's. What's that you say?
 Kyrilo shouts, Do you know better than me
 about hunting and game, you who'd slay
 a pregnant doe in Spring! Call the Chief
 Magistrate in. He does, and Kuzodusin 35
 presents his evidence and signs a sheaf
 of legal documents as verification
 that the dead animal is, in fact, a doe,
 not some lapdog like this lackey contends.
 Judge for yourself--my title alone should show
 I am the better judge. so you must lend
 more credence to my expert testimony.
 The Police Chief muses for a while, then pulls
 the underling aside--just like some crony.
 If you plead guilty then I'll bend the rules.
 The Huntmaster seems pleased and promises
 to intercede to get the Czar's reprieve.
 His hounds strangled, the Magistrate is
 sent to prison a month; and we receive
 an entire evening's worth of entertainment.
 Everyone still talks about the case
 of my poor pup, which Kuzodusin sent
 to the Tsar, which brought a smile to his face."

Laughter from both rooms. The monk and Judge
 played *marriage*, but as the Judge was about
 to show his hand to Robak, who wouldn't budge,
 he overheard the tale and vainly sought

to hear some more, his card still raised, unseen.
He didn't say a word, as the monk trembled,
waiting for him to drop the winning queen.
“And so they praise the German,” the Judge mumbled,
“his civilization, and the Muscovite
his discipline. Should we let the people
of Greater Poland learn in court to fight
over the fox and likewise summon legal
help to arrest a trespassing bloodhound?
In Lithuania, we have much older
customs, and wild game is easily found.
Inquests can't turn pebbles into boulders;
we have sufficient grain, so that famine
will not occur if some dog might damage
some vegetables. I would impose a fine
or forbid hunting only on vital acreage.”

The Steward spoke, “And so it is no wonder,
my Lord, that you pay dearly for such game.
A peasant is happy to see your hounds blunder
into his crops, for if they are to blame
for shaking off some ears, you reimburse
sixty, and often throw in a gold coin.
Believe me, peasants will only get worse
if...” So many men began to join
in the debate, the Judge could not determine
the cogency of the Steward's sermon.

Telimena and Tadeusz spoke,
alone and mindful of each other; she
was pleased Tadeusz had enjoyed her joke,
accepting his compliments willingly,
speaking softly. Tadeusz joined the game,
pretending not to hear, and whispering
and leaning in so close, he felt the flame,
that from her brow seemed to be emanating.
Holding his breath, trying to catch her sighs,
he bathed within the sparkle of her eyes.

Just then a fly darted into the matter;
behind it came the Seneschal with his swatter.

Lithuania has an abundance of flies;
among them is a special kind, known
as the *Noble*. Only its great size
sets it apart; color and shape alone

link it to the vulgar breed. They thunder through the air and buzz intolerably, and when trapped in the web of a spider, will struggle for three days, and squirming free, defeat the spider so deliciously.

The Seneschal had long observed this fly and theorized, that like the queen bee, it gave birth to smaller insects, and by destroying them, the rest would surely perish. Even if it were true, no one believed his theories, and although they did not cherish these monstrous flies, they were always relieved that the Seneschal so fiercely pursued them--even now, as a *Noble* fly flashed by his ear, he swatted with his crude swatter, astonished that he almost smashed the window glass instead. The fly was dazed from the attack; seeing two people block his exit for escape, it flew as though crazed between their faces, as if it meant to mock them. Until the Seneschal raised his arm, swatting so hard the two heads split apart like a tree struck by lightning. Such harm was done--the marks were black and blue and hurt!

Luckily, no one noticed; the heretofore animated but orderly conversation ended with a sudden outbreak of commotion--as in the forest hunting, just before the fox is caught, such sounds are always heard: crashing tree, gunshot, and baying hound; then, unexpectedly, without a word, the signal is given, the game is found, and the entire forest erupts in sound. Likewise, this discussion ambled along until it came upon this profound subject again--the hunt. It wasn't long until the quarrel, like the attack, grew fierce. The Notary and the Sheriff, proclaiming the talents of their own hounds--soon their terse words gave way to epithets and insult-flinging. with three-fourths of their quarrel now dismissed (jibe, abuse, and challenge), now there looms the final part--to threaten with a fist.

Everyone rushed in from the other rooms,
pouring through the hall like waves to shore.
The young couple, like Janus, two-faced and fair,
was caught unhappily in the current, before
they could rearrange their disheveled hair.

Already, though, the terrible clamor
had died down; laughter spreading through the air
as Father Robak, the alms collector,
pacified the brawl. Old, but squat
and broad shouldered--so when the Sheriff rushed
into combat, flailing his arms, the monk shot
between them, knocking their heads together,
violently, as if they were mere Easter eggs.
Then he stretched out both arms like a tower
and threw both men, at the same time, so their legs
upended, and they lay huddled in two
corners. Standing between them, furious and bold,
he yelled, "*Pax obiscum!* Peace be with you!"

They were astounded and both factions would
have burst into laughter had they not respected
the clergy so highly. None dared to scold
the monk, for his behavior, unexpected
and unpriestlike, and surely no one cared
to renew the dispute. As soon as calm
prevailed and it was clear that everyone feared
his wrath, he pulled up his hood, mumbled a psalm,
tucked his hands into his belt and disappeared.

By this time now the Judge and the Official
occupied the area, already hushed.
The commotion had roused the Seneschal
out of deep meditation, and he rushed
into the gathering with a fiery glare.
Whenever he heard a murmur, like a priest
sprinkling holy water, he swatted the air
with his leather fly killer and only ceased
when the crowd respected its raised handle,
as though it were the baton of a Marshall.

"Keep quiet!" he repeated, "and take heed;
you are the foremost hunters in the district--
do you know where such brawling's sure to lead?
Our country demands that our youth respect
the time-honored ways of the nobility.

We expect them to bring fame both to forest
and field, yet they neglect hunting already,
I'm sad to say, and here you give them ample
reason to scorn it--by your poor example.
You teach them only to wrangle and argue.
Considering my gray hairs, you must realize
that I knew hunters much greater than you;
more than once I judged who won the prize.
Who could equal Rejtan in the Lithuanian wood?
Whether he was setting off the beaters
or else encountering game? And who could
compare with Bialopiotrowicz? Such leaders
unrivaled, were able to hit a running hare
with one pistol shot. Or Terajewicz, who'd bear
only his lance against a wild boar,
or Budrowicz, who, bare-handed, tore
apart a bear. Such men no longer roam
through these forests, but if disputes arose
how were they resolved? They returned home,
placed wagers, and proper judges they chose.
Oginski lost more land than he could count
over a simple wolf; and a badger
cost Niesiolowski a similar amount.
Perhaps you gentlemen should place a wager,
following their example and settle
this dispute. Lower the stakes and begin,
for words are like the wind, and a wordy quarrel
never ends. Such bickering seems a sin.
So please select an arbiter whose verdict
you can, in good conscience, accept. I beseech
the Judge, during the hunt, not to interdict
if and when the hounds happen to reach
the grain. I hope that you will grant me
this wish". With this, he embraced the Judge's knee.

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"I wager a horse," called out the Notary,
'I'll draw up papers at the local court.
The Judge has my ring to show I am a votary."
'And I,' said the Sheriff, "will stake my part,
my gold dog collars, lined with lizard skin,
my gold rings and leash of woven silk--handicraft
equal to the marvelous gem that shines within"

"I saved them hoping that they would be passed
to my children, should my bachelorhood go.
They were a gift from Prince Dominik,

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when we hunted with Marshall Sanguszko
and General Mejen; and so to pick
the best hound, I have wagered everything.
And there, unequalled in hunting annal,
a single bitch caught six hares without tiring.
We were in Kupisko Meadow and Radziwill,
the famous prince, could not stay in his saddle;
he dismounted, embraced Kania, my hound,
kissed her three times, and then he grabbed her muzzle:
'I hereby appoint you the newly crowned
Princess of Kupisko, for like Napoleon,
I hand out principalities on the very ground
of victory—Our Lord of this dominion.'”

Telimena grew bored with all the bickering.
She wished to go outside and so she sought
companions, grabbing a basket hanging
from a peg: “Gentlemen, I have caught
a headache from this incessant chatter,
I'm off to pick mushrooms, who will
accompany me?” She concluded the matter,
wrapping her head in a red cashmere shawl.

The Chamberlain's daughter took one hand,
and with the other, tucked-up her skirt.
Tadeusz, though quiet, was next to stand.
An evening stroll, just after their dessert,
appealed to the Judge. “All to the forest
for mushrooms,” he announced. “Whoever can find
the most beautiful, next to the fairest
lady shall sit--he shall the chooser.
And if a lady brings back the rarest,
the handsomest she'll pick--just to amuse her.”

BOOK 3

FLIRTATION

The Count's Excursion into the Garden - a Mysterious Nymph Feeding Geese - Mushroom Gatherers and the Elysian Fields – Mushrooms - Telimena in her Temple of Meditation - Tadeusz's Settlement - The Count as Landscape Painter - Tadeusz's Observations on Trees and Clouds - The Bell / A Love Note - A Bear, Milord!

The Count was late. He tried to keep his gaze out of the orchard, but a strange white dress swept quickly by. Then its floating gauze, seeming to pause above, caused him to reassess. Something hovered in the mist, as if to catch and trap the light inside the cucumber patch.

The Count dismounted, dismissed his servants, and alone, secretly approached the garden, squeezing through an opening in the fence, like a wolf into a sheepfold. But when his movement rustled a gooseberry bush, the gardener grew scared and looked around, spotting nothing. Still, the disturbed hush upset her, and she rushed across the ground. The Count followed her path along the edge, running between great sorrel plants, around burdock leaves, parting them from the hedge.

Scattered throughout the orchard were cherry trees, and among them a strange mixture of grains—wheat, maize, beans, bearded barley, millet, and peas, even a few bushes and flowering strains. For this was the housekeeper's invention for the fowl, a type of poultry garden, unique in its day, its application limited to a select few, who would pardon its novelty—though lately the almanac endorsed it under the title: The Problem of Hawks and Kites, or How to Fight Back and Raise Poultry. Here in this small garden!

As soon as the cock guarding the poultry
stood motionless, head upturned, red comb inclined,
aiming its eye to spot more easily
a hawk suspended in clouds and hard to find,
there'd be a shrieking crow to warn the hens,
who'd rush into the garden helter-skelter.
Even the geese, peacocks, and fear-struck pigeons
hid in the grain, unable to reach shelter,
now that their enemy could not be seen.
The scorching sun would pose the only threat,
and birds took refuge in the dense green
of groves or bathed in sand to stave off heat.

Among the birds' heads, tiny human faces
protruded, hair short and white as flax,
necks naked to the shoulders—in the spaces
between, a girl, longhaired, taller. At their backs
sat a peacock with its encircling tail-
feathers spread in the sky like a rainbow.
On it the tiny faces looked like pale
translucent stars that in the background glow
in certain old paintings, each one surrounded
by a halo from the eyes in the peacock's
tail. This spectacular vision was grounded
in golden stalks of maize and silvery shocks
of English grass with streaks of red and green
mallow, all mingled together like fine
latticework. In the breeze the entire scene
shimmered like a veil of heavenly design.

Like a canopy stretched above the mass
of colorful ears and stalks, a bright cloud
of butterflies hovered, wings clear as glass
and sectioned like cobwebs, forming a shroud
scarcely visible to one who'd pass.

The girl held high and waved gray tassels
(like a bunch of ostrich plumes) seeming to whisk
away those gold butterflies from the little
children's heads. She also held within her fist
something like a horn, gilded—a special
dish for feeding toddlers. Almost twenty
little ones sat, as she fed them in a circle,
as from some mythical horn of plenty.

She held this cornucopia to each mouth in turn,

and gazed around, mindful of the rustling
gooseberry bush. But she did not learn
quickly enough that her assailant was crawling
like a serpent, in from the other side,
until he sprung out of the burdock.
She watched as he emerged close by, and cried
out while he gave a bow. Almost in shock,
she flew off like a startled lark. Meanwhile,
the children, frightened by the intruder
and her sudden flight, let out a horrible wail.

Hearing it the girl realized her error,
abandoning the terrified children,
afraid herself, reluctant to return—
like an unwilling spirit to the incantation
of a sorcerer. At first she seemed quite stern,
though soon she was soothing the most hysterical
child, sitting him in her lap and stroking
his hand, whispering her own magical
phrases until he calmed. Soon all were hugging
her knees, nestling their little heads like chicks
under their mother's wing. "It isn't nice
to shriek like that. It's not polite. Your tricks
might scare the gentleman. I've told you twice
already, he is not some horrid beggar
who wants to frighten you. He is our guest,
a real gentleman, even a hunter.
See how nice and handsomely he's dressed."

The Count could only smile his reply,
bathing in her praise. She quickly hushed
herself and the children; dropping her eye
and blooming like a rose, she fully blushed.

The Count, in fact, did cut a handsome figure.
He had an oval face—quite fair yet fresh
as a berry, bright eyes and hair blonder
than the children's. In it bits of leaves meshed
with tufts of grass, torn as he slithered
into the garden, forming a wreath, though slightly withered.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "whatever shall I call you—
deity or nymph, spirit or vision?
Tell me, is it your own will that drew
you here, or has some power tried to imprison
you? Some rejected lover? Some powerful

Lord, jealous enough to lock you away
in this castle garden? Such a wonderful
maiden is worthy of some knight's jousting play,
the heroine of some tragic romance.
Reveal to me the secret of your fate;
I am your savior, I will raise my lance
at your command, my heart is yours to dictate."

She still blushed, basking in his flowing words,
like a child in front of a brightly colored picture book,
or even something like an abacus--that might accord
great pleasure to a one who otherwise took
no interest in its true value or use.
She bathed in the Count's melodious discourse,
the contents of which might only confuse,
and then she asked about his curious course.

The Count opened his eyes, and right away
lowered his tone. "I apologize,
young lady, I see that I have spoiled your play.
I was just now rushing home, when I realize
I will be late for breakfast if I stay.
Of course, unless I take this shortcut through
this garden, since it's faster."

"But if you
seek the road, it is right here. Only
is it really necessary to trample down
the plants?"

"Where?" asked the Count, "I fail to see."
The girl seemed to scrutinize with a frown,
because the manor house was barely a thousand
paces away, in plain sight. But the Count
extemporized—to keep things from coming to an end:
"Do you live here," he asked, "among the plants,
or in the village? However did I miss you
in the courtyard? Are you new? A visitor
perhaps?" But when her head began to shake anew—
"I'm sorry that I have upset you more."

He struggled with this thought: if not a heroine
of some romance, she's still pretty and young.
And often a great soul can live hidden
in isolation, like a rose among
trees, and it's enough to place it in the sun
for it to bloom in dazzling colors that stun.

The little gardener rose silently,
lifting one child, with another hanging
on her arm—the rest intently
herding—like geese through the garden, wading.

Turning back, she said, “Please help me gather
my birds back to the grain.” And in amazement,
the Count shouted, “Me—herd geese—I’d rather
not if you please!” So quickly off she went
into the shade of some great leafy trees.
Suddenly he felt his blood pressure rise,
Glimpsing the lambent glow of her blue eyes.

The Count lingered in the garden, alone,
his soul cooling like the earth at sunset,
and gradually, taking on a darker tone.
He fell asleep and when he tried to get
up and leave, he felt a swelling anger
that all his expectations had met with such
disappointment. For when he’d crawled under
the hedge, his head was burning, so much
had he expected from her secret charms.
But now, what had he found? A pretty face,
a slender waist, and youth—common stuff on farms
surrounding the manor. Yes, a common case,
adorned with an overabundance of joy—
an awakened heart at ignorant peace,
a village girl’s quips, fit for a village boy.
In short, his nymph was simply feeding geese!

Enchantment vanished as the girl left,
transforming gold and silver latticework,
sadly, back to straw. The Count, bereft,
clasped his hands and sighed at this cruel quirk
of fate, and knelt to reach a straw-sheaf bound
in grass, no longer plumes from an ostrich!
Likewise, the gilded vessel passed around
from child to child, the cornucopia, which
nourished them, was just a common carrot
in the mouth of a little boy, who bit
the tip greedily, unwilling to share it.

So, like a boy enticed by dandelions,
who rolls the stems inside his palms to squeeze
the soft light down—the slightest respirations
scatter the whole flower, like dust in a breeze—

his explorations come abruptly to a halt,
leaving him a naked, gray-green stalk.
The Count came to and headed to the road,
cutting through the vegetables and flowers
and gooseberry bushes. He strode,
recalling that the girl had spoken hours
ago of breakfast, and so he shuddered
to think that their meeting was being discussed.
What arch and mocking words were being uttered?
Would they begin to search for him? They must
surmise he'd fled—but it occurred to him just then
he'd really better leave. So he vaulted the fence,
and finally felt relief only when
he reached the well-worn path. With intense
glances back into the orchard, he hurried
like a thief from a granary, fearful
of leaving tracks, obsessively worried--
though no one followed--and still quite careful.

Beyond the orchard he noticed a grove
scattered with scrubby bushes and a layer
of turf, from which thin white birches rose,
their leafy branches bent as if in prayer.
He spied a multitude of forms dancing about
in strange costumes, like ancient spirits forlorn,
trolling beneath the moon. Some were decked-out
in flowing robes or snow-white gowns well-worn.
Others were all in black, with broad hoop-like caps.
Some heads were bare, but some appeared wrapped
in mist, as though the clouds themselves were traps.
Each figure would assume a pose in rapt
attention, joining hands to the smooth ground,
shifting only its glowing eyes, then gazing
straight ahead, dream-walking without a sound,
as if treading a tightrope—an amazing
vision, undeviating from the line,
only its arms reached down on either side,
as if regaining balance, or to design
some secret tapping language, new and untried.

If one approached another, it did not greet
or talk, so deeply were both plunged
in mime—no recognition, however discreet.
to each; each other figure was expunged
by separateness. And so the Count was sure
he'd been transported to the Elysian Field

where he observed wandering shades, pure
and cleansed, no longer full of woe, yield
their sins, their coming fate not yet revealed.

How could the Count have guessed that these silent
creeping people were the Judge's guests?
That after sumptuous breakfast they all went
to gather mushrooms—one of the ritual quests
still done in Lithuania. They were all
respectable people who knew just how
to moderate speech and movement; they could recall
the stringent rules of etiquette, so now
they trailed the Judge, and likewise dressed
in his attire, donning canvas capes
to ward off the forest damp, and had expressed
delight when large straw hats of various shapes
were passed around. Thus it was no surprise
that they appeared like spirits from Purgatory,
since all but Telimena wore this disguise.

The Count, confused by this ritual foray,
dashed off, convinced that it was wrong to stay.

While boys picked the infamous *fox-maiden*—
sung about by Lithuanian grooms,
symbols of maidenhood, for worms will not slip in,
and insects will not land upon them.
And girls picked the slender *Pinelover*, which the tale
refers to as the *Mushroom Colonel*, as well as the stem
of the *Orange Agaric*, which is not as tall
and less praised, yet sought by everyone
for its fine taste, fresh or salt-cured in fall
or winter. The Seneschal on his own
searched for toadstools, called, what else, but *Fly-bane*.

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Other common mushrooms—ignored or despised
for their poison or unsavory taste—
were eaten by wild game or else supplied
shelter to insects; or, since there's no waste
in the forest, simply adorned the grove,
like table settings laid-out on some fine
linen: the *Leaf Mushroom*, red, gold and mauve,
like goblets filled with different colored wine;
the *Kozlak*, bulging like an upturned cup;
Funnels, slender as a champagne goblet;
Whities, round and flat like china all filled up

with milk; or *Puffballs*, with black dust set inside them, like pepper in a canister. There were others whose names were only known to hares' or wolves' tongues or unbaptized master of sorcery. There were even some grown which no wolf or rabbit would deign to touch. And thus, whoever bent to pick one quickly perceived his own mistake, and with much irritation, broke the stem and angrily crushed or uprooted it—with no reward.

Telimena chose, unlike the wolf or man, to gaze upward, distracted or else bored. The angry Notary remarked, "How can she think that mushrooms, like leaves, grow downward from trees?" Then the Sheriff added in jest, "Just like a female who's desperate to nest."

But Telimena searched for solitude, withdrawing bit by bit from all her friends—to woods and to a hillock she had viewed earlier, sloping and shaded by dense stands of trees, arranged around a massive rock. A spring was gushing beneath it, which vanished into weeds and fern, as from the shock of daylight, seeking refuge in plants nourished by it. And there, the frolicking stream, swaddled in grass and leaf bedding, still and noiseless, hidden and inaudible, seemed like a cradled infant, wailing minutes before, full of bliss—as its mother fastens the lace above the crib and sprinkles poppy leaves upon its head. This spot was Telimena's love, what she called her *Temple of Meditation* .

Having stood a while above the spring, wrapped in a shawl, red as carnelian, she crouched like a swimmer before plunging into cold water, reluctant to venture in. Then, dipping her toe hesitantly, she flopped on the grass and stretched her whole body, forehead propped on hands, while the glittery velum of a French novel sparkled brightly above the alabaster pages of the book, over which black ringlets and pink ribbons shook.

Amid the emerald grasses, she was lying
upon a red shawl, wearing her long gown,
as though wrapped in coral, her hair flowing
out from one end, black slippers—the crown
of the other, affixed on snow-white stockings.
And with her glowing cheeks and bright kerchief,
and hands protruding, she looked like a shocking
giant caterpillar, crawling along a maple leaf.

A shame that his epitome of grace
vainly waits an aesthete's trained gaze—
so intently does the party race
about for mushrooms. Only Tadeusz pays
attention; he alone takes notice
of something off to the side, not bold enough
to leave the group, but dropping back, to dismiss
himself from it. So like a hunter in some rough
camouflaged contraption, stalking curlews,
or sneaking up to catch a sandpiper,
hiding behind his horse in attempt to confuse
the bird—his rifle like that of a sniper
leveled on the saddle or the horse's neck,
he creeps along approaching the hillock.

Too bad his plans are foiled by the Judge,
who cuts him off and hurries to the mounds,
the white tails of his overcoat so huge
and fluttering, a knotted kerchief binds
the rest. A straw hat tied beneath his chin
sways in the breeze like a great burdock leaf,
falling off into his eyes, and in
his hand he holds a monstrous shepherd's staff.
He stoops to wash his hands beneath a spring,
then sits by Telimena on a boulder.
With both hands on the ivory knob, leaning,
he speaks to her like someone who is older.

“Since the guests arrived, my dear sister,
my nephew's caused me much anxiety.
I'm old and childless, so in the matter
there is some consolation; besides, he
surely will inherit what I own.
It's no small morsel of our noble bread
I've set aside, and now he must be shown
how to secure his fate. But still, I dread
all this business about Jacek, my brother,

Tadeusz's father—such a strange man,
his motives too mysterious to uncover.
He vows he won't return to his homeland.
God knows his hiding place—he won't allow
his son to know he lives, and yet he still
wants to control his life. First to follow
the Legions—I was afraid he wished to kill
the boy. Later he agreed and ordered
marriage, even arranging for the match.
She is a guest of ours, one quite preferred
by all young men, unequaled...and quite a catch,
as they say—both beauty and connection.
Quite a dowry too! Who wouldn't plead
for the hand of one whose reputation
is without blemish—and that is guaranteed!
So now negotiations shall proceed.”

“My God!” Telimena quickly replied,
“Nonsense! Do you have stones inside your heart?
However will Tadeusz be the pride
of nobles—sowing buckwheat in this dirt?
How could you strand him here? Believe me,
he's sure to curse having his vast talents
buried in these woods and furrows. Trust me,
I recognize wit and intelligence;
I know what he can do out in the world.
Just pack him off to some great capital,
Warsaw, perhaps, or if the truth be told,
Petersburg. You know this winter I shall go;
Leave it to me to make arrangements.
I know so many people living there,
I have influence, so he'll gain entrance
into the finest homes, and thus will share
rich conversation with important Russians,
perhaps position, too. Much later
he can renounce his post and choose to shun
society, if he so wishes, dear brother.
Just let him come back with a title.”

“Of course,” the Judge replied, “Youthful fire
is quenched by different air. To fully sample
the world, embrace it and perhaps acquire
finish—this has merit. I too did travel
in my youth—Piotrkow, Dubno—even went
to Warsaw to practice law, to handle
cases there. Yes, when a youth is sent

into the world he is likely to prosper;
but when it comes to my nephew's case,
I'd rather he go like a wanderer,
like some apprentice who must learn to face
each situation—without hope of decoration
or rank. Moreover, if it came from Moscow,
it would be such a meaningless distinction.
Do you think our nobles care? For how
could they avoid despising such trifles?
They are esteemed by others for their name,
high birth, office—conferred not by rifles
or foreign authorities. No, their fame
depends upon their fellow citizens.”

Telimena paused and dropped her book.
“If that is what you think, then by all means,
go let him wander with a beggar's crook.”

“Something I wouldn't mind,” the Judge replied,
scratching his head, “but now new difficulties
are sure to come, now that my brother will decide
Tadeusz's fate. Today new decrees
come through Father Robak the Bernardine,
who ferried them across the Vistula.
He knows my brother's thoughts and his design,
so you should know that your dear ward, Zosia
is destined to marry Tadeusz. My fortune
will go to them, as well as huge sums
from Jacek—no small amount, his portion
earned in business deals. Since my wealth comes
from him, he is able to control me.
Consider what will cause the least trouble—
they must be introduced. It is true that she
is still quite young, but both are capable
of falling in love. It's clearly time to free
Zosia; let her come out of seclusion.
Please, we should be working in collusion.”

Telimena was in shock and panic.
She rose abruptly, kneeling on her shawl.
Her arms began to lash the air with quick
jabs signifying denial and then gall,
as though attempting to repel discourse,
like a buzzing gnat, back, back to its source.

“Ahah!” she blurted out. “A new notion, whether or not Tadeusz will be harmed. He is not my concern; if your devotion turns him into a steward to this farmed estate—what do I care? Let him serve drink in some tavern, or track down wild game. As for Zosia, how could you even think to speak for her, who’s mine in all but name? Alone, I guide her hand; and since your brother provided money for her upbringing, an allowance, though to my mind, rather meager—he thinks that he’s been purchasing her life. Of course, we all know that he’s merely trying to relieve the guilt that he must feel toward the Horeszko lineage.” The Judge barely believed his ears, shocked that she might reveal this news. Sadness, disgust, and even fear he felt, at what he thought he might next hear.

“I’m her foster-mother,” Telimena concluded, “I’m Zosia’s blood, her only guardian. About her happiness, no one has brooded more.”

“But what if this marriage decision will ensure that?” asked the Judge. “What if she likes Tadeusz?”

“You might as well promise pears from a willow tree! I’m sure you’ll see she won’t. It’s true, Zosia must compromise somewhat, for she is not so richly dowered; but she is not some peasant girl either. She has noble ancestors, some who once towered over the likes of Soplicas—her mother was a Horeszko. After all the pain I took, providing proper upbringing... she’d grow up wild here—what would we gain?”

Surprisingly, the Judge seemed to reconcile, responding pleasantly, “Oh well, I dread participating in this vile business, but please, don’t let your anger swell. I’ve done the thing my brother commanded; no one can compel you against your will. I’ll write to tell Jacek what he demanded could not be carried out, that the fault still is not my own. Now, to discuss again

with the Seneschel—my original plan.”

Telimena, calm, had lost her zeal;
“It’s not that Zosia should refuse him,
but as you said, their age creates a real
problem. Let’s not give in to someone’s whim.
Let them meet and then we shall observe,
leaving nothing as precious as happiness
to chance. And yet, brother, don’t they deserve
to meet alone, not under the duress
of your machinations. “The heart’s not a slave
and can’t be manacled or forced to behave.”

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And as the Judge went off in much less gloom,
Tadeusz from the other side approached,
pretending to be lured by some mushroom.
Likewise, the Count upon this scene encroached.

Wiping his lorgnette with a kerchief,
he stared once more at this miraculous view,
and placed his undone sketch within a sheaf,
thinking to himself—“I fear the true
beauty will disappear if I approach.
Will velvet quickly transform back to poppies
and beets? Will this nymph on grassy couch
turn into some housekeeper shelling peas?”

Years ago the Count had often seen
Telimena visiting the Judge’s home.
But he had barely noticed her, until this scene
appeared, and all at once, the model’s aplomb—
her bearing and her charming mode of dress—
revealed intensity. Her eyes now glowed
with unextinguished ardor; he could guess
how beautiful she truly was, so proud
yet shy—after these sudden intrusions
added to the quarrel new confusions.

“Madam,” he said, please pardon my boldness
and this expression of my gratitude,
and, moreover, my tact and furtiveness.
I hope when I observed your solitude
you didn’t take offence; you know that your musing
is such a source of blissful inspiration.
Condemn me if you must, but be forgiving
of the artist, who, without trepidation,

will dare to capture such beauty.” With part bravado and part humility, he shared his art.

Telimena took the sketch, regarding it with a connoisseur’s discerning gaze. She didn’t wish to be accused of larding it with lavish, undeserved praise. “Bravo,” she said, “This shows you have talent. But talent must be nurtured; you must find the proper landscape. Young painters must be sent to Italy—such views flock to my mind: Caesar’s rose gardens, Tiberian falls, the terrifying cliffs of Posilipo! A painter’s land—you can see how it galls me when a child of the muses must go to Soplica’s estate as to a wet nurse.” She placed the Count’s new sketch inside her purse.

Then they began to talk of azure skies, the roaring sea, fragrant breeze, and sand, adding, like seasoned travelers, deep sighs for distant views, mocking their native land. And yet, magnificent forests surrounded them with beauty—blackberries entwined in wreaths of wild hops, rowan berries red as confounded shepherdesses, hazelnut trees like sheathed maenads with nuts and heavy clusters of grapes. While beneath them hid the forest’s little children, hawthorn, covered by guelder roses’ capes, raspberries in the grip of a blackberry fen, leaves all joining hands like village girls dancing around a newly married pair, towering above as the circle twirls. It is none other than the birch so fair, with its own betrothed, the horn beam. Farther off, in silent gaze, the venerable beeches, matronly poplars—and the father oak, bearded with moss, imperturbable, having endured for centuries. Hunchbacked, it leans on the very pillars, sepulchral, of its own ancestors, petrified and cracked.

Bored, Tadeusz soon began to squirm. He’d held his tongue until these two began to praise some foreign trees, moving in turn from orange, cypress, olive, almond, pecan,

to cactus, aloe and mahogany,
sandalwood, lemon, ivy, walnut, fig—
praising shape, flower, stem, all lavishly.
Tadeusz was simple, though not some prig
but a lover of nature. “In Vilno,
in botanical gardens I have seen
those vaunted trees from East and South, and so
I am not ignorant. But if you’ve ever been
in Lithuanian woods, of course you know
how poorly they compare: aloes, long and thin
like a conductor’s baton; lemon trees, so low
and dwarfed, with golden balls that are like tin
coated with lacquer--they remind me
of unattractive women of modest wealth.
And what about the cypress, said to be
symbol of grief—boredom and poor health.
They say it holds the sorrow of the dead—
I see instead some morbid German, afraid to sit
or laugh or gesture, even turn his head
for fear of breaking codes of etiquette.”

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“But think of our sublime, kind-hearted birch—
a peasant woman weeping for her child,
wringing her hands after a useless search,
braids streaming to the ground. She is not wild
with grief, but eloquent, despairing yet mild.”

“If the Count is so very fond of painting,
why not paint the trees he so disdains?
His neighbors must surely find it amusing,
that living on this lush and fertile plain,
a craggy desert is more to his choosing.”

“My friend,” remarked the Count, “the beauty of nature
is but the form, the ground, the material,
but inspiration’s from the soul, to be sure,
transported on imagination’s ethereal
wings. And polished by taste and then upheld
by principles. Nature’s not sufficient,
nor is enthusiasm; artists must yield
to the ideal. Not all beauty is meant
to be painted. You will learn in time
that all painting requires a point of view,
grouping, composition, sky—the fine
Italian sky! For only that could imbue
with such beauty, the landscapes painted there.

Apart from Breughel, and perhaps Ruysdal, no northern landscape painters that I'd dare call first rate, certainly not Van der Halle."

"Our painter, Orłowski," Telimena
broke in, "shared this same Soplica taste,
what I call *the Malady of Soplica*—
to like only what is Polish and to praise
nothing else. Orłowski spent his career
in Petersburg (I met him there and acquired
several sketches) living in paradise, near
the Tsar's court. Yet unbelievable how fired
up he became when he recalled his homeland.
He'd dwell for hours on his lost boyhood,
praising all that was Polish—every stand
of trees, patch of ground, wisp of straw and cloud."

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"How right he was!" Tadeusz shouted with ardor.
"I've heard about this *grand* Italian sky:
blue and clear, so much like frozen water.
It takes a windy storm to move my eye—
just raise your head to find spectacular views.
Just watch the play of clouds, for every instant
they're different—in fall they seem to choose
to crawl like lazy tortoises. Then, pregnant
with rain, unleashing long streamers like unbound
braids. The hail cloud's like a balloon, sent
aloft in wind, dark blue, a glint of gold found
in the center. Even an ordinary cloud,
so white and inconspicuous--transformed.
At first they fly like swans flocking in crowds
or gaggles of geese—that suddenly are swarmed
by the wind acting like a falcon
in pursuit. They quickly form a single mass
that grows a neck, spreads a mane, and starts to run
on legs shot out—a silver charger to surpass
a horseman's dream. Then, a new twist of fate—
a mast grows from the neck, the broad mane spreads
into sails—the cloud becomes a frigate.
Across the endless blue heavens it heads."

Both Telimena and the Count looked up;
Tadeusz pointed out with his one hand,
using the other to squeeze lightly and cup
around Telimena's fingers—time seemed to stand
quite still. The Count began to spread parchment

right on his hat and gripped pencils to sketch,
when suddenly the clanging manor bell sent
disrupting dins throughout the air, to fetch
the mushroom pickers back for refreshment.

Amid the commotion the Count shook
his head. “It seems we share a common fate
on earth, to end things with some ungodly quake
and clatter—the reckoning of a great
thought, the flight of the imagination,
the joy of friendship, the sport of innocence,
outpourings of some tender emotion. . .
All halts at the clanging bronze bell’s insistence.
And what remains?” he asked, looking forlorn.
“Memories!” Telimena said, quite touched;
and wishing to relieve the Count’s well-worn
despair, she handed him *forget-me-nots* she’d plucked.
The Count kissed them and pinned them to his coat.
Meanwhile, Tadeusz, standing by a hedge,
saw something lily white reach towards his throat.
Sensing it was her hand, offered as pledge,
he held it to his lips and drowned his face
in it, like a bee in the cup of a lily,
only to recoil as his lips could trace,
folded within a note, a metal key.
He hid it in his sleeve, unable to refrain
from wondering what this letter would explain

The bell still rang and soon the forest echoed
with cry and exhortation, a signal
for mushroom pickers to gather up their load.
Though this assaulting din was just the dinner bell,
the Count heard only a funereal knell.

Each afternoon from the garret it tolled,
inviting help and guest to come and eat,
a custom still observed in countless old
manors like this. And soon, shuffling feet
could be heard, returning from the grove
with crate and basket. Each young lady waved
a *pine-lover* like a fan and held above
leaf-mushrooms and *fungi* like wildflowers saved
in a bunch. The Seneschal had his *fly-bane*;
but Telimena, empty-handed, halted,
waiting for the two young gentlemen.

The guests entered in order and then stood
in a circle, allowing the Official
to take his place, as one of his rank should,
advancing to the head of the table,
bowing to the ladies, old and young.
The Judge stood by the Bernardine monk;
a benediction in Latin was sung,
and vodka, served to honored guests, was drunk.
The rest sat down, for it was getting late,
in front of bowls of borscht which they then ate.

More quietly than usual they dined,
refraining from chatter, despite entreaties
from the host. Even the factions behind
the great hound controversy displayed uncertainties
about the outcome of tomorrow's wager.
Telimena spoke continually
to Tadeusz yet often had to offer
words to the Count, for the Sheriff to see—
like a hunter peeking into a snare
where he's lured a goldfinch, at the same time
he's trying to trap a sparrow. Neither cares
that she talks to the other, for that's no crime
and each expects to be the one chosen.
The Count glances proudly at his flower;
Tadeusz fingers stealthily the token,
which his eyes are longing to devour.
The Judge refills the dignitary's tumbler
with Hungarian wine and then Champagne,
but does not talk, remaining even humbler—
it's evident he feels some hidden pain.

Serving dishes were quietly passed around,
when suddenly the routine course of dinner
was interrupted by a crashing sound.
The forester, upset, rushed in the door
and faced the Judge and stood there dumbly panting
as the whole room turned toward the head table.
He unleashed words, "A bear, Milord!" granting
all else to conjecture. The Judge was able
to surmise that a bear had slipped across
the river Nieman and now must be pursued.
With almost no discussion, a consensus
was reached; it was evident from the crude
gestures, clipped commands, tumult, confusion—
that hunters must deter this bear's intrusion.

The Judge issued orders: fetch the village elder—"We need volunteers at daybreak. A peasant with a spear need not engage in road labor two days and also take five days off from field work."

"Saddle my gray," yelled the Official, and gallop to my estate. We need my famous *leaches* to save the day, My bulldogs called *The Chief* and his *Mate*. Better yet, gag and tie them in a sack; bring them on horseback for we must hurry." "Vanka," shouted the Sheriff, searching the pack for his Russian servant, "You'll be sorry if my Sanguszko blade has not been drawn over the whetstone by morning! And fill my belt with cartridges and balls."

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"By dawn!" became the one resounding phrase this chill evening, as all shouted to get their gun ready. The Sheriff repeated, "Lead, lead—I have molds in my bag."

"Now let us run to rouse the sleeping priest out of his bed. To the forest chapel, Mass will be offered to the hunters' patron, Saint Hubert."

Silence followed the orders. Each in place pondered his role and cast about searching glances. It was to the Seneschal's face that they were drawn, unanimously revealing the expedition's need for a general—they wished to hand to him the hunter's staff. Sensing the will of his comrades, the Seneschal rose up striking the bench, drawing from his cuff a chain from which a watch, big as a pear was suspended. "Tomorrow—half-past four, hunters as well as beaters will appear at the forest chapel." Preparing war, he headed straight for the forester's tent to map out a strategy for the hunt.

Responding to commands for this battle, soldiers dispersed throughout the large campground; each cleaned his weapon, polished his saddle, carefree, whistling, knowing sleep would be sound.

BOOK 4

DIPLOMACY AND THE CHASE

An apparition in curling papers awakens Tadeusz – belated discovery of a mistake – the tavern – emissary – the skillful use of a snuffbox returns the discussion to proper channels – the backwood – a bear – the Count and Tadeusz in peril – three shots – a dispute over a Sagalos musket and a Sanguzko musket, favored in favor of the Horeszko single-barrel – bigos – the Seneschal’s tale of Dowejko’s and Domejko’s duel interrupted by a hare – conclusion of the tale of Dowejko and Domejko

Comrades of the Lithuanian Princes,
trees of Bialowieza, Switez, Ponary,
and Kuszelewo—over vast distances
your shade once fell. Can you recall the story
of dread Vitenas, Mindova the Great
and Giedymin—when in the forested heights, 43

by campfire on bearskin he lay in wait?
Wise Lizdejko sang, and with the sighs
of Vilia, and Velijka’s soothing tones
ringing in his ears, he rocked himself to sleep,
dreaming an iron wolf above the stones.
The Gods ordained this prophecy to keep—
to build alone the city of Vilno,
to sit like a wolf in its forest home
with bison, bear, and wild boar below.
From this city, as from the wolf of Rome,
legendary knights would ride off in pursuit
of wild game and enemies to rout.
Over the years Kiejstut, Olgierd and his son 44
would soon fulfill the hunter’s prophecy:
that Lithuania would depend upon
iron and forests for its supremacy.

Forests! The last king who wore Vitold’s cap 45
was also the last of the Jagiellonian
hunting monarchs, the last warrior to trap
game in your mighty depths. Oh, Lithuanian
trees—if God would grant one last look,
would I still find the great Baublis tree, 46

where I once crawled, whose branches I once shook.
Its trunk hollowed by each century
could host the Last Supper. Will it remain?
Does Mendog's grove still bloom nearby the church? 47
And Holowinski's manor in the Ukraine,
on the banks of the Rus—do hawks still perch
in the towering linden, branches so spread
a hundred couples could dance in its shade?

Each year so many of these monuments
fall prey to the devouring greedy axe
of businessmen and foreign governments.
What will remain after these cruel attacks
as refuge for the singing birds and bards—
for both loved them. And what will be the fate
of the huge Czarnolas linden, whose chords
inspired Jan Kochanowski, the great 48
poet,? Or sacred oaks that seem to chatter
with Cossack Bards of miraculous matter?

How much I owe these trees of my homeland!
Wretched shot that I was, facing the sneers
of my comrades, when game evaded my hand—
how often some dense thicket would appear
to capture my fancy. Forget the chase—
just sit amid a clump of trees, surrounded
by silvery, gray-bearded moss to ease
my melancholy. The ground drenched with mounded
rotting blueberries, while the hills were reddened
from all the heather and cowberry leaves,
like coral rosaries. And all seemed deadened,
as the topmost branches barely heaved
in the storm that raged above the vault.
And yet, from high, I heard deafening crashes
like those heard on shore which the sea lashes.

On the forest floor, like ancient ruins,
a toppled oak protrudes from a great clearing.
Rotting logs, leaning like beams and columns,
fence in a grassy terrace, menacing,
because the lords of the forest dwell
inside—boar, bears, wolves, and by the gate,
half-gnawed bones of imprudent guests tell
the terrifying tales: for lying in wait,
they spot, through the grass, like tiny sprays
of water, antlers of a helpless stag.

There is a flicker from inside the maze,
a streak of light, and then a howling rage.

Then all is silent—until a woodpecker
raps on a spruce lightly and disappears;
hidden, its beak still taps like a drummer
or a playful child unseen, whose fears
give it away. A squirrel clasps a nut,
gnawing; its tail curls over its eye and falls
like the plume on a Swiss Guard's helmet.
Although shielded, it heeds some unknown calls,
and pirouettes, leaping into a jump,
only to vanish in an empty stump.

Then the branches of an ash are shaken,
and as a cluster of rowanberries
separate, while a handful is taken—
a face as bright as those berries scurries
to the next tree, to find more hidden treasures.
And from a basket woven out of bark,
she offers a boy what she picks and measures.
He takes and eats while reaching into the dark
thicket, for hazelnuts, which find their mark.

But horns blare through the woods and hounds are baying,
and they sense that the hunt is drawing near;
fear has disrupted their innocent playing,
and like forest deities, they disappear.

A great commotion filled Soplica estate,
but barking dog, neighing charger, creaking cart,
even trumpeters' fanfare from the gate,
could not drag Tadeusz from bed to take part.
Fully dressed, he had fallen to the mattress
and slept snug as a marmot in its den.
Since none thought to search for him—having to press
on to appointed place—he was forgotten.

He was snoring. Into a heart-shaped hole
cut in the shutter, a ray of light poured,
striking his forehead like a fiery pole.
Wishing to doze longer, he had turned toward
the wall, to shield out rays. Then a sharp knock
woke him, and joyous was his awakening!
Spry as a sparrow, the brisk air a shock
to his lungs, he sighed, heart rapidly beating.

After all the events of the day before,
anxious for this new day to bring him more.

He looked at the gleaming, heart-shaped opening,
where two bright eyes glittered, having turned away
from the sun to darkness; and protecting
those eyes, a tiny hand, red in the gray
of shade, looking like a ruby-colored fan.
Tadeusz saw lips slightly parted, and teeth
like pearls amid coral. Her cheeks were not wan—
though shielded, they flushed like a rose in a wreath.

Tadeusz lay beneath the window, hidden
in shadow, marveling at this apparition
hovering above, fearful, as though chidden:
was he awake? Had his imagination
recreated a face from his innocent
years? And as it leaned closer, terror struck
him, mixed with joy. In his astonishment
he recalled bright golden hair, papers that stuck
out from wrapped curls like silver spokes upon
the glitter-crown of a holy icon.

He jumped from bed, frightened by the din;
the vision dispersed and would not reappear.
Then three quick knocks—and a few words passed in:
“Please get up now, the hunters gather near
the gate, you must’ve overslept.” He sprung
to the window and shoved open the shutter.
Hinges snapped; so wildly were they flung,
they struck the walls. Tadeusz could not utter
a sound. He saw no one, not even a trace.
Nearby on the orchard fence, some hop-leaves
and a wreath of flowers swayed. Did she grace
them with her touch? Were they rustled by the breeze?
Tadeusz studied them, leaning on the fence,
not bold enough to enter the orchard.
He pressed a finger to his lips in silence,
so that some hasty remark might not ward
off her appearance. Finally he struck
his forehead, trying to stir the old memory
buried deep within. When he had no luck,
he began to bite his fingers bloody.

The yard, so full of shouts moments before,
was deserted now, and hushed like graveyard.

Everyone rushed to the fields; the wind bore their sharp cries, and signals that trumpets blared reached his ear, hand cupped to better hear.

Tadeusz's horse, already saddled, was waiting. Musket in hand he mounted and galloped wildly to the Taverns, where the assembling hunters, after Mass, were lining up. Both of these taverns leaned over the road, their windows facing like threatening enemies. To the castle estate the old one owed its existence; whereas the new, to decrees by Soplica, who only wished to spite his rival. In one Gervazy's word was might; In the other, Protazy's always right.

The new tavern would not interest our craftsmen; the old was built according to ancient plans, devised first by Tyrolean draftsmen, later appropriated by Jews who went along with this foreign style of architecture, which to this day in Lithuania endures.

The front of this tavern recalled an ark like Noah's, though now more like a stable, where many animals lived in the dark quarters: horses, cows, and some excitable goats. In the rafters birds had built their nests, along with snakes, in pairs, and insects.

The back, however, was like a temple, recalling the edifice of Solomon, known to be the earliest example of Hiram's craft and artistry in Zion.

The Jews adopted it for their own schools and this design, in turn, can then be traced to taverns and stables—even the tools and the materials. And it was graced by a roof of wood-lath and straw, upturned and crooked as an old Jew's torn peaked cap. Down from that peak a balcony was formed, supported by columns, flared at the top—architectural wonders, for though they rot and lean like Pisa's tower of renown, instead of classical models, they lack capitals and foundations to hold them down.

Under these columns rested wooden arches,
imitations of the Gothic style,
ornately carved, but more like peasant porches
incised by a hatchet and not a chisel
or an engraving tool. They curved like Sabbath
candalabra—and button-shaped balls hung
for praying Jews to wrap and then attach
to their foreheads—these they call *Tefillin*.
From a distance the rickety old inn
looked like a Jew nodding his head in prayer:
the roof like his hat, the thatch filled-in
like a thick beard, from sooty air
like gabardine, and the wooden carving
like a prayer box from his forehead protruding.

Peasant men and women crowded inside,
and close by sat the minor nobility;
the Steward sat alone, off to the side.
From chapel, after Mass, they happily
gathered in Jankiel's inn to dance and drink:
already grayish vodka was splashing
as the hostess filled cups up to the brink
from a large jug. Jankiel himself was standing
in his caftan, girded by a silk belt,
embroidered, fastened with a silver clip.
He was gravely stroking his long gray pelt
of beard, and casting his eyes like a ship
captain, issuing orders, greeting guests,
joining the talk and reconciling quarrels.
He paced about, honoring all requests,
this Jew, so old and known for his morals.
For many years this tavern he had leased,
and his landlord had never heard complaint.
So why did all now seem to be displeased?
he served good vodka, kept careful account
of the ledger, always above deceit.
He urged all merriment and yet forbade
drunkenness, welcomed all manner of fete—
weddings and christenings he often paid.
Sundays he summoned musicians to appear,
to scrape their basses to the bagpipe's blare.

Jankiel himself was a famous musician.
He played the *cymbalom*, the instrument
of his nation in court and royal mansion,
where he sang with sweet and polished intent.

A Jew whose Polish was both clear and pure,
 he also had a love of Polish music,
 learned on journeys to places near and far
 beyond the Nieman: from Carpathian Halicz
 he brought *kolomajkas*, and from Mazovia 49
 he knew *mazurkas*. But his true fame 50
 (at least some claim here in Lithuania)
 stems from that glorious day when he first came
 bearing the song he learned in Italy—
 played by trumpeters of the Polish legion—
 the well-known *March of Dombrowski*, 51
 “Poland has not yet perished...” In this region
 of Lithuania, a singing talent
 is well loved and well-rewarded; it can bring
 riches and fame. And thus, Jankiel, content
 with his fortune, tired of wandering,
 hung his sweet-stringed *cymbalom* on a peg, 52
 and settled down to family, inn, and wife.
 But there is more: often neighbors would beg
 advice on matters of domestic life.
 He served as Rabbi in a nearby town;
 he knew the river-barge business and grain,
 once so important to sustain the crown:
 that he was a good Pole, all would maintain. 53

Jankiel was quick to reconcile all quarrels,
 often bloody, between establishments,
 since he leased both of them. And those in brawls
 both sides respected him--the adherents
 of Horeszko as well as Sopllica’s men.
 Jankiel alone could gain the upper hand
 over Horeszko’s terrible Warden
 and the spiteful Steward. When he’d stand
 in front of them, old grudges were dismissed—
 Protazy’s tongue stifled, Gervazy’s fist.

Gervzy didn’t occupy his roost;
 he’d rushed out to the hunt, having the sense
 to know the Count’s lack of experience and youth—
 to offer his advice and his defense.

But on his bench, far from the entrance way,
the seat of honor, far back in the corner,
 Father Robak had been seated all day.
 Jankiel had led him there, with the order
 to make sure that his cup was filled with mead.

It was clear from this treatment, he respected
his guest. They were acquainted—it was agreed—
from years ago. And Robak was expected
to frequent this tavern at night, to confer
with Jankiel, though rumors about a thief,
smuggling forbidden goods were pure slander,
mere idle talk, unworthy of belief.

The priest leaned on the table discoursing
in whispers to a throng of noblemen
encircling him, his hushed voice forcing
them to listen so carefully, that when
he bent toward his snuffbox, their noses followed.
Pinching, they sneezed, like guns discharging a load.

“Father,” announced Skoluba, sneezing,
“such princely snuff; it makes my scalp tingle.
Since I’ve had *this*,” he said, squeezing
his nose, “never did my nostrils mingle
with such fine powder. Surely from Kovno
it came, renowned for all its snuff and mead.”
The priest interrupted, “Tobacco
such as this is quite difficult to breed,
and must be transported a bit further
than Skoluba believes. The monastery
at Jasna Gora of the Pauline Fathers
is where it grew, prepared by the very
monks who maintain the Czestochowa Shrine,
home of the miraculous charred icon,
the Virgin whose bright crown will always shine
over Poland, and watch over her son,
Lithuania, although a schism now
divides them. “From that very shrine,” said Wilbik,
I prayed there once, it was so long ago,
a pilgrimage. Tell me if what they speak
about the French army—that they intend
to smash the church and loot the treasury,
for such did our newspaper once contend.”
“Oh no!” the monk broke in. “That is unworthy
gossip; Napoleon is an exemplary
Catholic, anointed by the Pope in Rome.
Together they can live in harmony
reconverting the French nation, now grown
a bit corrupt. They already return
much silver to our Polish treasury,
for God commands us not to scorn

the wealth at his altar. In the Duchy
of Warsaw, one hundred thousand soldiers
are gathered now, more to arrive.
And to pay for this army, to what coffers
should we tap? You Lithuanians give
so meagerly.”

“If only Moscow
didn’t milk us dry,” Wilbik said,
turning red. “But sirs,” a peasant spoke low,
bowing to the priest, scratching his head,
“Compared to them our landlords aren’t half
as bad—but still they skin us like birch bark.”
Skoluba shouted back, “You stupid calf.
These sons of Ham—ever since the ark 55
they’ve been flayed as often as river eels—
you’d think by now they’d grow accustomed to it.
But we of higher birth know how it feels--
freedom! Even the King has to admit
the poorest gentleman farmer to sit
at his table.”

“Oh yes,” they all chanted,
“Each to a Senator equal!” 56

“Now they submit
us to such scrutiny, demand proof of granted
nobility—and we must dig up documents...”
“Because you have none!” Juraha broke in.
“Your great great grandparents were ennobled peasants;
yet I can trace my lineage from Lithuanian
princes. How could I possibly furnish proof,
since only God could remember the date?
Let the Muscovite search throughout the wood
for the oak tree’s patent, and let him prate
about its right to spread its leaves above.”
“Prince,” said Zagiell, “Go pull another’s beard;
there are no coronets in your alcove,
since a cross on your coat of arms appeared
to signify you come from Jews converted.”
“False!” Birbasz interrupted, full of spite,
“from Tartar Counts, with noble sails inserted
beneath the cross.”

“And my shield bears the white
four-petaled rose,” Mickiewicz loudly told,
“of which Strykowski of old chronicled.” 57

A thunderous roar spread throughout the tavern;
in his snuffbox the Bernardine found refuge.

The orators followed, and each in turn took a pinch and sneezed, as the deluge subsided and courtesy ruled once again. The monk spoke, taking advantage of the lull—
“Many great men have sneezed from this fine snuff. From this very box the famed General Dombrowski dipped four times.”

“Dombrowski!”

they shouted. “Yes, I was in the camp serving when he took back Gdansk from the German army. He had something to write, and to keep from sleeping, he dipped, sneezed twice, and patted my shoulder. Father Robak, he said, perhaps we’ll rendezvous in Lithuania, less than a year older, and dip this same Czestochowa tobacco.”

The Priest’s story stirred up such amazement that the noisy gathering silenced a while, till muffled mutterings broke through the silent hush. “Tobacco in the Polish style... from Czestochowa...Dombrowski...from Italy....” building to a chant as if thought merged with spoken word—on signal everybody sang *Dombrowski’s March*, as voices converged. Then all embraced—peasant and Tartar count, *cross-above-ship, white rose, coronet lacking deed*. All feuding ceased, supplanted by the sound of song and shout—“More vodka, wine, and mead!”

The priest patiently listened to the song; then lifting the snuffbox with both his hands, he sneezed, wishing not to further prolong his silence. All succumbed to his demands and followed suit. “You praise my tobacco,” he said, “now look at what the insides hold.” Wiping the soiled base, he started to show a miniature army painted in gold, looking like a swarm of flies, one figure the size of a beetle, perched on his steed, clearly the troop commander, setting spur to horse, grabbing the reins, trying to lead his men, leaping to heaven. “Can you guess,” he said, “who is this terrible figure? Emperor, yes, but I would not address him in Russian.” All began their conjecture, as he explained the Tsars never took snuff.

“A great man?” asked Cydzik, “in long coat that’s gray?
I thought all great men dress in gold—enough
to shine like a pike in saffron, to slay
the eye.”

“Bah,” broke in Rzymsza, “in my youth
I saw Kosciuszko, our nation’s commander,
dressed in a Cracow peasant coat. In truth
they it a *czamara* like that of the Hussar.”
“It certainly was not,” Wilbik retorted—
as the querulous factions quarreled again.

The priest was quite astute and wished to quell
this new dispute by dipping some more snuff.
The men partook again—after a spell
of sneezing, blessed themselves, dropping their gruff
Tone of before. The priest prolonged the peace—
“Napoleon in a skirmish will take
tobacco to ensure his victories.
At Austerlitz, with all Europe at stake,
the French artillery could stand its ground,
while the Russian army began to charge.
Napoleon silenced and looked around--
French fire mowed down the Moscovite’s new surge,
as numerous as ants, as regiments
galloped toward him—and fell from the saddle.
Each time it was to his snuffbox he went,
till all the Russians fled like frightened cattle,
led by Alexander and Constantine,
along with Francis, the German emperor.
Napoleon, viewing this splendid scene,
burst out laughing and wiped his dipping finger—
if you find that you are called upon to serve,
recall how snuff gave Bonoparte his nerve.”

“Ach,” cried Skoluba, “when will that be?
Tell me, dear priest, for on each holy day,
the coming of the French is a prophecy.
A man can look until his sight decay,
and yet Moscow’s grip still does continue--
eyes that wait till dawn get drenched with dew.”

“My friends,” replied the monk, “I’ve heard complaints
like this from old ladies. And then, too, waiting
with arms folded, submissive in restraint,
for someone to knock at the tavern grating
befits a Jew. With Napoleon’s help,

thrashing the Russians won't be such a trick.
Three times he's taken the Swabian's scalp;
the nasty Prussians were trampled so quick,
and then he sent the English to the sea—
he'd easily vanquish any Moscovite!
But what will happen here? The nobility
in Lithuania are sure to join the fight,
mounting a horse, grabbing for a sabre
when there no longer is an enemy!
You'll let Napoleon perform the labor
without you. When he looks, what will he see?
It's not enough just to invite the guest,
your servants must clean and arrange the den;
and yet, before the feast—there's this request:
make sure the house is fully cleaned, children.”

Silence followed, and then a host of voices.
“What do you mean by this command to clean?
We are prepared to make the proper choices—
but first, explain to us just what you mean.”

The priest ignored them, gazing out the window,
having spotted something interesting.
He soon got up, announcing, “I must go.
Later we shall resume all this debating.
There are some things in Wilno I must say;
I'll be collecting alms along the way.”

“Niehrymov's where the priest should spend the night,”
the Steward said, “He'll be well-greeted there.
What people say about the town is right—
*To be lucky as an alms collector
In Niehrymov.*”

“And we,” said Zubkowski,
“will give him linen sheets, also a hunk
of mutton, bread and butter—for *Happy
is the man who's treated like a monk
at Zubkow.*”

“And to us,” shouted the others,
“No monk will ever leave hungry or poor!”
They showered him with promises and prayers,
though he was almost fully out the door.

The priest rushed off, but spotted Tadeusz
galloping on the path, no hat, head bent,
gloomy—in such a mad and frenzied rush,

he spurred and whipped his horse without relent.
The priest, disturbed by this harrowing sight,
ran after him. Up to the woods he went,
which stretched far to the left and right
to the horizon, which was black as night.

Who has penetrated to the core,
the abyss of this primeval wilderness?
Fishermen know nothing of the ocean floor,
and hunters who circle about see less
than surface features, only the forest's face—
to them the inner heart remains secret,
and only stories hint at what takes place.
If you would wander into this thicket,
you'd find vast ramparts, stumps and logs and roots
defending bogs and fens, a thousand streamlets
with nets of wild weeds and shaggy shoots,
mounded anthills, nests of wasps and hornets,
and coiling snakes. But if you overcame
these barriers with superhuman courage,
greater danger awaits, and no less tame
than hungry wolves setting out to forage.
Sparse grass covers the lakes that are so deep
no human foot will ever touch their bottom,
(thus a likely spot for devils to keep)
waters speckled with bloody rust from
something below, smoking and foul smelling,
which rots the leaves and bark of nearby trees:
stunted and worm-eaten branches entangling
hunched-over stumps, around which beards of ugly
fungus grow. They circle the foul water
like witches around a cauldron steamy—
into which some old corpse they dice and stir.

Beyond these pools it would be vain to wander,
for eyes cannot penetrate through the gases
that hover above the swampy morasses.
It is rumored that if a human passes
beyond these mists, he'd be surprised to find
a beautiful and fertile kingdom
where plants and animals of every kind
gather—a breeding ground, from which all come
proliferating as from Noah's ark.
In the very center, we've been told,
ancient bison continue to hold their dark
courts, along with bears, the most bold

forest ruler. And lynxes nest in trees
and greedy wolverines, like over-vigilant
bureaucrats, keeping track of the ways
of boar and wolf and elk as they are sent.
Above them, eagles and falcons swoop down,
to scavenge food right from the courtly table.
These patriarchs, these holders of the crown,
hide themselves within the forest, invisible,
sending forth the young to colonize
the outer woods. They dominate the stage
where gun and knife will never reach the prize,
and where they die, but only from old age.

They have their own graveyard, where the near-dead
gather to die—birds dragging feathers
and creatures their fur, make their final bed.
When bear can chew no longer, or when hare
is slowed by blood thickening in his veins,
or stag barely able to move his hind
quarters, or graying raven who must refrain
from flight, like falcon who has turned quite blind,
eagle with his beak curved like a bow,
closed so long his throat has forgotten food—
all to their own ancestral graveyard go,
small animals as well, and they include
wounded and sick—so bones are never found
in places where man steps. It's also told
that inside this kingdom, customs abound
insuring order and justice of old,
uncorrupted by man, without property
rights and social strife, and no knowledge
of duels or the arts of war. Peacefully
as their forebears in an unspoiled age,
they live in Paradise, wild and free,
in harmony and love, where no one bites
or butts another. Even the unlikely
trespass of unarmed man will not incite
them—if he passes through. They might just gaze
as though during the sixth day of creation,
their first fathers, after having that day
of bliss—Adam exploring his new nation,
before the Expulsion. But men won't stray
in here, for Death and Terror block the way.

And yet sometimes a hound in furious chase,
imprudently crosses the borderline

into the pitted marshy land to face
this overwhelming horror. The dog's whine
is heard after its master's soothing strokes,
and it trembles a long time at his foot.
This place, so deep in forest which evokes
such fear, is called by hunters the backwoods.

Foolish bear! Remain in the backwoods,
for then hunters might never learn of you.
but some fragrant beehive or other food,
perhaps a longing for fresh oats drew
you to the edge of the forest, less dense,
where the lookout detected your foot prints,
and sent his spies—so cunning they could sense
just where you fed, and reading stains and dents
in twigs, where you slept. Now there is a row
of hunters between the backwoods and you!

There was silence while hunters--with ears strained
as though eavesdropping on some fascinating
talk—listened and for a long time remained
in place. The forest, though, was creating
music: dogs dove into the wilderness,
like loons under the sea, and hunters turned
to the woods, double-barreled rifles pressed
to shoulders, wondering what the Seneschal learned
as he knelt with his ear pressed to the ground.
all eyes observed, awaiting the verdict,
as though he were the doctor with profound
insight into someone's fate—to predict.
The hunters trusted the Seneschal's skill,
and drowned him in looks of both hope and fear.
“Yes, yes,” he uttered as they heard a shrill
cry—first one dog, then two, then twenty roar,
as the pack scattered having caught the scent--
attacking the bear with their howls and whines,
no longer just a game, leisure event,
of pursuing a fox or hare or hind.
Incessant yelps, clipped by their furious cries
told that the bloodhounds had spotted the bear.
The noise subsided to the hunter's surprise—
but soon again fierce growling filled the air.
The hounds had reached the beast and had attacked,
and the bear, defending itself, was injured.
Yet from the groans and sounds of bones cracked,
it was certain the hounds had also suffered.

Hunters stood in place, their rifles ready,
taut as strung bows, their heads aimed to the wood;
but they could wait no more—and already
they left their posts, and as fast as they could,
squeezed into thickets, thinking as they swarmed,
each would be first, though the Seneschal trotted
on horseback from station to station and warned
that anyone who left his post, if spotted--
simple peasant as well as noble's son—
would feel his angry lash. But who listened?
Despite his prohibition, three men ran
into the woods and three quick shots were sent,
then a barrage of fire, till deafening roars
echoed even louder, filling the skies.
This meant more pain and desperate fury, as scores
of yelping dogs and blaring horns thundered replies.
The hunters cocked their guns again and cheered;
only their leader groaned as they all missed.
Shooters and beaters from the side now veered
to chase the bear—that from sheer fright hissed.

Hounds and hunters closed in; the bear turned back
and forth, till it spotted a path, unguarded,
and fled to the same field from where the track
had started—where the crowds had just departed,
where only the Seneschal and the Count,
and Tadeusz, remained—prepared to dismount.

The woods were thinner here, and branches crunched
as the bear flew out from the dark thicket,
like thunder from a cloud. The dogs soon bunched
around the bear which rose—as they clawed it
with their paws, the bear uprooted stumps,
tossing them like stones. Brandishing a tree,
it roared as the frightened hounds yelped and jumped;
then it charged the line of beaters viciously.
Only the Count and Tadeusz stood their ground,
fearlessly, flintlocks lowered like lightning rods
into the belly of cloud, dark and round—
until both men (such inexperienced lads!)
pulled their triggers. Double-barrels thundered out.
They missed! When the bear leaped, they grabbed a spear
with four arms and shouting aimed for its red snout
and rows of glistening teeth--but the bear
prepared to swat them with its clawed hand.

They paled from fright, then jumped to open land.
For one moment it seemed they could escape,
till the bear rose up to its full monstrous shape,
and once more stretched its paw to the flaxen head
of the Count. It might have ripped his skull
from his brains, and he surely would be dead,
if the Sheriff and Notary had not witnessed the dreadful
act. Gervazy ran to join from the field;
Father Robak followed, without a gun,
and three of them fired, as though it had been drilled.
The bear leapt like a startled hare, then stunned,
crashed down on the Count's head and summersaulted,
flinging its bloody load right by his feet—
the Count flew in the air but landed on the grass!
The bear still howled, its struggle only halted
when the Chief and his Mate attacked the carcass.

Then the Seneschal reached into his belt
and pulled out from among the cartridges,
a bison horn, dappled, like a snake coiled.
With both hands, he held it to his parted
lips, puffing out his cheeks like a balloon, his eyes
bloodshot. Then his entire breath went
to his lungs by sucking in to half its size
his stomach—and a gale-like wind was sent
into the forest, music doubled by echo.
Hunters silenced, marveling at the might,
the pure tones and harmony he blew.
For the old man, within earshot and sight,
exhibited a legendary skill.
His song stirred oak grove and every tree,
as though into them the whole hunt he'd spill—
for his playing contained the hunt's history:
first the vigorous call, the reveille;
then whining yelps now that the dogs are baying;
then, full force, a harsh unyielding spree,
Like crackling thunder—the shots meant for the slaying.

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He stopped blowing his horn—not letting go;
though no one knew, they were hearing an echo.

When the Seneschal again began to play,
the horn seemed to transform. At first it thickened,
taking some animal shape. Then to bay
piercingly like a wolf, it stretched and lengthened.
Then once again it was a bear's broad snout,

and then a buffalo bellowing out.

He stopped blowing his horn—not letting go;
though no one knew, they were hearing an echo.
Deep into the woods this masterpiece could reach,
repeated—oak to oak—and beech to beech.

When he blew more it seemed a hundredfold.
All sounds combined at once—the dogs set free,
outcries of anger, the fear of the bold
shooters, the hounds and beast trying to flee,
till the Seneschal raised on high his horn—
a hymn of triumph in the clouds was born.

He stopped blowing his horn—not letting go;
though no one knew, they were hearing an echo.
It seemed that every tree had its own horn,
conveying the whole song from choir to choir,
spreading deep into the woods, though borne
more soft, more pure, as though it wouldn't expire.

Then the Seneschal let go of his horn
and spread his arms; it fell to his belt
and swung. His face swollen and warm,
he raised his eyes, this inspiration felt,
as he tried hard to catch the dying notes,
as a thousand cheers rose up in a swarm.

The noise died down. All eyes turned to the bear—
its monstrous corpse lay splattered in its blood
and pierced by bullets, grass matted in its fur.
front paws spread out, and through its nostrils a flood
of black liquid—yet still it was panting,
eyes open, head motionless, not quite dead.
The bulldogs rushed up to its ears, tearing,
the Chief's Mate bit at the massive head,
while Chief choked off the throat, sucking as it bled.

To halt the attack, the Seneschal placed
steel braces in the jaws of the crazed mutts.
Three times men shouted *Vivat*—clearly pleased,
flipping the carcass with their rifle butts.

“So!” said the Sheriff, flourishing his gun,
“what do you think of this little one's aim?
This birdshot that it shoots can surely stun.

But that is nothing new—for she can claim
she’s never had to waste a charge, this one
from Prince Sanguszko, such craft is rare.”
The Notary broke in, wiping his sweaty hair:
“As I was running right behind the bear,
the Seneschal told me to stand in place—
but what could I do—when it rushed like a hare
shooting into the field? I had to chase!
But I began to wheeze, and so my hopes
of reaching it vanished—until it shot
into a clearing! For then it lopes,
almost halting. The bruin is so near...
And sure enough, my wide barreled gun,
a Sagolos, mows it down. Inscribed
on it—from *Balabonov to London*—
for the famed ironsmith himself described
how muskets from his workshop are Polish,
but English in the way he must embellish.”

“*You*—mowed it down?” The Sheriff said in jest.
“Your talk is nothing short of preposterous!”
The Notary replied, “This is no inquest;
but let us summon the hunters to witness.”

And so their dogged quarrel again commenced.
Some to the Sheriff, some to the Notary
flocked. But about Gervazy’s role, none sensed,
for they’d been off to either side, while he
stood right in front. The Seneschal’s command
returned: “at least there’s reason now to quarrel.
This is no silly hare—hunters demand
satisfaction for a bear—a duel!
Custom calls for swords, or else pistols,
so go and reconcile, I give permission.
I recall two neighbors, neither fools
nor dishonest, of noble disposition.
They lived on opposite sides of a river,
one named Domeyko, and one Doweiko. 58
Hunting a bear, they both fired together,
so which bullet killed it, no one could know.
They vowed to shoot across the bear’s stretched hide,
in true noble fashion, barrel to barrel—
a *cause celebe* throughout the countryside.
Even songs were written about this quarrel.
I was *second*—Let me give the history
so that you understand the whole mystery.”

While the Seneschal talked, Gervazy checked
the bear carefully, drawing out his knife,
splitting the snout. After the skull was cracked,
he dug into the brain, until a slice
revealed the bullet, which was then extracted,
measured and placed into his own flintlock.
The group's attention was clearly attracted:
"Sirs, this is clearly not from your lead stock—
Horeszko's double-barrel gun, the same
musket I hold, old and bound with string.
But I did not shoot it, and I feel shame,
terrible shame, though I was surely trying.
Tadeusz and the Count ran straight to me;
the bear behind, batting the poor Count's head—
the last of the Horeszkos, *Jesus-Mary*,
I shouted, spotting the monk's uncovered head.
His courage surely puts us all to shame—
while I trembled, afraid to even squeeze
the trigger, he grabbed the gun and took aim—
a hundred paces, between both heads, such ease.
Straight to its snout, knocking out its teeth.
Gentlemen, I am old, one man only
could shoot so well. Even the heel beneath
a lady's boot he'd hit. He dueled constantly.
Such a scoundrel was famous in his day,
dubbed *The Mustached-One*, though his true name
I won't mention. But he is far away
from bears—he surely dwells in hell, quite tame.
Praise the Priest, he saved two lives...or three.
If the final link to Horeszko's line
fell to the beast—then I too would depart
this world, the bear would lick my bones and dine.
So let us toast the Priest. Let the praising start!"

They sought the Priest in vain. He had been seen
after the bear was slain when he bounded
over to the Count and Tadeusz and soon
determined neither one of them lay wounded.
He raised his eyes and then intoned a prayer
and fled like an animal full of fear.

Meanwhile, the Seneschal told them to heap
bundles of heather and kindling, and lighted
a fire. Billowing smoke began to creep
into the air—the shape of a wind-bloated

tent. Pikes were crossed and bound above the fire and from them were hung large pot-bellied kettles. From carts they brought provisions for an entire feast—bread, flour, roasted meat, and vegetables.

The Judge unlocked a special liquor trunk;
from the protruding necks he chose a flask,
a fine crystal gift from the Bernardine monk.
“Gdansk Vodka,” he said, “and no hard task
for Pole to drink. Long live Gdansk!” he shouted,
raising his stein. “Gdansk was once our town,
and so will be again.” The vodka spouted
a silver arc as he poured it around,
till only golden leaves glowed on the ground. 59

It is hard to describe *Bigos* heating -- 60
its rich color and miraculous fragrance,
for words can offer only sound and meaning.
You city dwellers can not reach its essence--
to know it you must live in the country,
returning from the hunt in all its pageantry.

Bigos is not some simple seasoned fare.
Besides vegetables, they artfully prepare
a cabbage base, picked then chopped with care,
which, as the saying goes, *the mouth must share*.
Placed within the moist womb of the kettle,
it is covered with chunks of finest meat
and roasted till the living juices settle.
The fire-extracted flavor is complete,
when the heat is furious and dramatic
and boils over with juices so aromatic.

The *Bigos* ready, all the hunters cheer;
armed with spoons they run to attack the cauldron.
The copper rings, as streams of vapor,
like camphor, evaporate and all is gone—
pot smoking like a dead volcano’s crater.

When appetite and thirst are satisfied,
they load the bear onto a cart, mount their horses,
quite pleased and talkative—although some tried
to break the calm with the quarrel’s new courses:
the Sheriff and Notary argued once more,
each over his own musket’s advantage—
Sanguszko, Sagalos—heated as before.

The Count and Tadeusz also felt rage,
ashamed they failed, and missed, and fled,
Because in Lithuania the blame
for letting bears break through the beaters' stead
is hard to overcome—to regain that lost fame.

The Count claimed he was first to reach the spear,
and that Tadeusz hindered his attack.
Tadeusz maintained that he was stronger,
and that his skill could counter the Count's lack,
that he wished to unburden him. The longer
they talked, the more rebukes were hurled back.

Among the men, the worthy Seneschal rode,
exceedingly happy and talkative.
He wanted to squelch the quarrel, to goad
them into agreement by his narrative
of Dowejko's and Domejko's feud.
"It's not because I crave spilling more blood
that I called for a duel—that would be crude.
I meant it as a joke, if I may be so bold,
a farce. It is a notion I contrived
some forty years ago. You won't recall,
since you're so young, but its fame has survived,
as well as its ability to enthrall."

"Dowejko's and Domejko's animosities
arose from the unfortunate resemblance
of their names. During the District Assemblies,
Dowejko's allies recruited partisans
among nobles so he could get their vote.
But they heard incorrectly, so Domejko
won. At a banquet once, Marshall Rupejko
toasted *Vivat Dowejko!*—but take note,
on either side they shouted out *Domejko*,
and those in the center confused their vote."

"But worse in Vilno—when a drunken noble
dueled with Domejko and was wounded twice.
Returning home, strangely coincidental,
he boarded the same boat—let it suffice—
with his almost-namesake. So as they sailed
along, the noble asked his neighbor's name.
And when he heard *Domejko*, he curtailed
his civility and out his rapier came.
In no time at all he began to slash—

on one's account, he sliced the other's mustache."

"To make matters much worse, during a hunt they were standing so close that when they fired, both of them hit the bear right in the front. After so many bullets, she expired, but since her gut was filled with at least ten, the same caliber every hunter used, no one could tell who shot her first, or when she died. Needless to say, all were confused."

"Enough of this," they said, "we must resolve the matter! Whether by God or the Devil united, we must separate. Two suns cannot revolve around the earth. And so the two decided to duel, since neither could be reconciled. All tries just made them that much more determined. They found their choice of sabres far too mild, switching to pistols, though we all complained their range was far too short. But they, in spite, swore that they'd only shoot across the hide of a bear—though this caused us all some fright, since both were excellent shots. But I complied, acting as *second*, requesting a deep hole be dug, for such a duel will have results. And what noble would dare usurp the role of a butcher? This close range does insult your skill—why stick your barrel in a belly? I won't permit, but I'll agree to pistols, if you insist on this shooting spree, I, as your *second*, will stretch and pull this bearskin so that one of you will stand upon the snout, the other on the tail. Agreed, they shouted, and the rest was planned—tomorrow at the inn, without fail. And thus they left, rushing with great speed, while I went home to study Virgil's Aeneid."

The cries of *sic him!* interrupted the tale. From underneath a horse, a hare scampered; and both hounds were already on its trail. The masters expected their hounds, pampered during the hunt, to encounter a hare—and so they let them go without leashes. The Sheriff and Notary were aware of this new chase, and so spurred on their horses,

though the Seneschal had ordered them to halt.
He would not let them run into the field,
insisting that they'd better view which caught
the hare from here. But using horses to shield
its flight, the hare burst free, ears sticking out
like antlers on a stag—a streak of gray--
it dashed, with legs like sticks kicking out
and barely tapped the ground, rushing away,
like a sparrow skimming across a creek.
Behind the hare and hounds the dust clouded,
soon blending into a single streak:
a slithering serpent, its head shrouded
in dust, a bluish neck, the dogs its tail.

The Notary and Sheriff barely breathed.
They watched and both of them turned fully pale.
And in anticipation, both of them seethed—
the serpent grew longer, then split in two;
its head entered the woods, its neck close by,
the tail remained outside. Then the head flew
into view and vanished just as quickly.

The poor bewildered dogs ran by the trees;
they seemed to be conferring with each other;
but then returned, bounding back shamefully.
Tails between their legs, they didn't bother
to raise their eyes or ears—clearly they shied
away from masters, cowering off to the side.

The Notary lowered his head, dejected;
the Sheriff cast about his eyes, unhappy,
while their excuses were rejected—
the hounds were unaccustomed, running free
without leashes. They were caught unaware,
for they had not been baited; their poor paws
lacked boots protecting them from stone and boulder.
With cunning they excused their hounds' flaws.
The other hunters might have taken heed,
but they did not—whistling, they laughed instead,
or jabbered on, recalling their heroic deed—
now that the once ferocious bear was dead.

The Seneschal had scarcely paid attention;
the hare escaped, so he resumed his talk.
“What was my point before this interruption?
oh, yes, both men agreed—they'd fire across

the bear's hide, and all present were concerned
that this meant certain death, barrel to barrel—
but I laughed, for from Virgil I had learned
that any hide of any animal
is no standard measure. Recall Dido
the Queen, and how to Libya she once sailed
to haggle for some land and made a show
of stretching an oxhide, and thus availed
herself to all the land that it could cover--
and from this act of cunning Carthage grew.
a plan, I thought, to carefully think over.”

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“At dawn Dowejko came in a carriage,
while Domejko galloped up on his horseback
from the other side—but a new bridge
they beheld, crossing the river, shaggy and slack,
constructed of bearskin, cut up and knotted.
I stood Dowejko on the poor beast's tail;
across the river Domejko was spotted
on the snout. Gentlemen, you may assail
each other now—or if perhaps you'd rather
try to solve this and thus to reconcile.
They were furious, though all the others
fell over laughing. I, in priestly style,
inveighed the Gospels, commanding them to cease.
They had no choice, they had to call for peace.”

“So they became dear friends after the feud,
and Dowejko, Domejko's sister wed.
Domejko, not to be outdone, wooed
his brother-in-law's sister, and so instead
of enemies, they're kin. Soon their estates
were divided and they began to share.
On the spot of this near deadly debate,
they built a tavern called *The Little Bear*.”

BOOK 5

THE BRAWL

Telimena's hunting plans – the gardener enters society, instructed by her guardian – hunters return – Tadeusz dumbstruck – repeated meeting the Sanctuary and reconciliation after ants intervene – the hunt discussed – the Seneschal's tale of Rejtan and the Prince deNasseau, interrupted – a preliminary settlement, also interrupted – the brawl – the Count and Gervazy hold a war council

The Senschal, concluding the hunt with honor,
returns from the forest; Telimena, meanwhile,
in the depths of the deserted manor,
begins to hunt in her own special style.
She sits with arms folded, while her thoughts chase
two beasts—how to ensnare and catch her game,
the Count and Tadeusz. The Count has grace
and charm, a legacy comes with his name,
in love already, yes, but that could change.
Then will he truly love or want to marry
a woman who's some years beyond his range
and not well off? Will my whole plan miscarry?
Is this a match his family must arrange?

With thoughts like this she rose up from the couch,
standing on tiptoe and stretching tall.
Then she revealed her cleavage with a slouch
and gazed into the mirror on the wall.
She seemed to want her image to decide
her fate, then quickly turned away and sighed.

The Count has wealth—such men are changeable;
he's blond, and blonds are not so passionate.
Tadeusz, though, is simple, amiable,
a child and like a puppy, affectionate.
He is falling in love for the first time—
he will not easily break off this tie—
for young men more than men who've reached their prime
easily change views; their feelings, though, belie
tenacity not found in their grandfathers,
because they have conscience. The heart of youth

is simple like a girl's—gratitude matters.
It blissfully welcomes sweet love to soothe,
and quickly digests it, a modest meal.
Only a drunk, now sleeping soberly,
abhors the vodka that he downed with zeal.
Telimena considered carefully
what reason and experience revealed.

But what would people say? Could she avoid
accusing stares or live like one secluded
or even move abroad? She might decide
to go to Petersburg, to be included
in all the best affairs. Then she would guide
his steps, dispense advice, in short she'd mold
his heart. She'd have a confidante, a brother tied
always to her, as she blissfully grew old.

Such brazen thoughts soon put in her a state;
she started pacing then lowered her head.
Perhaps she should consider the Count's fate--
if she could match him with Zosia instead.
She was not rich but was equal in birth,
a Senator's home, yes, a person of rank.
Such a marriage was sure to have its worth—
she'd find refuge in their home; they would thank
her for arranging this and then she'd be
like a mother to them. So thus assured
she walked to the window to better see
Zosia, amusing herself in the orchard.

Zosia in morning dress, her head uncovered,
held up a sieve, and all the barnyard fowl
rushed to her feet, feeding time discovered.
Shaggy-feathered chicks like woolen balls
rolled in, and roosters with orange combs twitching,
stroked their wings through the furrows and bushes,
dragging spurred feet. A turkey cock, swishing,
followed behind, puffed-up, grumbling, it hushes
its noisy spouse, and peacocks, too, like rafts,
their long tails steering through the dense meadow.
Above, like fresh snow spraying in a draft,
silver doves descend into the shadow,
resembling white ribbons that wrap around.
Specks and stars and stripes beneath the shroud—
amber beaks and coral tufts, the ground
of thick plumage—fish under waves breaking.

Their thrusting necks advance all in a line,
like waterlilies in a pond shaking.
It seems a thousand eyes toward Zosia shine.

In the center, above the birds, she rises
in her white shift as tall as a fountain,
showering from the sieve her grand prizes.
From her white hand they splash almost like rain,
these drops of pearl barley, big as hailstones.
Such grains belong at a gentleman's table,
added to broth that's been prepared from bones.
Too bad that now the cook will be unable
to make such soup—since Zosia stole the grain.

When Zosia heard the shrill call of her aunt,
she scattered all the last tidbits of grain,
twirling the empty sieve—as if to enchant
the birds—a dancer with her tambourine.
Over the hens, the pigeons, and peacocks
she jumped, rushing, the birds clearly ruffled,
fluttering and whirling above in flocks.
Her steps were still so very light and muffled,
she seemed to be drawn by some startled doves
in her chariot—a mythic goddess of love.

Zosia hopped inside the open window;
breathless, she sat by the knees of the aunt,
who kissed her and began to stroke her brow,
clearly deriving pleasure from this instant.
She truly loved her ward, but now once more
her mood turned solemn and she rose to pace
across the chamber several times before
she scolded Zosia, who made a wry face.
“Zosia,” she said, “how can you just forget
who you are? This is such a special day;
you're fourteen now, perhaps it's time to let
these chicks and turkeys go their way.
Such toys are not fit for a noble's child!
And really, how much longer can you bear
those sunburned peasant children, so wild?
You're dark as a gypsy—yet once so fair,
traipsing about as if some farmer's wife.
But this is soon to change; starting today
I'm taking charge of your social life.
When there are guests, you must do as I say,
and don't embarrass me by how you play.”

Zosia jumped up excitedly and hugged
her aunt, who maintained her stern composure.
She cried and laughed, though clearly from pleasure.
“Oh Aunt, I never see these guests,” she shrugged,
“since I’ve arrived it’s just turkey and hen.
The only guest I saw was a wild dove.
I’m bored feeling like a sheep in its pen,
I’m sure even the Judge would not approve.”

“The Judge,” Telimena said, “nags me—
bring your niece into society at last,
mumbling under his breath constantly
that you’ve been growing up so very fast.
But what does he know of society?
It takes an awful lot of care to fashion
a young lady. I have notoriety
for that! To make the proper impression
it’s not how pretty and clever you are—
if all have known you since your childhood.
But if a young girl has been raised quite far
away, of course, then everything looks good—
men find her fascinating and her movement
will enthrall, her glance sure to bewitch;
her conversation praised for its content;
she will be loved for every little twitch,
by even those who seem to dislike her.
You must not forget all that you have learned
during the two long years that you’ve spent here.
Remember, Zosia, just how much we’ve yearned
to return to Petersburg. Now get dressed;
you’ll find all that you need back in the trunk,
and please consider what I’ve just expressed—
quickly, they’re all returning from the hunt.

The serving girl summoned—the chamber maid,
and water was poured in a silver basin.
Zosia, like a sparrow in sand, played,
splashing about, as servants tried to hasten,
washing her hands and face, trying to aid.
Telimena, from her Petersburg stores,
pulled out flasks of perfume, jars of pomade;
she sprayed Zosia with a scent that allures,
applying to her hair a fragrant ointment.
Clear white stockings Zosia began placing
by her white satin shoes—from Warsaw sent,

while the servant began the task of lacing
the corset, covered by a dressing smock.
Curling papers were twisted in her hair,
which was so short they had to braid the locks
revealing temples and forehead—both fair.
A corsage of fresh flowers was then placed
in Telimena's hand—for her to pin
in Zosia's hair. So skillfully it graced
her face—like a blue cornflower within
a field of pale grain. The smock was replaced
with a white gown and Zosia thrust her head
through the opening. A kerchief, white and frilly,
went in her hand; the serving girl said
she looked just like a perfect white lily.

A last adjustment to her hair and gown—
they told her to parade across the floor.
Telimena observed with a connoisseur's frown,
drilling her knowledge (which she knew was poor)
of etiquette. She angrily grimaced,
and when Zosia curtsied, cried in despair.
“Oh, wretched me! I'm sure to be disgraced.
Wait and see how this gooseherd will fare—
you spread your legs, what's worse, you glance about
like some divorcee. Curtsey again,
this awkwardness is not something to flout.”
“Oh Aunt,” replied Zosia, “You mustn't complain,
you kept me locked away! When could I learn
to dance. I'm bored, and so I feed these birds,
and frolic with these children that you spurn.
One more chance, and I'll disprove your words;
don't shut me in—for how else will I learn?”

“The birds,” her Aunt said, “are an evil less
than the rabble we always see, to attract.
Think of our guests, and how they must impress—
the grouchy priest with his card-playing act;
the lawyer with his awful pipes—are these
eligible bachelors? What manners or finesse
could you possibly learn—to hang from tree?
But now we have a young distinguished guest,
the Count, a lord and so well educated,
properly raised. I have but one request—
just be polite in ways I've indicated.”

Whinnying horses could be heard outside,

and hunters' slang, the opening of the gate.
Away from the mirror, Zosia was pried,
rushed into the hall with a frantic gait—
the hunters didn't occupy the room;
they were changing out of their hunting shirts
in the kitchen, so they could also groom
themselves, in case some lady wished to flirt.
Most anxious were Tadeusz and the Count,
who quickly dressed and rushed out to the front.

Telimena was obliged to act
as host. She greeted them, led them to chairs;
she talked politely and they didn't lack
attention. Then, amid the talk of bears,
she introduced her niece, Tadeusz first.
Zosia curtseyed and he bowed very low,
his lips parted, his eyes to her eyes glued.
Then he grew shy, standing pale and dumbstruck,
his own feelings unable to surmise.
He recognized Zosia—to his ill-luck—
her size and shining hair, her voice and eyes,
just hours before he'd seen this very face
whose sweet voice had awakened him for the bear chase.

The Seneschal, watching Tadeusz shaken,
rescued him from his predicament,
advising to withdraw at once, to make an
effort to rest. But Tadeusz went,
instead, to the fireplace, his crazed eyes
glancing to his aunt, then to her niece.
Telimena noticed, with some deep sighs,
the impression that Zosia made—displeased.
And Zosia, too, appeared to be distracted,
staring at the flames. Unable to wait,
Telimena approached the youth who so attracted
her. "Are you sick? Or sad?" Questions would not abate,
until to Zosia she jokingly alluded.
Tadeusz remained still, propped on his elbow,
silent, brows knit, mouth twisted—he brooded.
Telimena's confusion began to show;
she changed her tack and then her tone of voice;
with sharp and angry words she jibed and taunted;
Tadeusz felt the sting of her word choice.
With no reply but with his anger flaunted,
he kicked a chair as from the room he bolted;
and as it crashed over, the door was jolted

open. Only Telimena was unnerved,
to all the rest, this scene passed unobserved.

Through the swinging gate, Tadeusz fled,
straight to the field—like a pike with its gill
punctured by a hook, plunging, diving, far from dead,
deeper, the fishing line following still--
Tadeusz dragged along his new-found pain,
trudging through ditches, vaulting across fences,
aimless and pathless and under great strain,
wandering as though he had lost his senses,
till deep in the forest, by chance or will,
he found himself, where only yesterday,
he'd felt such joy—where, by the tiny hill,
the trees witnessed his rapturous display,
where Telimena passed the infamous note,
as both the Count and Tadeusz she smote.

Looking about—what a shock to notice,
Telimena alone, deeply plunged
in her own thoughts. And yet it was her bodice
he noticed, white, and the way that she lounged
on a boulder, as though sculpted from stone
herself, her palms to face, pale as a lotus,
clearly she sobbed, though emitting no tone.

Tadeusz defended his heart in vain;
he felt pity; he was moved by her sorrow.
He gazed silently, in awe of her pain;
he hid behind a tree, then anger grew—
“Fool!” he scolded himself, “she’s not to blame;
it’s my mistake.” Then suddenly she tore
from her place with a start, and when she came
leaping across a stream, arms in the air,
hair disheveled, she screamed, heading for the trees.
Jumping, kneeling, and finally falling down,
unable to get up or to squirm free—
it was so clear that her torment had grown,
grasping her breasts, her knees, and then her toes.
Tadeusz sprung up, sure that she’d gone mad,
or else that some disease held her in the throes
of seizure—yet it wasn’t nearly that bad.

In a nearby birch wood, a great anthill
supplied thousands of ants crawling along the grass,
frantic and black, like soldiers in a drill.

Perhaps it was pleasure that made them pass
into this lady's Temple of Meditation.
Leaving behind their heaped-up mound and spring,
they marched in line to their new destination.
Unfortunately, for them, someone was blocking
their path, and Telimena's sparkling white
stockings, so glittery and alluring,
attracted them—to tickle and to bite.
Telimena was forced to flee, fluttering
her arms, till she dropped down, shaking her dress,
picking off ants, between fingers to press.

Tadeusz felt compelled to help her now,
brushing her gown and stooping by her foot,
his lips accidentally strayed to her brow.
Remaining on that tender spot, mute
about their recent quarrel—they didn't speak,
reconciled and under each other's spell.
Their silence could have lasted for a week,
if not for the Soplica's dinner bell.

This signaled time to come to evening meal,
time to return—and since they just now heard
branches cracking, a search party might reveal
their indiscretion. So, passions stirred,
they returned separately--she through the orchard,
Tadeusz to the highway in a rush.
Yet an alarming sight both encountered—
Telimena saw behind a bush
the hooded face of the Bernardine monk;
Tadeusz, too, distinctly saw a figure,
tall and dressed in white, behind the trunk
of a tree. He suspected, though not sure,
that the Count's long English frockcoat it wore.

They were to dine in the castle again;
Protazy one more time had disobeyed
the Judge's prohibition with disdain.
During the absence of the men, he played
his advantage, and he had stormed the castle,
moving the cupboard in before guests came.
They entered in order, stood in a circle—
the Official sat where someone of his fame
belonged, bowing to all along the way.
The priest was absent, so his wife sat next
to the Judge, who in Latin, began to pray.

Then vodka was served to the honored guests,
and *kompot*, rich with cream—so they might dine
on crabs and chicken and asparagus,
downing huge cups of Hungarian wine,
feasting in silence, without making a fuss.

62

Since they first erected these castle walls,
so lavishly they'd always entertained,
so many nobles visited these halls—
it seemed the echoes of *vivats* remained.
Yet never could the Judge recall more gloom—
only the popping corks and rattling plates
resounded hollowly through the great room;
even the servants abandoned their debates,
for it seemed that some angry spirit tried
to silence all, as if all tongues were tied.

There were many reasons for this silence.
Returning from the hunt quite talkative,
their ardor had grown less and less intense,
realizing just how hard it was to live
with the shame—was it really necessary,
this hooded monk appearing from nowhere
like Philip from Hemp, who didn't even carry
a gun? Something about this wasn't fair!
What would their rivals in the district town
think? And would they mock their hunting renown?

63

And adding to their long, ongoing feud,
the Notary and Sheriff faced new shame—
they both dwelled on the memory, renewed:
the hare fleeing, their hounds already tame,
the fluffy tail as it mockingly waved
from the grove, like a whip lashing the heart.
In spite of this disgrace, gazing down, they braved
the crowd—yet the Sheriff was also hurt,
as he watched Telimena and his rival play.

She sat by Tadeusz but turned away
and barely noticed him, intent instead
to tease the Count out of his sad display,
to talk freely, his ill-humor to shed.
The Count was glum, returning from his walk,
or his ambush, as Tadeusz surmised;
for he listened to Telimena talk
and raised his head haughtily, not surprised.

He frowned and looked at both of them with scorn,
and sat by Zosia, leaning as close as possible.
He filled her glass and passed her plates in turn,
showing every courtesy—and bow and smile.
At times he rolled his eyes and gasped for air,
and it was clear, despite his deception,
his flirting words were meant for Telimena's ear.
He wished to spite her, to cause irritation,
turning to stare at her with every chance,
to drown her in his threatening glance.

Telimena watched, uncomprehending,
shrugging her shoulders—so very strange, she thought,
returning to the Count with talk unending.
Tadeusz grew more dismal, and he sought
escape in his plate, though he ate and drank
nothing. Even when Telimena poured
more wine, questioning, he acted bored,
though he seemed ill, and soon his head sank.
When he opened his eyes, he grew upset,
his face so near her cleavage, so immodest,
so shocked by what his quick perusal met.
To her red cheeks he turned his present inquest,
a grave secret about to be exposed—
by rouge this rosy hue had been imposed.

Perhaps this rouge was an inferior grade,
or had in spots rubbed off accidentally,
or else worn off, and underneath its shade,
a coarse complexion—all could plainly see.
Perhaps Tadeusz, an hour or so before,
had brushed her cheek during their conversation,
and the carmine fell to the forest floor,
lightly as dust from its powder foundation.
Telimena had rushed from the forest,
with virtually no time to make repairs
to her makeup, and tiny spots had surfaced
around her mouth. Tadeusz had to stare,
the cunning spy, having discovered treason.
He carefully examined all her charms,
having more than sufficient reason,
and everywhere betrayals caused alarm--
two teeth missing, and where her powder pealed,
a thousand tiny wrinkles were revealed.

How terrible Tadeusz began to feel,

to examine so closely—a disgrace!
To spy like that, creating his own hell,
to change his heart, his love even to erase.
Could he control his heart? He felt such shame,
and tried to substitute conscience for love's absence,
To warm his cold soul in her glance's flame,
though like the moon, her eyes were cold, intense—
his soul was frozen to the very tip;
head buried in his hands, he bit his lip.

Just then a new temptation arose—
on Zosia and the Count he would eavesdrop.
Clearly the girl was in the Count's throes,
visibly blushing, and unable to stop
staring, laughing as they began to converse
about yesterday's unexpected meeting.
What they recalled—they spoke as if in verse:
huge burdock leaves, and how they made their greeting
in the garden. Tadeusz pricked his ears,
swallowing words which then his soul digested.
His feast was bitter and brought him new fears—
like a garden viper whose tongue ingested
the poison of a plant, there on the path
rolled into a ball, the very place
someone might step, poised to display its wrath.
Now drunk with jealousy as poisonous,
Tadeusz was about to show his malice.

To even the most festive gathering,
just one person can introduce much gloom;
though the hunters had stopped their blathering,
Tadeusz's gall suffused the room.

Even the Chamberlain was despondent.
Astonished, he observed his two daughters,
well-dowered and pretty, by all consent,
the bloom of youth and in all quarters
the district's best matches, in utter silence,
neglected by the eligible young men.
The Judge, as host, felt deeply this offence,
while the Seneschal offered his comments—
they might as well dine in some fierce wolf's den.

The Seneschal was very sensitive
to silence, and inordinately fond
of chatter—and no wonder, for to live

as a noble meant a continuous round
of banquets, hunts, salons, assemblies,
accustomed to something drumming his ear.
Even when not talking, or swatting flies,
or quietly musing, he longed to hear
some conversation. And even at night
he said his rosaries and made up tales.
Against pipe-smoking he would rail and fight,
claiming that the silence this habit entails
was a German invention meant to deny
good Polish traits. And so he did determine—
“by wiping out the germs of speech, they well might
propose a cure to make us more German.”

64

The lack of sound at night would make him jolt
from bed. Like millers lured to sleep by grinding gears,
who wake if noise comes to a grinding halt,
jumping to their feet, all full of fear.

The Seneschal faced the Chamberlain and bowed,
motioning to the Judge, who raised his hand,
a signal for him to address the sullen crowd.
Both of them acknowledged and begged him to take a stand.
“I implore you young people,” the Seneschal lectured,
“enjoy yourselves at this sumptuous meal;
don’t chew so quietly without a word.
Are you Trappist monks who’ve vowed to seal
your lips? It makes me think of that hunter
who lets the cartridge rust inside his gun.
I do admire the garrulous banter
of our ancestors—who, after the run,
returned to the table not just to feast,
but to express freely their opinions.
What they held in their heart, always released,
reproofs, of course, but also commendations;
hunter and beater, hound and shot appraised
as vociferously as another chase.
I know what’s wrong—the monk has raised
a specter in this room; you feel disgrace
at your poor shots. But don’t be tormented.
Better hunters than you have often missed—
it is something that cannot be prevented.
Since youth I’ve brought a gun into the chase;
and even the great Rejtan could miss sometime.
So you young men, you do not face disgrace;
failing to kill a bear is not a crime.”

“With just a spear, I could not criticize.
But if you fled, holding your loaded gun,
then cries of coward would surely arise.
A coward is likely to shoot and run
blindly, afraid to let the beast approach.
But if he aims, and lets the game get near,
and hunting rules he’s careful not to breach,
a miss means he can withdraw without fear
or disgrace. Now if he chooses a pike,
not simply out of need but for pleasure,
let him beware—it’s a weapon unlike
the gun, unsuited to attack a bear.
In ancient times, I ask you to believe,
your retreat would not be a cause of shame.
So Count and Tadeusz, please do not grieve;
please hear an old man’s words, do not be deaf;
if you wish to escape dispute or blame,
two hunters should not shoot at the same game.”

Just as the Seneschal said the word *game*,
the Sheriff whispered, almost out loud, *dame*.
“Bravo!” shouted the young men with laughter,
repeating the Seneschal’s admonition,
especially the word that followed after.
One yelled, *game*, the next said *dame* in opposition.
the Notary whispered, “she’d be no pet,”
to which the Sheriff responded, “Coquette,
fixing on Telimena his fierce gaze.

The steadfast Seneschal was not amazed;
he didn’t castigate or pay attention
to these whispered comments. Instead he praised
the levity brought by this word association—
his glass of wine, to be refilled, he raised.

“Oh, how I’d like to find the Bernardine;
I have a tale to tell, I wonder what he’d think—
the Warden claimed that only once he’d seen
aim that was as accurate as the monk.
But I know a marksman of equal skill,
whose shots once saved two nobles’ skins,
just as the beast readied to make its kill—
Rejtan the Deputy and DeNassau the Prince,
who judged a man regardless of his title.
At the table they’d be the first to toast,
presenting him with gifts, formidable—

the hide of a slain boar, something to boast!
I can recall that boar, that infamous shot,
I was an eyewitness, and yes, I saw
just like today—although a finer lot,
the Deputy Rejtan and Prince DeNasseau.”

65

The Judge spoke up as he refilled his bowl.
“I think it’s time for us to toast the priest;
if charity will not enrich his cowl,
let’s replenish his gunpowder at least.
I give my word that the bear slain today
will be rewarded with two year’s supply
of wood to heat the stove of his monastery.
Although the hide—I think I must deny,
either by force or his humble concession,
though I’d offer the pelts of ten sables.
To dispose of this hide—my obligation.
Of course his role in killing it enables
him to receive the highest crowning glory,
But the choice of the valued second prize,
the hide, the hunt’s most prized and cherished bounty—
I think the Official should now decide.”

The Official stroked his forehead and he frowned.
Murmurs arose as the hunters depicted
their roles in the hunt—how the beast was found,
and one about the first wound inflicted;
one freed the dogs, another scared the bear...
The Notary and Sheriff fought once more:
one held his Sanguszko musket quite dear;
the other his Sagalos’ precision bore.

“Dear Judge, my friend,” the Chamberlain replied,
“the first prize—clearly the monk deserves
to win, second much harder to decide.
All took part with equal courage and nerve,
though two young men were singled out by fate
to come perilously close to the bear’s claw.
The Count and Tadeusz, without debate,
have earned the skin. Tadeusz will withdraw
his claim, I’m sure, younger, kin to the host;
the Count, the *spolia opima*, shall take,
the spoils, the trophy goes back to his roost.
A glorious reminder this will make—
a sign that good fortune will not be lost.”

66

He clearly thought the Count had been appeased,
unaware this gift pierced through his heart,
for the Count, when he should have been amused,
glanced up unhappily at the mounted hart,
its branching antlers almost like laurel fronds
gracing the walls, as though a father's hand
had gathered them to make crowns for his sons.
Rows of ancestral portraits seemed to command
from the pillars, and high on the vault shone
the old coat of arms, the Horeszko *half-goat*.
The Count felt these figures, once so remote,
spoke to him. But as his musing now ceased,
he realized just where he was--whose guest.
the Horeszko's heir's new outrage increased,
inside *his* hall, attending this new feast
hosted by his enemies, the Soplicas.
Compounding this was a renewed jealousy
towards Tadeusz, his rival for Telimena's
charms, as his anger began to intensify.

He replied with a bitter laugh and smile,
"my house is small and lacks a worthy place
for a gift of such magnificent style.
Let the bear remain—let it grace
these castle walls, among other horned beasts,
until the Judge returns what he has only leased."

The Chamberlain, guessing future events,
tapped his snuffbox and demanded to speak.
"You deserve praise, Count, for having the sense
to talk business and never take a break;
such concern is rare in this sad age.
You have my word, we will come to agreement;
my last concern is the castle acreage
and regarding this I have an arrangement."
He gravely began to relate his plan,
expounding upon the future exchange,
when an unexpected movement began
across the table and out of his range.
Someone pointed, a few eyes followed first,
till, soon, like a field of rye in the wind,
all heads simultaneously reversed
direction—turning to face the corner behind.

Where the dead Pantler's portrait was hanging,
from a small door among the pillars, hidden,

emerging with a terrible clanging,
came Gervazy, like a ghost, as though chidden
of God. All recognized his stature, his face,
his frayed yellow greatcoat with the *half-goat*.
Straight as a pole, with a slow, rigid pace,
his hat still on, without looking about--
he was brandishing a glittering key,
and unlocked a great chest, turning forcefully.

In the corner stood two musical clocks,
locked in a large case against the pillars,
old and unique and with intricate locks.
They told time contrary to sun and star,
tolling midnight at noon and noon at midnight.
Gervazy never bothered to repair
the works, though with his key he wound each night.
So now he came to wind, without a care,
just as the Chamberlain began his discourse.
He lifted the weight; the rusty wheels grinding,
gnashing their teeth, as he tugged with force.
The Chamberlain shuddered, reprimanding,
“Brother,” he said, “postpone this urgent work.”
Nothing happened; he tried again to state
his case. The spiteful Warden tugged--with a jerk
even more forceful—the second weight .
Suddenly, the goldfinch, perched on top,
flapped its wings, chiming forth a melody.
This bird, once a work of art, wouldn’t stop,
broken and disfigured and quite moody,
began a squeal that turned into a howl.
The Chamberlain was furious, the guests rooting.
“My dear Warden, or should I say *Screech Owl*;
if you value your beak, you’ll stop this hooting.”

67

“Oh Count,” cried the Warden, “What do you think?
It’s not enough that your honor is stained—
must you with these Soplicas eat and drink?
Must I, Gervazy Rembajlo, named
Warden of the Horeszko castle estate,
endure insults in the house of my Lord?”
“Silence!” Protazy cried, “Before it is too late!
I, Protazy Balthazar Brechalski, swear by the sword
of my office as Court Apparitor
in front of all free-born men to witness,
I call upon the Sheriff to order
an investigation into the heinous

and violent infringement of property.
It is this castle that he wants to steal,
yet he has no legal authority—
as evidence, the Judge eating his meal!”

“Windbag!” the Warden bellowed, “I will teach you.”
He drew the metal keys hung from his belt
whirling them around his head—they flew
like a stone from a slingshot catapult.
Surely they almost struck Protazy’s head,
splitting it in two, and he’d be dead...

All jumped up from their seats in utter silence,
until the Judge spoke up—“Put him in stocks!
Arrest the trump!” He ordered the servants,
who rushed to the passage behind the clocks.
The Count, though, stood between the bench and wall,
blocking their way. And all alone he stood,
in his feeble entrenchment. “That is all,”
He said, “Judge, no one will dare to harm
my servants in my home. Take your complaints
against this man to court, but do not raise your arm
against him—bring them to me—or to the Saints!”

The Chamberlain stared deep into the eyes
of the Count. “I can punish, without your intervention,
this impudent old fool. Besides, the prize
cannot be claimed before my determination.
The castle’s not yet yours—your not the host,
so please sit down; respect my gray hair,
if not my rank and my official post.”

“Enough,” muttered the Count. “I don’t care!
Bore us with your *office* and *respect*;
I’ve heard enough stupidities tonight;
drinking bouts, brawls—what more can I expect.
When we’re sober—for honor then I’ll fight.”

Surprised by such an unexpected answer,
the Chamberlain quickly refilled his cup.
The Count’s impudence struck him like thunder.
He grabbed the bottle and raised his head up,
and with his mouth gaping began to blather.
The whole time he was so violently squeezing
the glass, it cracked, causing wine to splatter
his face. It seemed as though the fire seething

in his soul was quenched by the wine. He paled,
and grew quiet—his first words were unclear;
he gnashed his teeth, and further words expelled.
“My Count, you are an ass! Bring my sword here;
I’ll teach you manners no matter the price.
So your delicate ears find me a bore—
those tender earlobes I might have to slice.
Hand me my cutless. Now Count, out the door!”

The Chamberlain’s allies leapt to his aid.
The Judge grabbed his hand. “This is my affair,
I was challenged first. Protazy, my blade.
Let me at him—he’ll dance like a chained bear.”
But Tadeusz restrained him. “Please Uncle,
and you, most honored Sir, we all agree,
yet it’s not fitting for the old to meddle;
I will punish him more than adequately.
And you, bold Count, we’ll settle these affairs
tomorrow. Choose the site and your weapon.
Go now before my good sense disappears.”

This advice was good, for no small danger
was threatening the Warden and the Count.
At the far end of the table raged anger,
and soon attacks were beginning to mount—
bottles flying over the Count’s head.
The terrified ladies beseeched and wept.
“Enough!” Telimena finally cried in dread.
She tried to leave but fainted as she stepped;
her neck fell right onto the Count’s shoulder,
her swanlike breast now lay upon his chest.
The Count checked his fury to comfort her;
to revive her he stroked and closely pressed.

Meanwhile Gervazy, withstanding the barrage
of bottles and benches, staggered on his feet.
There servants, now a fist-throwing entourage,
swarmed towards him. Fortunately, certain defeat
was avoided, when Zosia, out of pity,
leapt right in front of them, her arms flung wide.
They halted; Gervazy withdrew slowly,
and disappeared under a table to hide,
emerging from the other side as though
from underground. Then he picked up a chair
in his powerful arms, threatening to throw.
Spinning like a windmill, slashing the air,

he almost cleared the room, grabbed the Count's sleeve,
retreating, swinging the bench for protection.
Almost through the door, about to leave,
Gervazy stopped to make a last inspection.
He eyed his enemies, musing a moment,
deciding whether to retreat or aim.
He chose to fight—his message clearly sent
as he lifted the bench, to inflict harm—
a battering ram! He moved with his head bent,
his chest thrust out, his leg almost upraised.
But once he saw the Seneschal he went
pale—freezing, falling, seemingly crazed.

The Seneschal sat calmly, eyes half-closed;
he had been plunged deep in some meditation
until he saw the threat this quarrel posed.
Then with the Count's renewed provocation,
first to the Chamberlain, then to the Judge—
he took a pinch of snuff from his own case
and wiped his eyes, but still he did not budge.
A distant relation, he loved his place
as guest of the Judge and cared exceedingly
about his host's welfare. He watched the strife,
laying his hand on the table slowly,
fingers extended to cradle a knife
in his broad palm--the hilt reached his elbow.
He fiddled with it while watching the show.

The art of knife-throwing, so feared in warfare,
in Lithuania was long out of fashion;
only the old practiced the skill with care.
The Warden, in more than one altercation
at the tavern, tried, and none was more skilled
than the Seneschal. It was evident
from his itchy fingers—he had killed
before, and carefully sized up the Count.
Although the youths knew nothing of this threat,
Gervazy paled. Using the bench as shield,
dragging the Count in such a quick retreat,
he rushed through the dense crowd that would not yield.

Like a wolf leaping onto a carcass,
throwing itself blindly into a pack
of dogs intruding on its feast, tearing the mass--
suddenly, amid howls, it looks back,
trembling as it hears a hammering click,

and spots a hunter in back of the hounds,
crouched on one knee, the barrel aimed to strike
the wolf. And then, before the trigger pounds—
ears lowered, tails between legs, off it scurries.
The triumphant dogs, with a howling death-
like screech, nibble the carcass, while the furry
beast, half-dead, snapping jaws and gnashing teeth,
is no longer a threat. Yet with a yelp,
the pack flies off—just so, Gervazy's pose,
so menacing, deters, with no more help
than upraised bench and the fierce glance he throws.
He drags the Count into the alcove's shadows.

“Catch him!” they shouted, confused as they ran;
for there above their heads the Warden appeared,
high in the loft of the ancient organ.
With a crash the lead pipes were fully severed,
and he threatened to drop them to the crowded floor.
But already the guests had left the hall;
the terrified servants scattered with an uproar,
seizing laden platters, they followed the call
of their masters, fleeing the missile-filled air,
leaving behind the plates and silverware.

And who was last to leave this battleground?
Brechalski Protazy endured the onslaught
standing behind the Judge's chair. He found
his courtroom voice useful—as he sought
to make a declaration. He had his bellowing say,
then from the shambles gravely walked away.

There were no casualties amid the carnage,
though benches rocked and tables reeled,
the linen littered and soiled with garbage,
winesoaked—piled like a bloody knight on his shield.
Carcasses of chicken, turkey, and duck
scattered about, as though attacked in rage—
in each plump breast, a silver fork was stuck.

Soon the usual quiet and calm returned,
and darkness enveloped the empty castle,
casting in shadow all the overturned
remnants of this banquet-turned-brawl.
The food lay scattered as in peasant rites,
where departed spirits gather to feast.
Already the attic screech owl invites,

like a wizard, the moonrise in the east,
which drips upon the table a trembling beam,
struggling like a soul from Purgatory.
From basement vaults, as in some horrid dream,
rats leap to the food, gnaw and drink greedily.
In shadowy corners they still remain,
toasting spirits, popping corks of Champagne.

But on the second floor, in chambers known
as the Hall of Mirrors, though all were gone,
the Count stood on the balcony alone,
cooling in the breeze, his coat half on,
draped on his shoulder, tails around his neck,
like some ancient and dark mysterious cape.
Inside the hall, Gervazy paced back
and forth, deep in thought, plans taking shape.
“Pistols,” said the Count, “or swords if they prefer.”
“The castle,” replied the Warden, “and the village—
are yours.”

“Challenge the Uncle and make war
on his nephew and their estate. We should pillage,”
cried out the Count.

“Oh, yes, and seize his land,”
Gervazy shouted. Then he turned and faced
the Count. “It’s time to take things with your hand;
forget about lawsuits, you’ve been disgraced,
just take possession—what’s rightfully yours,
Horeszkos have owned it four-hundred years!
Only a tiny parcel was broken away
during the Targowica Confederacy,
which Soplica still claims to this very day.
Why do you waste your entire legacy
to fund this lawsuit and to punish plunder.
How many times I’ve said, forsake the court!
In ancient times the cannon would thunder.
Make an incursion, yes, we’ll storm the fort;
whoever occupies the land will rule;
win in the field—and in the court you win.
With my *penknife* they’ll soak in bloody pools.
If Maciek will help this flogging begin,
together we’ll punish their heinous sin.”

“Bravo!” replied the Count. “This reminds me
of some Gothic-Sarmatian tale of vengeance,
better than the courts, I do agree.
Together we will cause a disturbance

unknown in Lithuania. For two long years
I've sat watching disputes over borders
between peasants. Now this foray appears
to promise bloodshed. Once some marauders
attacked during a trek in Sicily—
when I was hosted by a certain prince—
and brigands stole his son-in-law, and we
pursued them to their mountain camp entrance,
for their demand of ransom was absurd.
In haste we summoned vassals and servants,
and then attacked. I freed, using my sword,
the captive. Oh, Gervazy, what victory—
returning like a feudal knight to flowers
strewn by common folk, and oh the glory
when the Prince's weeping daughter showers
me with kisses. From the gazette they knew
even before we came back from Palermo,
and the ladies pointed as we passed through.
A romance was published about this show,
The Count and the Mysteries of the Castle
Of Birbante-Roca. Are there dungeons
in this castle?"

"The cellars, once so full,"
replied Gervazy, "are depleted ones.
Soplicas drank your wine."

"My servants,"
added the Count, "We must arm my *jockies*,
summon vassals."

"Let God forbid such nonsense,"
interrupted Gervazy, "they are lackies!
You might as well go plan a raid with peasants.
My Lord, you know nothing of strategy.
Some farmer with whiskers is no defense,
but gentlemen with mustaches and pedigree
can be counted on—so you shouldn't ask
in huts, but in settlements of the gentry—
Dobrzyn, Cietycze, Rzezikow, Ranbanki,
where descendants of knights will do the task,
all to the Horeszko family attached,
each the Soplica's mortal enemy.
I can assemble three-hundred, all mustached,
for now return to your palace quickly;
sleep well, for tomorrow is a great day;
it's late, I hear the cock already crow.
I'll guard the castle, till the dawn I'll stay,
then to the Dobrzyn settlement I'll go."

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At this the Count withdrew from the porch heights.
Before he left he glanced through the embrasure—
and saw a multitude of glowing lights
from the Soplica homestead. “Take your pleasure
while you can,” he exclaimed, “for tomorrow
will be quite dark, while this castle will glow.”

Gervazy settled on the floor, propped
by the wall, as his head fell to his chest.
Onto his scarred, bald pate, moonlight dropped,
and the restless play of his fingers expressed
his grave attempt to plan the upcoming foray.
But the weight of his eyelids grew too great,
and so his head flopped. He began to say
Our Fathers and *Hail Marys*, to abate
his sleep—though strange, dreamlike creatures appeared.
They were his ancient Lords, the Horeszkos,
holding sabres and maces once so feared,
each one approaching with a menacing pose,
twirling a mustache, brandishing a sword
or swinging a mace. A frightened spirit
follows slowly behind, dressed like a Lord,
chest stained bloody, fresh blood dripping near it.
Gervazy crossed himself and with deep sighs—
recognizing his dead master so gory—
tried desperately to exorcise
this ghost, praying for souls in Purgatory.
Once more his eyes shut tight, but his ears rang—
a raid on Korelicz which Rzymsza led.
as though in dream he watched the great harangue;
astride a horse, sword raised above his head,
he charged, his coattails snapping in the wind,
a red-plumed hat over one ear. He charged,
and the ranks on horseback and foot were thinned.
and then into Soplica’s stable he barged
to set him ablaze. Thus, Gervazy kept
this vengeful vision in his mind and slept.

BOOK 6

THE DOBRZYN SETTLEMENT

Warlike preparations for the foray – Protazy’s expedition – Father Robak and the Judge discuss public matters – continuation of Protazy’s fruitless mission – a digression about hemp – the noble’s settlement – description of Maciek Dobrzynski

Imperceptibly, out of the damp dark,
the dawn crept, without its usual red glow,
drifting into day from the night, stark
and barely visible, though begun long ago.
Mist hung above the ground—like a straw roof
above a simple peasant hut. From the east
a white encircling glow furnished proof
the sun had risen, as its rays increased—
to come only when its slumber had ceased.

Following the sky’s example, all is late
on the earth. Cattle trudge out to pasture
interrupting hares that procrastinate
over breakfast. They are usually sure
to return to the forest grove by dawn—
but today, shrouded in mist, they nibble chickweed
or burrow in pairs in the mist-covered lawn,
slowly, as though a holiday decreed,
till lumbering cattle drive them away.

The forest is quiet; a wakened bird
does not sing but shakes a dewy spray
from its feathers, awaiting further word
day has begun, hiding its head in wings.
A stork soon clacks its bill beside a swamp;
dew-drenched crows with gaping beaks are chattering,
a frightful sound foretelling rain and damp
to farmers in the fields already working.

Women were singing their harvesting songs,
tunes monotonous and melancholy
as the rainy day to which they belong—

sadly, the mist absorbs the melody.
Sickles clink in the grain, meadows resound,
a row of clanking mowers cut the rowen;
they whistle after each swath, by the mound
of stacked grain and stop—their scythes to sharpen
and hammer rhythmically. All seem hidden
in fog and mist; and there is just the sound
of sickle, scythe, and song, till work is done.
The bored steward rests on bundles of grain,
turning his head, ignoring the harvest,
to watch the path, then the crossroads again,
where something strange is disturbing his rest.

On highways and crossroads since early dawn,
unusual movement began to reign—
a creaking peasant cart, like a post-chaise drawn
at a gallop, halted a coach in his lane.
Two more drove up with a great creaking rattle
and from a path a messenger races;
across the way a dozen mounts assemble.
and then people scatter from their places.
What does this mean? The steward was bemused:
he stood on the haystack to investigate,
to make inquiries but remained confused.
He called out, but this business would not abate.
In the thick mist he couldn't identify
the riders like angry spirits flashing by.
He heard the dull thud of hooves and stranger yet
The clanging of cutlasses, a frightening ring,
for though Lithuania's peace was not upset,
rumors of war were rife and terrifying.
Such talk--the French, Napoleon, Dombrowski!
Were these horsemen armed harbingers of war?
The steward rushed to the Judge with his theory,
hoping to learn from his visit much more.

In the Soplcia manor guests awoke,
Gloomy and sad after yesterday's brawl.
The Seneschal's daughter hoped to evoke
a brighter mood, and to cure this common gall,
suggested that the ladies tell fortunes,
the men play cards, but neither paid attention,
sitting in corners quietly past noon.
Men smoked pipes, women knitted in isolation,
even the flies were dozing in silence.

The Seneschal threw down his fly swatter.
Bored with lack of talk, he joined the servants,
preferring the housekeeper's loud chatter
or the cook who used crude threats to praise
his helpers. The monotonous motion
of roasts on the spit, turning as they braised,
was soporific, and thus a sleeping potion.

Since dawn the Judge was in his room, writing.
Since dawn Protazy had been waiting below
his window, on a turf bench. He was biding
his time, until the Judge would come and show
the finished *Summons* which he would then read out.
Against the Count there was a grave complaint:
the Count had wounded his honor, and about
his abusive words, well, they needed restraint.
Gervazy was guilty of vicious attack,
and both had made threats of equal violence.
So in order to win the court costs back,
before sunset the summons had to be sent,
served with both parties present, spoken aloud.
Protazy the Apparitor appeared quite grave,
listening with care, his demeanor quite proud,
though the writ that he was now holding gave
him such pleasure he'd leap over the gate—
so much could a lawsuit rejuvenate!

He thought how he served writs many years back,
returning quite bruised but also well paid.
Just like a soldier who with gun and pack
spent a lifetime waging war but now has stayed
in a hospital for too many years,
a bed-ridden invalid in his old age—
If distant drum or trumpet he might hear,
dragging himself from bed he yells in rage,
"Kill the Moscovite dog!" He leaps to the hall,
wooden leg clunking; he runs, despite his age,
so fast attendants can't catch him at all.

Protazy rushed to don his Court Apparitor's
costume, though he reserved his tunic and robber
for the pomp and ceremony for legal wars.
For this journey he dressed in different mode—
tight riding breeches and short overcoat,
the top trimmed with buttons and tails long enough
to be tucked under or let loose about

the knees. His hat had earflaps, for weather rough
or rainy, tied with a string about the peak.
Thus attired he took his staff and set out
on foot, for an Apparitor is no meek
messenger, but like a spy with news about
an upcoming battle. He must be wise
and hide in various costume or disguise.

Protazy knew enough to rush off fast;
the summons would not delight for long;
in Soplica manor the plan did not last.
While the Judge wondered if his tack was wrong,
Father Robak broke in, clearly distressed.
“Judge,” he said, “This aunt is a nuisance
and a scatterbrain. Zosia’s circumstance
was grave. When she was orphaned, Jacek decreed
that Telimena should raise her, for he heard
she was a decent person. What better deed
than to entrust the child to her—he’d rest assured.
But now I see that she stirs up trouble,
causes intrigue, first with Tadeusz flirting
and then the Count! Perhaps she wants a double
affair—it’s clear we’ll all end up hurting.
We must get rid of her before it is too late;
people will gossip, destroy reputations,
behavior will surely disintegrate,
quarrels might thwart your negotiations.”

“Negotiations!” the Judge blurted out.
“They’re finished, broken off, once and for all!”
“What?” interrupted the Priest, “is this about?”
“No fault of mine,” replied the Judge, “The trial
will reveal the Count ‘s a pompous fool
who takes pleasure in sowing discord, while
Gervazy is no better than a scoundrel.
Too bad, dear Monk, you weren’t at dinner,
you might have witnessed the Count’s cruel insults.”

“Why?” shouted Robak, as though damning a sinner,
“When you loiter in ruins, expect such results.
I can’t stand the castle, never set foot.
But not another brawl—surely punishment
from God. It will ruin the lawsuit.
These brawls make tedious entertainment;
I’ve halted such folly before, but though
I have more pressing matters, the factions

I'll reconcile."

"You will? Well you can go
to Hell with your reconciliations!
Look at this monk, so graciously accepted—
he'd lead me by the nose and take my seat.
You should know that Soplicas rejected
many attempts at compromise. We've sued
a man in court and seen the case drag on
for six generations. And still we pursued.
I've had enough of your foolish opinion.
So far the High Court has three times convened,
from this day on, no compromise, none!"
Stamping both feet he paced and then he screamed,
"After yesterday's most gracious action
he must beg my pardon or fight a duel."
"But Judge, what if Jacek should learn of this—
He'd die of despair. Are Soplicas so cruel?
Haven't they caused the castle enough mischief?
This tragic event—I don't wish to mention,
You must know that a large portion of land
was delivered into Soplica's hand
by the Targowica Confederation.
And then, Jacek, repenting, gave his word,
under absolution, to restore
the claim. He made the orphan child his ward—
this Horeszko girl, educated her
and provided, hoping that she might marry
Tadeusz—and thus repair this rupture,
unite again two clans and end the story
happily, releasing her land from capture.

"What do I care?" cried out the Judge, "My land!
It's been so long since Jacek last was seen,
I barely knew about his Cossack band.
While he caroused—a life you now demean—
I read the law at a Jesuit school
and then to a Governor became apprenticed.
I inherited his estate and rule.
Zosia came along, nothing was missed,
her upbringing and welfare—but enough!
These fairy tales quickly become weary.
And now the Count proceeds to make things rough.
What makes him stake his claims on this dreary
Castle? Barely an heir to the Horezko crown—
the tenth part of *kisiel*, so watered down.
For this insult must I apologize?"

“Of course you must do this,” replied the Priest,
“There are reasons and you must realize
that though Jacek first wished his son released
to the army, he has changed his command—
in Lithuania he is to stay.
On what ground does this intercession stand?
He’ll serve the nation much better this way.
Surely you’ve heard this talk about a war;
you’ve heard my tidings, now the time is here.
This war will let our nation live once more;
it can’t be avoided, the troops are near.
When I arrived on my secret mission--
along the Nieman troops already camped,
armies assembled by Napoleon
such as no man has seen, or ever tramped
through the annals of history. Beside
the French, the whole Polish army led by
Dombrowski and Jozef, our very pride.
Napoleon will let white eagles fly
across the Nieman to the other shore.”

Removing his glasses, the Judge now gazed
hard at the monk, his thoughts confused, unsure.
He sighed deeply as his eyes became glazed
with tears; he grabbed the monk with all his might.
“Robak!” he shouted, “This cannot be believed.”
Twice he repeated, still holding him tight,
“How many times have we now been deceived?
They say Napoleon is on his way,
yet we are still waiting. He’s in the Kingdom—
defeated the Prussians like child’s play.
And what’s he done but gone to seek peace from
Tilsit. If only this were not deception.”
“It’s true,” cried Robak, “true as God’s in heaven.”
“Your mouth should be praised for this declaration,”
exclaimed the Judge, waving, “Christ has risen!
This secret mission I will not forget,
nor will your monastery—two hundred
of my finest sheep your order will get.
Or take my chestnut mare or bay instead,
to harness to your cart. Ask me today
for anything; today I won’t refuse.
But concerning the Count, don’t try to sway;
let me correct his harm and his abuse.”

The priest wrung his hands in astonishment.

He stared straight at the Judge and shrugged his shoulders.
“Napoleon will come and this event
will make the world tremble! Don’t be still as boulders,
fretting this lawsuit. While he’s ready to bring
freedom to Lithuania, you react
calmly folding your hands.”

“What are you saying?”

cried out the Judge.

“That now’s the time to act,”
replied the monk. “These words should not surprise.
Just listen to your heart; if there’s a drop
Of Soplica blood in your veins, let it rise.
Consider this: the Moscovite can’t stop
the French if we support them in this war.
The Lithuanian warhorse rears back;
and the howl of the Sarmogatian bear;
a thousand men can start a rear attack,
or half that many. Then like wildfire
the uprising will spread. If we could seize
the Moscovite standard—how we’ll inspire
our countrymen. And how all this will please
Napoleon, for when he sees our lances
advance, he’ll ask what kind of army now appears.
Insurgents! We’ll shout, as the Emperor glances
at our ranks, *Lithuanian volunteers!*
And under whose command? We will reply,
Judge Soplica! Who would be bold enough
to recall Targowica’s shame and folly.
As long as Ponary stands and the rough
waters of the Nieman flow, the name
Soplica will be praised. Even grandchildren
and their children will share Jagiello’s fame.
People will proudly point to them again--
their ancestors began the Insurrection.”

To this the Judge replied, “For such acclaim
I care very little; for people’s talk
not at all, as God’s my witness, the blame
for my brother’s sins can no longer stalk
me. In politics I rarely meddle,
my duties are performed, my land’s well-plowed;
yet I’m a faithful Pole and would not settle
for treason. I’d gladly remove this shroud
of shame from my homeland; I’d give my life.
Though with the sword I never felt at ease,
a few have felt the sharp tip of my knife.

In the time of the last Polish Assemblies,
the Buzwik brothers I challenged and injured...
Enough of my past, now what is your plan?
To ride at once to battle? Rest assured,
musketeers and every able-bodied man.
Gunpowder's stored and in the Rectory,
small cannon that the parish priest still hides.
I can recall how Jankiel told the story,
how from Konigsberg, concealed beneath some hides,
he smuggled in a case of points for lances
for times like this. And swords will not be lacking,
nor nobles on horseback to make advances.
With my nephew I'll lead the attacking.

“Oh Polish blood,” cried out the Bernardine,
springing to the Judge with arms outstretched,
“a true Soplica whom God will ordain
to expiate the sins of his wretched
vagabond brother. You have had my respect
always, yet now I love you as a brother.
We shall prepare, yes, but do not expect
to set out soon; I'll indicate rather
the time and place. The Tsar has sent envoys
to Napoleon to negotiate peace,
and war is undeclared, though he deploys
his troops, so these peace talks are soon to cease.
Prince Jozef heard from the Frenchman Bignon,
a member of the Imperial Council,
there will be war—so on this scouting mission
he sent me to the Lithuanian people
to announce to the advancing Napoleon
they wish to join the divided Kingdom,
to state the claim that Poland be restored.
Now is the time to reconcile the Count;
if he's eccentric, well, that means he's bored;
he's young and patriotic, such fools amount
to much in revolution—they are needed.
I know firsthand that without fools and cranks
and hotheads, very few would have succeeded.
They must be honest, though, and in the ranks
beneath a clever man. The Count has wealth
and over nobles he has vast influence;
When he toasts the whole district drinks his health;
they'll do his bidding, praising his good sense.
He needs to be informed.”

“Before he's swarmed

by followers,” replied the Judge, “First go and ask if he’s ready to come unarmed to beg my pardon. Let him begin to show respect befitting my office and age. This lawsuit, though, the court will still engage.”

The monk hopped on a coach hitched by the fence; his whip stung the horse, reins tickled its sides-- into the mist, his quick disappearance almost complete, as through the fog he rides. Like a vulture soaring above a cloud, his dark hood showed above the misty shroud.

The Court Apparitor had long ago arrived at the Count’s home, and like a cunning fox lured by the scent of bacon, yet not deprived of its innate sense of caution, locks its step, then runs, then sits, raising its brush, Waving, fanning the scent to its nostril; knowing the hunter’s trick, it does not rush to take the prize, but sniffs for poison that might kill. Protazy crossed the road, went through the hay, circled the manor house, twirling his staff, pretending to follow a cow astray. He stood by the garden, forgetting the calf, then maneuvered through parted plants, crouched and lunged as though to trap a corncrake. Reaching the fence he vaulted—and into the hemp he plunged.

Within this thicket, so fragrant and dense, surrounding the manor, both man and beast find refuge. Often a hare has the good sense, caught in the cabbage, to continue his feast in the hemp, safer than in the bushes, for into this thicket, a hound rarely rushes, afraid of its overpowering odor. And sometimes a servant, fleeing the lash or fist, hides from the wrath of his master. Or some peasant recruit might dive with a crash into the hemp, evading his sergeant. In times of war, foray or confiscations, a *hare’s nest* in the hemp by both factions was greatly valued for the thicket went up to the manor wall in front, and back to fields of hops. Thus it offered excellent cover from which to retreat or attack.

Though Protazy was brave, he still had fear,
recalling, amid the leaves, adventures
serving writs, the danger very clear,
the hemp itself witness to many ventures.
Once he summoned the noble Dzindolet,
who, pulling a pistol from his breast, led
him under a table, forcing him to sit,
till, barking like dog, he recanted
the summons--then into the hemp he fled.
Later Wolodkowicz, proud and insolent,
who violated tribunals and disrupted
District Assemblies, refused to relent
when handed the writ from the messenger—
tearing it to shreds, posting a guard with a club,
holding to Protazy's head a rapier.
“I'll cut you down to size, unless you rub
your nose in those papers.” So pretending
to chew, he crept to the window with those crumbs
and leaped into the hemp, his life defending.

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By now it was no longer the custom
in Lithuania to greet a summons
with sword or lash . Sometimes harsh invective
met the Apparitor—a scolding that stuns
but does not injure. Yet we must forgive
Protazy's fear, not knowing things had changed,
having retired, though very much prepared
to serve the court again, if it were arranged.
The Judge, though, refused his requests out of regard
for his old age, and yet it was not pity
this time that sent Protazy but necessity.

Once in the hemp, Protazy was vigilant.
All was silent as he parted a stalk;
like a swimmer he plunged with head bent,
surfacing so he could catch any talk.
But when he reached the large window casement,
he heard and saw nothing. Entering the hall,
a bit fearful, for it was utterly silent
and only his own shadow moved across the wall.
So Protazy opened the door and read
aloud the proclamation. Something swished
behind him—and his heart fluttered with dread.
About to flee—until a shrouded head
peered though the door. Robak! Both were astonished.

Evidently the Count had departed
in such great haste along with his household,
he left the door unlocked. He had started
to arm himself: double-barrels guns had rolled
across the floor by carbines and ramrods,
and to repair rifles, some locksmith's tools.
Gunpowder and paper and cartridge pods
were strewn about. Intruders were not fools
believing that the Count prepared to hunt—
a saber with a hilt that had been chipped
and a beltless scabbard rusted in front.
While the Count's household was being equipped,
these were rejected with the old weapons
ransacked from the ancient armory.
Robak surveyed—along with antique guns,
the harquebus and epee of history.
Then he searched in the farmhouse for a servant,
Discovering two old peasant women
who told how the master and household went,
a fighting force on the road to Dobrzyn.

The Dobrzyn settlement was widely known
in Lithuania for male courage
and female beauty; it had formerly grown
to a mighty and populous assemblage,
and when King Sobieski summoned the militia,
six-hundred armed nobles they recruited,
nore than any hamlet in Lithuania.
Now numbers had decreased, fortunes looted,
they no longer frequented lordly manors,
supplied the army, organized forays,
attended District Assemblies with banners;
long gone were their carefree and easy days.

They worked the land themselves like mere peasants,
but not wearing a peasant homespun coat;
they wore white robes, black trim, and for events
such as Saints Days, a Polish noble's cloak.
Even the poorest lady changed her dress,
wearing percale or drilling, and through the heather
to graze cattle, they walked upon the grass
not in bark moccasins but boots of leather.
And to protect their hands they took such care
when reaping grain or spinning wool—gloves they'd wear.

The Dobrzynskis differed from their countrymen. Besides speaking in their own dialect, they seemed to be pure-blooded Mazovian: black hair, blue eyes, broad foreheads held erect, and aquiline noses. From Mazovia near Warsaw they had come, keeping their ways though four centuries they'd lived in Lithuania, preserving the old speech, practicing always the old customs. When christening a son, after their patron saint they had it named: Saint Bartholomew or Matthew. So one child of Mathew Bartholomew claimed, while Bartholomew's son had to be Matthew. Kachna or Maryna girls were baptized, so to avoid the confusion that grew, nicknames for both men and women were prized, deriving from virtues or faults, and often a man had more than one, sign of respect or contempt bestowed by his countrymen. Sometimes he'd have one name in Dobrzyn, except a nearby town might call him by another. Soon all nobles started to name each other, imitating this or that Dobrzynski-- nicknames and sobriquets became the fashion. And yet few know that this custom began out of necessity not imitation.

So Matthew Dobrzynski, the Partriarch of the family, was known as *Steeplecock*, until seventeen-seventy-four, a dark year, when he was given the name, *Hip-lock*. At home he was the *Rabbit King* we're told; among Lithuanians, *Maciek the Bold*.

Just as Maciek ruled over his family, his home between the tavern and the church ruled the village, although it was rarely visited, almost in shambles. Some birch trees grew freely in the vegetable patch, and the garden was missing gate and fence. Yet in the village his house had no match; it was handsome, spacious, and by the entrance it had a living room built out of brick. In back, granary, barn, cowshed, and stalls were bunched together—not even a stick could fit between the buildings' rotting walls.

The roofs glistened as though made of green tin,
from moss and grass which grew as in a meadow.
Along the roof thatch was a hanging garden:
nettle, red crocus, mullen, and a row
of colorful tassels of mercury.
Swallows built nests in the windows, the loft
had dovecotes, and by the entrance a flurry
of rabbits hopped and burrowed in the soft
turf. In short, the house seemed unfit for men,
more like a bird coop or a rabbit warren.

Yet long ago it had been fortified,
and evidence of great onslaughts sustained
was all around. In the deep grass, beside
the gate an iron cannonball remained,
large as a child's head, back from the time
of the Swedish invasions. On the path
among wormwood and weeds, the border line,
a dozen old crosses of thin wood lath
rose from unhallowed ground—this a clear sign
they buried in great haste their fallen dead.
The house and granary walls, in decline,
were peppered from top to bottom with lead.
The spots looked like swarming insects alive,
bullets in the center—bees in a hive.

The hooks and latches at every door front
were chopped off or bore the mark of a blade;
surely back in the time of King Zygmunt,
soldiers tested how well their swords were made,
trying to slice the head off of a nail
or cleave a hook without notching the blade.
Dobrzynski's Coat of Arms, lacking detail,
mostly hidden by uninvited guests—
above the door, swallows had built their nests.

The carriage house and stables were equipped
like an old arsenal. Four large helmets,
that once rested on soldiers' brows, were stripped
of former glory, hanging on ceiling struts,
where doves, Venus' birds, cooed and fed their brood.
Chain mail was strung above the feeding bin;
an armor plate, propped on a piece of wood,
served as a chute where some youth shoveled in
clover to the colts. Back in the kitchen
were sabers, ruined by some impious cook,

who mistakenly placed them in the oven.
That same servant now takes down from a hook
a Turkish horse's tail, seized at Vienna;
with it she dusts the mill—and banishes
Mars, securing spots for Flora, Pomona,
And Vertumnus, as the God of War vanishes.
Ceres (and her domestic brood) now rules
the Dobrzynski stable, yard, and homestead—
yet soon these goddesses will yield their tools,
when Mars returns to claim this battered shed.

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At dawn a mounted messenger appeared
in Dobrzyn, rushing round from hut to hut,
attempting to arouse the sleeping herd,
which formed into a crowd. Doors opened and shut,
shouts came from the tavern, the priest lit candles,
and everyone questioned what this all meant.
Old men held counsels, youths prepared saddles,
women steadied horses as news was sent.
Young boys, eager to fight, loitered apart,
knowing neither cause nor opponent,
only that they were too young to take part.
A long, tumultuous, debate ensued
ending in harsh words; so rather than wreck
the tavern, they finally reluctantly agreed
to bring the matter to Father Maciek.

Maciek had lived for more than seventy years,
a short, sprightly man, a Bar Confederate—
how well his enemies recall their fears
when he would wield his damascened blade,
which hacked to pieces pike and bayonet,
which he modestly named his *Little Rose*.
He hailed the King as a Confederate;
the Lithuanian Treasurer opposed,
until the King in Targowica betrayed
them—and Maciek responded by switching
from one side to the other. Always he swayed,
which earned him his nickname—for following
prevailing political winds like a weathervane—
Steeplecock. No sense trying to probe
reasons; perhaps he saw war as a game,
or victorious on one side, he rode
to the other. Or perhaps he was shrewd
in politics; or discerning the spirit
of the times, he dispassionately viewed

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the future. He never sought fame or profit,
never supported any Moscovite,
and simply seeing a Russian would fill
him with rage. Yet since the tragic night
of Poland's partition, his sword was still.
Like a bear sucking its paw in the forest,
he sat at home brooding and depressed.

He waged war last in Vilno with Oginski,
working miracles with his *Little Rose*,
serving in the army of Jaskinski.
We know that when the Vistula once froze,
from the ramparts of Praga he'd leapt
to defend Pan Pocij, who'd been abandoned
below with twenty-three wounds. He kept
him alive while the country mourned and condemned
their death--when they returned, surprised to live,
pricked full of holes as a kitchen sieve.
Pan Pocij was a man of great honor;
when the war ended he tried to reward
Maciek generously for his valor:
a farm with five houses for life were offered,
along with ten-thousand *zloty* a year.
Maciek quickly refused, "Let Pocij remain
in Maciek's debt, not Maciek from Pocij gain."
The offer displeased him, it was quite clear—
returning home he rushed to work his land.
He built beehives, mixed medicines for cattle,
sent partridges, trapped in snares or else by hand,
to market, and only with wild game did battle.

In Dobrzyn there were many wise old men
well-versed in Latin, who had practiced law.
Though Maciek was by far the poorest one,
He was the most venerated, for they saw
him not only as a skillful swordsman,
but also a wise man with sound judgment
who knew the country's history, tradition
of the family, the law, and farm management.
Also the secrets of hunting and curing,
and it was even thought (though the priest denies)
he had knowledge of supernatural things.
It was certain he predicted a change in the skies
more often than the farming almanac.
No wonder, then, that to begin sowing,
or dispatch a river barge and send it back,

or reap grain with the least wind blowing,
or litigate in court or compromise,
nothing was done that Maciek didn't advise.

He never sought to have such influence,
but did his best attempting to upstage
callers, often chiding them, in defense,
shoving them out the door in silent rage.
He rarely dispensed advice; when he did,
only in matters of extreme importance,
quarrels or court cases. Even then, he'd rid
himself of what he had to say in few words.
And yet it was a simple decision
that Maciek should ride, wielding his sword,
at the very head of the expedition.

Through the deserted yard the old man walked,
humming the song, *When morning wakes to dawn*, 78
pleased the sky was clearing, though fog still stalked
along the ground, while over the grassy lawn.
The wind unfurled its palms, to stroke the mist,
to smooth and spread it across the pastures.
The sun sent down thousands of its shiniest
beams, which pierced the mist with a swarm of colors:
silver, gold, and red. Like an ancient craftsman
in Sluck, spreading the threads to make a belt, 79
while a girl at the base of the loom spins
the silk, to create on top of the felt,
purple and gold patterns of bright flowers,
the wind spreads the mist which the sun embroiders.

Maciek finished his prayers and warmed himself,
already rushing about doing his chores;
he brings a bundle of greens from the shelf
and sets it by the house. Whistling, he implores
the rabbits to feed. Suddenly, they unsettle,
tiny heads pop up from under the ground,
each long white ear like a narcissus petal,
each glittering eye like a ruby found
on the turf. The rabbits sit up cautiously,
till the entire white and fluffy flock, lured
by the cabbage leaves on the old man's knee,
hop on his legs, his shoulders, their feast ensured.
Maciek himself, white as their glistening fur,
strokes them with one hand; with the other he throws
some millet, stored in his cap. With a great stir,

from the rooftops, swoop down the hungry sparrows.

But while Maciek was enjoying the feast,
the rabbits vanished into their burrow,
and scattering sparrows let out a screech,
as the envoys arrived and stood in a row.
They greeted Maciek, bowed to him deeply:
“Let Jesus Christ be praised.”

“For ever and ever,”

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replied the old man, who listened carefully.
Sensing the import, he motioned them over,
inviting them into his house to explain.
While the men sat on a bench in silence,
the envoy related his mission again.

Outside the crowd of nobles became more dense—
almost all the Dobrzynskis and neighbors
from surrounding settlements, armed and unarmed.
In wagons and carts, in groups of twos or fours,
on foot, on horseback, together they swarmed
to Maciek’s house, halting their carts and tying
their nags to the garden birches. Curious,
they encircled the hut overflowing,
crowding the door to catch the furious
debate inside. Others tried their best
to hear, their ears against the windows pressed.

So everyone awaited Maciek’s verdict,
though he neither moved his head nor spoke a word,
but with his right hand repeatedly picked
his belt as if he hoped to find a sword.
Since the Partition, he’d hung up his saber,
though from habit, his hand went to his hip
at mention of Moscow, when he’d remember
how easily his *Little Rose* would slip
from its scabbard. Realizing it was gone,
he raised his head as all paid rapt attention;
what disappointment when they saw him frown
and drop his head right to his chest, the tension
broken only when his jaw fell open,
And with a slow emphatic pronunciation,
answered, “By whom was this message spoken?
Where are the French and where’s Napoleon?
Has war with Moscow finally been declared?
Where and what pretext? How large an army?
Foot soldiers? Cavalries?” He simply stared.

The crowd grew silent; each man turned to see his neighbors' reaction. Bartek the Prussian was first to speak: "I know these are not lies. Ask the monk, because this information comes from him. Let's send some trusted spies across the border, while we arm the neighbors. Let's proceed cautiously, for I'm afraid the Moscovites might learn of our labors, and our most careful plans might be betrayed."

"So we should wait? Debate? Procrastinate?" broke in another Maciek, known as *Baptist*, from the club, big as the post of a gate, which he carried, whose message none could resist. He stood, leaning on it, propping his chin. "To wait, procrastinate till we agree.... in the end to flee? I never was in Prussia, but this Konigsberg sensibility is good for Prussians, but it's bad for Poles. Nobles prefer to fight, to grab our *Baptizers* rather than die. Let those with loftier goals wait for the monk. We are not sympathizers—what is Robak to me; he'd have us worm our way to Moscow, sending spies to nibble. Explore the matter—hah! Hide from the storm? Bloodhounds follow the scent into the stubble, and monks collect alms—but we shall baptize!" He touched his club—the crowd loved his cries.

BOOK 7

CONSULTATION

Advice of Bartek, known as the Prussian – martial advice of Maciek the Baptist – political argument of Pan Buchman – Jankiel urges harmony, cut-off by the Pen-Knife – the matter of Gervazy, which reveals the results of parliamentary eloquence – protest of old Maciek – sudden arrival of military reinforcements disrupts the council – Down with Soplica!

Bartek the Deputy stated his case.
He'd often gone to Konigsberg by raft—
his family called him *Prussian* to his face
in jest, and when he would complain, they laughed
heartily, for he loved to talk about Prussians.
Bartek, already well advanced in age,
having journeyed about in many nations,
faithful reader of gazettes, with knowledge
of politics that he was eager to impart:
“It isn't wise to turn them down, Pan Maciek;
don't despise the French, for they know well the art
of war, they are a warlike race. I'd bet
on them, sure as a hand of four aces.
Not since Kosciuszko have we been rewarded
with genius like Napoleon in these places.
Once when the French, the Warta River forded,
way back in '06, when I had business
in Danzig, I remember, for I went
to visit kin in Poznan for a rest.
There was a man, who heads his regiment—
Pan Jozef Grabowski, who lived nearby;
we often went hunting for small game.
Wielkopolska was peaceful then, like we
maintain in Lithuania, until news came
of the terrible battle. A messenger
rushed from Pan Towden, Grabowski grabbed the note
and shouted, “So now we are out of danger!
At Jena, the Prussian forces they smote,
The victory is ours.” So I dismounted,
fell to my knees and prayed. Then we rode back
to the city, as though we had discounted
or never learned the outcome of the attack.

The Prussian governor, and each Hofrath
and each commissioner—all similar trash—
bowed deeply to us, trembled and turned pale,
just like the cockroach we call *Prussian*,
when boiling water is poured on its tail.
We laughed and modestly raised the question
about Jena, which struck them with such fear,
astonished that we knew of their defeat.
“Ach, herri Got!” they shout then disappear
with heads hanging, rushing to the street
in such a mad scramble. Soon all the roads
in Wielkopolska are full of fleeing
Germans, crawling like ants under their load—
carts that they call wagons and drays, dragging.
Men and women followed with pipes and teapots,
crates and feather bedding. They scuttled away
nervously, as though they ran from rifle shots.
Then we decided that we wanted to play
with the Germans, to upset their retreat,
to pummel the Governor and tear the chops
off the Hofraths—the officers unseat.
Only General Dombrowski stops
our fun, entering Poznan with the command
straight from the Emperor—Insurrection!
And so in just one week, throughout the land,
Prussians were taught a serious lesson.
Couldn’t the same be done, turning the trick
against the Moscovites in our nation?
The only Russians left would be the sick
or deserting; let *them* face Napoleon,
let *them* pick a bone with Bonaparte,
For whom warfare is not a joke but art.
The greatest hero the world could ever bring;
what do you think, Maciek, our rabbit-king?”

The Baptist’s side was supported by Bartek,
known as *Razor*, for his thin blade, and Maciek,
known as *Bucket*, for the musket he owned,
its muzzle so wide a dozen bullets
flowed in a single torrent. Both intoned:
“Vivat the Baptist!” shrieking like pullets.
The Prussian tired to speak, but the turmoil
almost drowned his words, “The Prussians are cowards;
let them hide in the monk’s cowl if they’re so loyal.”

Maciek raised his head, looking towards

the Prussian. The chatter began to cease.
“Don’t scoff at Robak; he’s a cunning fox,
that little worm has gnawed a larger piece
of fruit than you—beware of his alms-box.
I saw him once, and with no hesitation,
I recognized the type of bird he was;
he left, afraid I’d hear his confession.
If he’s the source, we’d better all beware,
he’s more a priest of satan and we can’t
trust him—he’d lead us to our death, without a care.
So why have you come? And what do you want?”

“War!” they shouted. “And whom will you fight?”
asked Maciek. “War against the Moscovite!”

Bartek the Prussian wanted to be heard;
He raised his voice to a penetrating shrill,
until the agitated crowd appeared
To notice. As he bowed they were quite still.
“I want to fight,” he said, pounding his chest,
“though I have no bludgeon, I have a pole
from a river barge—which I once blessed
four Prussians trying to drown my drunken soul
in the Pregel River.”

“And a good thing,”
said Bartek the Baptist.

“It’s good to baptize,”
said the Prussian, “but shouldn’t we be making
plans? What should we say to the world’s replies?
How to persuade the people all to follow?
Where should they go, when even we don’t know?
Gentlemen, what we need are keen judgments;
What we need is orderly deliberation.
If you want war, let’s start with the arrangements.
Should we first form a confederation—
but where and under whose leadership?
In Wielkopolska it happened that way;
Germans retreated from our grip,
and what did we do? On that very day,
we formed a secret council, then we armed
the nobles along with a company
of peasants. Yes, the Germans soon were harmed,
but we awaited orders from Dombrowski.”

“Let me be heard,” yelled a commissioner
from Kleck, young and handsomely attired,

like a German and named Buchman; however,
he was a Pole, in Poland he was sired.
No one was sure if he had noble blood,
but none questioned and all gave him respect,
for he served a great magnate, was a good
patriot, full of learning. He would inspect
foreign books for knowledge of agriculture
and conduct the business of the estate
with diligence no one dared to censure.
And politics was something he'd debate,
expressing himself with much eloquence.
And so, when he began his grave discourse,
repeating his plea, "Let there be silence,"
he cleared his throat, his lips became the source
of reasoned and harmonious phrases.
"My predecessors have spoken quite well;
they've touched on all the principle phases,
they've raised the discourse to a high level.
My current task is just to stoke the fire,
to keep these pertinent ideas burning,
to reconcile this contradictory ire.
And now, to these parts, I shall be turning—
since the divide has already been made,
I will delineate. Why undertake
this insurrection? Do not feel betrayed,
I ask this vital question for your sake.
And then, of course, that nagging question
of revolutionary authority,
for this division is a proper one.
Consider now both parts—please allow me
to reverse the order of our consideration,
and start to analyze authority.
In the history of mankind, each nation
began as savage tribes without unity,
scattered in forests and joining together
for common defense. Each individual
must sacrifice his freedom for the better
of the entire group. This alone can fuel
the first formation of society;
it is the spring, the source from which law flows.
Government—a covenant, which men decree,
and not, as wrongly thought, something that grows
from divine will. It is a social contract—
division of authority a fact.

Old Maciek asked, "Are these contracts of yours

from Kiev or Minsk, or the Babin government?
Pan Bachman, if God has sent us Tsars
or the devil has, that is not important.
Just show us how we can relieve our torment.”

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“Enough!” the Baptist yelled, “If I could leap
upon the throne and with my *baptizer*
drench the Tsar, there’d be no need to keep
discussing contracts with this orator,
who’d let the Orthodox Bishops revive
him with Beelzebub’s might. And there’s the rub—
the more we talk the more we let him live;
the Tsar would die from my baptizing club.”

“Excellent!” screamed Bartek the Razor, leaving
the Baptist’s side for Maciek’s, back and forth
like a shuttle across a loom weaving.
“*Birch-rod* and bludgeon together are worth
a whole army. So please let us agree,
and quickly we’ll splinter the Moscovites.
I’ll take my orders from the *Birch-rod* army.”

“Orders for parades or funeral rites,
that’s all you’ll get,” interrupted the Baptist.
“Our commands back in the Kovno brigade
were short and sweet—“Strike terror and resist
fear! Never Surrender. Brandish your blade.”
“So,” screeched the Razor, “now it’s all quite clear,
why waste ink writing our confederacy?
Maciek’s our Marshall, when his sword appears,
then we’ll have our proper authority.”

“Long live the Steeplecock,” the Baptist shouted.
“With baptizers the Tsar will soon be routed!”

But in each corner, a murmur arose;
though the center was calm, a division
was evident, so shouting, Buchman rose:
“I refuse to give my authorization!”
Soon someone else cried out, “That is vetoed.”
from the corner came the cry of “Second,”
as Skoluba with his gruff voice bellowed,
“What’s this—to Maciek’s house we are beckoned,
called together as free-born noblemen,
deprived of our God-given right to *veto*,
invited by the Horeszko Warden,

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who promised that great things would soon follow,
things important not only to Dobezynskis,
the whole district and the entire nation.
Robak explained his esoteric decrees,
which of us can understand his allusion?
Now we've convened from all over the district,
two-hundred men from village, town and city,
yet our freedom is something you'd restrict.
Let's vote and exercise equality."

Hearing this, two Terujewiczes and four
Sypulkowskis and three Mickiewiczes cried out:
"Vivat equality!" Amid the roar,
Buchman, on one side, tried to shout:
"If you vote *yes* it will be our downfall."
To which the Baptist answered, "I doubt it."
Maciek the Steeplecock will be our Marshall;
hand him the staff." Dobrzynskis then shouted,
"accept it please." Others called their vetoes,
and it was clear the council was divided
in two factions—opposing cries arose,
and in the end, nothing was declared.

In the center, Maciek was mute;
of all the heads, his was motionless.
The Baptist was attempting to refute
the latest motion, seeming to caress
his club—his head resting upon the knob,
looking like a pumpkin on a pole.
Swaying from side to side, he told the mob:
"Baptize!" The Razor then resumed his role
of shuttlecock, crazily rushing about
from Maciek's bench, to where the Baptist sat.
The Bucket paced across the room to shout
at dissenting nobles, to tell them that
they must agree with all the Dobrzynskis.
One yelled, "To shave," another, "To drench,"
as the level of furor did increase
Maciek's jaw clearly began to clench.

A full-fledged shouting match was not postponed;
for more than ten minutes the din continued;
then all at once a flashing pole was raised—
a rapier, long and broad, with both sides honed,
its Nuremburg handiwork always praised,
as all admired its well-forged cutting blade,

Wondering whose it was, they settled down,
but quickly guessed—their fears clearly allayed—
“*Penknife*, long live the *Penknife* of renown!
Vivat Rembajlo, the crest upon his coat,
long live the notched-head Milord, the *Half-Goat!*”

Gervazy squeezed himself through the large crowd,
his *Penknife* raised. He then lowered the tip
to show respect, as Maciek watched and bowed.
“*Penknife* yields to “*Little Rose’s* grip.
Fellow nobles, Dobrzynskis—no advice,
I will simply repeat why we’re all here,
whatever course of action you devise.
You’ve heard the rumors flying through the air—
we all expect magnificent events.
Father Robak explained; do you all know?”
“We know,” they shouted.

“So you must now sense
that words are not enough.” He told them how,
as Buchman glanced sharply: “Well, is that true?”
“True!” They replied.

“The Emperor will advance
from one side, and then what will the Tsar do?
Of course, from the other—it’s just a dance
between monarchs, to music that’s martial.
Do we just sit and wait? Or do we let
the strong strangle the strong, without the small
strangling the small? Or rather do we set
our sights on bringing the small rascals down?
If we’d just slash, the Commonwealth would thrive—
is this not true!” Gervazy showed his frown.
“True!” they replied with such insistent drive,
it seemed they read from a missal. “It’s true,”
the Baptist said. “I’m ready to baptize.”
“And I—to shave,” the Razor added, too.
“But let’s agree on how to win the prize,”
the Bucket said politely. “Who commands,
the Baptist or Maciek?” But he was interrupted
by Buchman: “Will you fools lower your hands;
let the Warden resume what you’ve disrupted.”

“Of course,” said the Warden, “follow the old;
only great men should ponder such great things,
Lords and Senators, Deputies, their fold—
such things, Milords, in Krakow, are for kings,
or Warsaw, not for us in these back woods.

An act of federation is no comment
chalked on a chimney, not a bill for goods
sent on a barge, but fine words on parchment.
Poland has scribes; it's not our job to write,
a custom so honorable and old.
My task is to use my *Penknife* to fight,
to whittle."

"Mine to drench," the Baptist growled.
"To bore with my sharp awl—my favorite labor,"
shouted Bartek the *Awl*, drawing his saber.

"So," the Warden concluded, "this I witness.
The Priest once said, before you entertain
a guest as great as Bonaparte, the mess
must first be cleared away, washed and swept clean.
You've heard, but do you truly understand?
What is this district's trash? What treachery
Remains unpunished? Who plunders your land
and steals your legacy? Oh can't you see?"
"Of course—Soplica!" the Bucket broke in.
The Razor added, "That scoundrel, tyrant."
"We must baptize, to cleanse him of his sin,"
the Baptist shouted. "Such a traitor can't
escape the gallows," was Buchman's outcry.
"Down with Soplica," was the crowd's reply.

Bartek the Prussian defended the Judge,
rising above the throng, and discontented:
"Brothers, listen, for I won't budge
until you hear me out. This man's demented!
Was this matter ever discussed? To punish
one for his brother's sin is unchristian.
This scheme is just the Count's idle wish.
When has the Judge Soplica harmed you men?
Accuse him? He should take you all to court;
he'd halt the case, still pay the penalty.
Don't forget the lawsuit, and that, in short,
it's him against the Count—both are wealthy—
let one Lord fight another on a whim.
A tyrant? He was the first to forbid
his peasants to bow down in front of him,
calling it sinful. He would sit amid
farmers and eat and pay the village tax,
unlike magnates in Kleck, where Pan Buchman
prefers the German way. Now he attacks
the Judge as a traitor. I've known the man

since childhood—honest then, honest today.
He loves Poland more than anything.
Polish customs and not the Russian way
he upholds. How often, when returning
from Prussia, wanting to wash away all trace
of Germanness, the Judge's home I'd visit,
for there you discover it's no disgrace
to drink in and breathe in the Polish spirit,
though I am your brother, I won't permit
you to wrong the Judge. It won't be good.
In Wielkopolska—such a different spirit,
a sense of harmony and not this flood
of emotions, bickering over trifles.”
The Warden screamed, “Yes, with swords and rifles.”

Jankiel asked to be heard, hopped on a table
and raised his straw-like beard, down to his waist.
He first removed his cap fashioned from sable,
adjusted his yarmulke as he faced
the crowd, one hand tucked into his wide belt,
the other raised—courteously he knelt.
“Nu, gentlemen, I am only a Jew,
the Judge nothing to me, yet I
respect Soplica, for he is one of the few
magnates worthy of it. I won't neglect
the Dobrzynskis, the Bartkes and Macieks—
all good neighbors and my benefactors.
But I will say this—without proper pretext
you can't attack Soplica using force;
you might get killed. What has clouded your vision?
Did you forget the Sheriff and his prison?
In the village nearby, soldiers are camped,
so the Sheriff only has to whistle;
they'll march as soon as their orders are stamped.
That's it—the prospects are clearly dismal.
Forget the French, for they are far away.
I'm just a Jew who knows nothing of war,
but I've been in Bielic; the Jews there say,
reports from the border—do not ignore—
say the French army will be camped till Spring.
So why not wait? The Soplica manor
is not some market stall for dismantling,
then hauled from town to town by some carter.
It rests on firm foundations and will stand
till Spring. The Judge is not a tenant paying rent,
he will not flee, he'll still be on his land.

So please return home and stop this dissent.
My wife gave birth to yet another Jankiel;
I'll treat you all to music and good food.
I'll even hire bagpipes, bass, and fiddle;
my summer mead is sure to make your mood
festive. Maciek, a new *Mazurka* I'll be playing;
my children learned some brand-new songs to sing."

Jankiel was popular; his eloquence
penetrated their hearts, applause was rife,
as murmurs of approval bridged the distance—
until Gervazy pointed his *penknife*
at Jankiel, who leapt when he saw the blade appear.
The Warden yelled: "If you value your life,
you'll waste no time in getting out of here!"

"Pan Prussian, just because the Judge takes trade
from two miserable river barges,
you defend him—so halt your sad tirade.
Have you forgotten the generous charges
your dear father collected, just to float
twenty Horeszko barges? He grew rich!
Everyone in Dobrzyn should take note:
remember how My Lord tried to enrich
your fathers. Surely you've heard of his efforts—
who did he send to manage his estate
in Pinsk? And who maintained his books in court?
For Stewards and butlers there's no debate,
his manor was full of his Dobrzynskis.
He argued your cases at the Tribunal,
and gained from the King your pension increase.
Scores of your children he sent to school,
and paid the Piarists for their board and lodging,
and when they grew, secured them positions.
And why? Because it was the proper thing
for a good neighbor. Now the situations
have changed—and what has Sopllica been doing?"

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"Nothing!" the Bucket yelled, "because he comes
from petty landowners; he's too puffed up, I think,
he holds his nose up high when he is in our homes.
At my daughter's wedding, I offered him a drink
that he refused. "I don't imbibe as much
as you lesser nobles who drink like gadflies."
He's just a fox inside a rabbit's hutch,
a magnate who prefers delicacies.

A milksop! He did not drink, so we poured
it down his throat. “This act I won’ forget,”
he protested, though I clearly assured
him, next time I’d pour it from my bucket.”

The Baptist said, “It is time to attack.
My once sensible son is now a fool.
Blame the Judge, when they call him *The Sack*.
I asked him why to Soplica he’d crawl,
and said I’d beat him if he went again.
And yet he did, sneaking through the hemp to visit
Zosia. I caught and beat him—but in vain;
he wailed like a child and would not quit.
‘You can kill me,’ he cried, ‘but I will go.’
‘Why?’ I asked. Sobbing, he said, ‘I love
Zosia, I must see her.’ After this show
I pitied the poor creature and I drove
to the manor: ‘Let your Zosia wed
my *Sack*.’ He said, ‘She’s young, so wait three years,
and then let her decide.’ And now, instead—
he has arranged a match for her. Who cares,
I’ll go to the wedding and make a mess,
their wedding bed my baptizer will bless.”

“Can such a scoundrel maintain his dominion?”
asked the Warden, “while better lords he’d ruin?
While the Horeszko memory and appellation
now fades? Is there no gratitude in Dobrzyn?
The world? You’d battle with the Russian Tsar,
yet fear Soplica’s manor. Is it jail
that frightens you? For I’m talking of war,
not theft. And God forbid, we will not fail.
We have the right, the Count has won his plea,
and now it is our duty to enforce,
that’s how its always done—the courts decree,
the nobles carry out, and such a course
of action has always provided fame
to all Dobrzynskis. What of the foray
against Moscow in Mysz, and when you came
back with the Russian chief on the same day,
along with his friend, Pan Wolk, as captive.
We would have hung him right inside the stable,
tyrant who’d barely let our peasants live,
and served Moscow. Before we were able,
some foolish peasants took pity on him.
I won’t mention countless other forays

which we emerged from with our ranks untrimmed,
as nobles should with much profit and praise.
Why bring them up? Today your friend, the Count,
negotiated and won a decree,
yet none will take this poor orphan's account.
Horeszko's heir has no one now but me
to repay his ancestors' generosity—
no one but me remains faithful for life,
my trusty sword, yes, my renowned *penknife*."

"And my baptizer goes along with you,"
said the Baptist, "if I don't lose my hand—
your sword, Gervzy, and my club, we two
will hack and slash, and let the others stand."

"Don't exclude me," said Bartek *The Razor*,
"If you can lather him, then I can shave."
"And I," the Bucket added, I prefer
to move with you. A Marshall we must have,
and we must all agree, so let us cast
another ballot." From his pocket, he withdrew
a fistful of bullets and slowly passed
them between his fingers and finally threw
them to the floor. "I vote these for the Judge."
"I am with you," Skoluba said, "We must unite."
"And we," the nobles shouted, "have our grudge.
Long live Horeszko! With Warden we'll fight.
Vivit the *half-goat*, the Warden Rembajlo,
down with the Judge—to Soplica we go!"

All seem swayed by Gervazy's rousing speech,
for each has his own particular grudge
against the Judge. There always is some breach
between neighbors—cattle trample and trudge
through a garden or crops; a tree is felled;
a boundary line disputed. What of the wealth
of the Judge? Some by envy were compelled,
some by hatred or wishing him ill health.
They crowded round the Warden and they praised;
up in the air, sabres and clubs were raised.

Old Maciek, quite sullen and motionless,
rose from his bench and walked among the crowd,
his hand on hip, as he began his address,
pronouncing each syllable, his head bowed.
After each word he paused; each one he emphasized:

“You stupid fools—to jabber over a scapegoat!
While Poland’s fate was being analyzed,
when for the common good you need to vote,
you created disputes. You’re much too stubborn
for order to resolve; you senses leave,
surrender, when the simplest grudge is reborn.
Fools such foolish advice receive.
Get out of here! A thousand kegs of warts,
a thousand hogsheads brought on devils’ carts.”

The crowd silenced, as though struck by thunder,
although their fright diminished when they heard,
“Vivat the Count,” outside. And little wonder,
for just at that moment the Count appeared,
and rode right up to Maciek’s door, followed
by ten of his armed and equipped *Jockeys*--
the Count astride his horse, a cape that flowed
over his suit and spreading in the breeze.
It was nut-brown, cut by a Roman tailor,
embroidered more like some great tapestry.
His rounded hat was capped with a feather;
brandishing his sword, he spun round quickly
and saluted. The nobles gathered together.

“Vivat the Count!” they yelled. “With him we’ll live
or die.” And from inside the hut, men rushed
to the window and soon became festive,
following the Warden to the door, they pushed,
and tumbling, spilled into the courtyard.
Maciek drove out stragglers, bolted the door,
Stuck his head through the window, and bellowed hard:
“I gave advice that only fools ignore.”

Jankiel slipped away, riding bareback,
Bartek the Prussian, too, and unheeded--
his continued rail against the attack.
But two men followed—after him, they sped,
screaming, “Traitor!” Mickiewicz stood apart,
silent, though it was clear from his stance,
that he plotted some evil. So they start
after him, swords drawn, with fiery glance.
Retreating, he defends without success;
wounded, against a fence—to his rescue
spring Zan and three Czechots, to gain redress.
Others follow; before the scuffle’s through,
one’s ear is slashed, and two of them must count

fingers—bleeding. The rest rush to their mounts.

The Count and Gervazy distribute arms;
they mobilize the men—as they had hoped—
throughout the settlement, passing by farms.
“Down with Soplica!” And off they galloped.

BOOK 8

THE FORAY

The Seneschal's astronomy – the Official remarks on comets – mysterious scene in the Judge's room – Tadeusz, wishing to disentangle himself, is more deeply ensnared – a new Dido – the foray – the Apparitor's final protest – the Count conquers Soplica estate – assault and massacre – Gervazy the butler – banquet after the foray

An uncanny moment of calm before the storm,
when blowing clouds stop overhead and gather,
a menacing face, winds that alarm;
yet it won't release them—for it would rather
study the land with its bright flashing eyes,
and mark off spots to hurl bolts of lightning.
Soplica manor, hushed just like the skies,
a premonition that was frightening
and strange, had shut all mouths and transported
bodies to realms where spirits consorted.

The Judge and guests, after the evening meal,
went outside to enjoy the cool night air;
seated on the turf-bench, they seemed to feel
their own somber mood—all they did was stare
up at the sky, which seemed now to descend,
condense, and creep much closer to the ground,
concealed in the dark for some secret end.
Earth and sky consorted, and the strange sound
of lovers—emotions in translation,
muffled sighs, whispers from lips half-closed—
filled the air with its special elation:
thus the music of evening was composed.

Screech owls hooted from the manor garret;
bats rustled their flimsy wings and took flight
to windows where glowing candles were set.
Moths, whirling and beating, lured by the light
and white linen in which the women dressed,
flocked to Zosia's face, to her bright eyes,
which they mistook for candles. She expressed

horror, hands waving, emitting faint sighs.
Outside, huge clouds whirled by, and swarms of insects
orbited like spheres; she could discriminate,
amid the thousand different dialects,
the chord of the midge-fly in deep debate
with mosquito false-notes—none would abate.

The evening concert was barely beginning;
the meadow-musicians, instruments in tune;
three times the corncrake, undisputed king
of fiddlers shrieked; and from the marsh, a loon
chimed in, and soon the bass of the bittern.
the snipe added his drum; the rest, in turn.

And then the insect buzz, the chirping din
resounded in chorus from two large ponds,
like lakes on some far Caucasian mountain,
silent by day, that at twilight respond
with enchanted play. One pond to the bottom
was clear and sandy—from its deep blue breast,
arose a voice that was calm and solemn.
The other was muddy; its turbid chest
in mournful and passionate cries answered.
Both ponds harmonized: frogs were croaking;
an earthshaking fortissimo thundered,
a gentle hum from the other evoking,
complaining lament and distressing sigh—
two ponds conversing through a field of rye.

The dust thickened; the eyes of wolves now shone
through willow groves on the bank of a stream,
and farther, fires of shepherds camped alone.
Yet soon, the moon's silvery, torch-lit gleam
brightened forest and earth, leaving the air,
as land and sky lay side by side, uncovered,
slumbering like a happily married pair.
So that within pure arms, the sky discovered
earth's breast, which for it, the moon recovered.

Already one star glittered, then another,
a thousand, million, an infinity.
Castor the head, and with Pollux, his brother,
Lele and Polelle of Slavic mythology,
though more popular zodiacs demand
Lithuania and The Kingdom of Poland.

Libra, the starry scale, holds out its pans;
on the day of creation, it is said,
God weighed all things, according to his plans,
fixing their weights, and placing them instead
into the vault of his heavenly abyss.
He hung these golden scales up in his heavens,
and from this model, man has patterned his.

A ring of stars known as *The Great Sieve*
shines to the north; through it God once sifted
grain to the earth—when he began to give
sustenance to Adam, and insisted
that in the Garden he no longer live.

Somewhat higher is *David's Car*, all readied,
and pointing the way to the polar star.
Lithuanians call it an unjust deed
to call it his, for this angelic car
belonged to Lucifer when God was challenged,
when he galloped along the Milky Way,
ready to fight. His arrogance avenged
by Archangel Michael, who tipped the dray,
dumping Lucifer. He let it stay,
stretched and broken, because one would dare—
forbidden by Michael—the cart's repair.

In Lithuania, it's also known—
and this was learned from the ancient Rabbis—
the dragon that above the earth has grown
to wind its starry coils around the skies,
which astronomers wrongly call a serpent,
is a great fish called *The Leviathan*.
It dwelt in seas until the dreadful event
known as the deluge, when the waters ran
out of the oceans and the great fish perished.
As reminder and curiosity,
angels transported its remains, cherished,
up to heaven—a priest might similarly
hang in his church, thinking they held some worth,
leg bones or ribs of giants dug from earth.

84

The Seneschal gleaned these tales from old books
or heard from legends. And the old man
has poor eyesight and must strain when he looks,
or use glasses, but from memory can
relate shape and form of each constellation,

and point to each star's future destination.

But no one listened to his tales this evening;
the Dragon, Scales, and Sieve were all ignored.
Eyes and minds to a new guest were cleaving,
recently observed and unexplored.

A comet of great strength and magnitude
appeared and seemed to fly directly north;
passing The Chariot, its eye now viewed
the forsaken place of Lucifer's birth,
wishing to occupy that spot, now vacant.
Dragging its tail across one-third the sky,
and wrapped itself around stars as it went,
collecting with its net as it flew by.
It seemed the heavens followed from afar
this comet aimed straight at the polar star.

Each night, with silent apprehension,
Lithuanians gazed at the sky,
tracking this celestial evil omen,
comparing it to others, asking why
they heard such sinister cries of birds
flocked in deserted fields, sharpening beaks,
as though expecting carrion rewards.

85

And why their dogs dug in the ground by creeks,
and howled furiously, as though the scent
of death their frantic tunneling unearthed—
for war or starvation these things portend.
And the forest watchman was not the first
to have seen, wandering through cemeteries,
the Maid of Pestilence, tall as the trees,
waving a bloody kerchief in the breeze.

86

Such were the fears of the common people,
while in the courtyard of Soplica manor,
the Judge's guests and the honored Official
rested in a sedate though gloomy manner,
until the Chamberlain looked up, dismayed:
under the moonlight his tobacco case glowed
(covered in gold and with diamonds inlaid;
and under glass, King Stanislas' portrait showed.)
He tapped the case and took a pinch, "Gentlemen,"
he said, "all this strange talk about a comet,
reminds me of nights in some college den;
a fool might just as well discourse upon it.
In Vilno, I studied atronomy,

where Pani Puzynin, wealthy and wise,
with profits from her village economy,
more than two-hundred peasants in size,
purchased various glasses and telescopes.
A famous priest manned the observatory
and the school, as well, from his rectory.
Finally he abandoned his stellar hopes,
his professorship, too—and then returned,
until his death—to the monk’s life he spurned.

I also knew Pan Sniadecki quite well,
a clever man, though not a Jesuit.

87

Astronomers regard the skies, he’d tell,
planet or comet, when they look at it,
much like a peasant viewing a fine coach:
he knows it drives to the King’s residence,
and that from there, the tollgate will approach,
until he sees it vanish in the distance.

Whom did it carry? What did the King say?
Ambassadors of peace or war dispatched?
They don’t care at all! In some long passed day,

I can recall when Brannecki first hatched
his plan: to Jassy. He followed the trail,
a train of Targowica Confederates,
trailing behind just like a comet’s tail.

88

And everyone entered public debates,
even peasants, whose minds are not so deep,
guessed that the tail was an omen of doom.
This comet tonight they nickname the *Broom*,
thousands will die when it begins to sweep.”

The Seneschal politely spoke, “I’ve heard.
though barely ten years old, I can recall
Sapieha, a Lieutenant, clad and armored.
Later he was appointed Court Marshall,
and died Chancellor of Lithuania
at one-hundred ten. With King John the Third,
and Hetman Jablonowski, at Vienna,
the late Chancellor was being quartered.
He told how John was sitting on his mount
as the Papal Nuncio blessed his journey;
the Austrian ambassador, Wilczek, the Count,
embraced his feet, letting the reins go free,
when the King shouted out, “Look to the skies!”
Above their heads comet was streaming,
along the path of Mohammed’s armies,
from east to west, its tail long and gleaming.

The priest Barochowski—a panegyric
about the triumph at Cracow composed.
Orientis Fulmen, he called the lyric,
declaiming all the threats the comet posed.
In his tract, *Janina*, I also read
about King John’s noble expedition,
and saw, engraved, the standard of Mohammed--
the comet that announced his elevation.”

“Amen,” replied the Judge. “This is no jest.
I do believe it was just as you said.
Today a hero enraptures the west;
does this comet foretell what lies ahead?”

The Seneschal sadly lowered his eyes:
“A shooting star announces a new war—
or just a quarrel it might prophesize.
Perhaps it has appeared above this manor
to threaten us with domestic misfortune.
We’ve had our share of suspenseful wrangling,
during the hunt and in the afternoon,
and then at dinner. We have this entangling
debate—the Sheriff and the Notary;
and now Tadeusz has challenged the Count;
a bear hide has caused them to disagree.
If the Judge had not hindered my account,
I’d have them reconciled at the table.
I’d like to relate another event
that seems in many ways comparable:
Pan Czartoryski of Podolia went
through Volhynia to his Polish estate,
or else to attend the Warsaw Assembly,
I don’t recall. His intention was to mate
business with pleasure, for he stopped to see
numerous gentlemen along the way
both for amusement and to gain support.
He visited Rejtan, praised to this day,
who served Novogrodek at the Royal Court--
he was the one who raised me up from birth.
Rejtan prepared for the Prince’s arrival;
all were invited and all ventured forth.
Since, to the Prince, the theatre had no rival,
Rejtan staged a real extravaganza,
complete with fireworks. Dancers were sent
by Pan Tyzenhaus, a complete orchestra
Oginski and Pan Soltan from Zdzieciol lent.

A hunt arranged, a trek out in the woods.
Perhaps you know about the Czartoryskis—
though they descend from Jagiellonian blood,
the Prince was not eager to roam through trees,
though not from laziness but foreign taste,
preferring his own books to grooming dogs,
and ladies to alcoves he always chased,
instead of hares, racing across the bogs.
He entertained DeNasseau, German Prince,
who hunted in Libya with African kings,
who slew a tiger with only a lance,
now subjecting the whole group to his boastings.
Rejtan battled a wild boar, a sow,
a single shot, close range, at much great risk.
While they were praising Rejtan's aim, DeNasseau,
German that he was, remained quite brusque,
remarking through his nose, and thus piercing
their compliments: "Aim reveals an eye that's bold,
but tempered steel proves that the hand is king."
He jabbered on and once again he told
his Libyan tales—his tiger and monarch,
praising himself or his skill with a spear."

Evidently, his bragging hit the mark,
annoying Rejtan more than he could bear,
for he was quick-tempered and confident.
"Dear Prince, surely a boar equals a tiger,
sabre equals spear." With some dissent
heated debate sprung up, full of vigor.
Czartoryski resorted to protocol;
he spoke French and they kept their distance;
he might have thrown ashes over hot coals.
Rejtan, provoked, was waiting for the chance
to repay the German with a trick,
although his little joke almost turned tragic."
The Seneschal paused, emitting a cough;
he reached into the gold tobacco case,
leaving his tale dangling, as he dipped snuff.
To heighten interest, he slowed down the pace;
but when he tried to re-address his audience,
sadly his story was interrupted.
A man rushed up, leaping over the fence
calling to the Judge, the tale disrupted.
His business was urgent, so he waited
while the Judge excused himself. The rest
scattered wherever their wills dictated:

some went to rooms to sleep and there undressed;
some stayed awake; some to the barn and hay.
The Judge let the messenger have his say.

While others slept, Tadeusz preferred to walk
like a sentry, hovering by the door
of his uncle, desperately wanting to talk.
Though the door was unlocked, he didn't dare
to knock, disturbing the secret conference,
but pricked his ears instead, trying to make sense
of the sobbing within, careful not to nudge
as through the small keyhole to he deftly gazed.
How strange! He saw the monk Robak, the Judge,
kneeling on the floor as they embraced;
the monk kissed the Judge's hand as he wept,
and both remained in this pose of regret,
till he arose and to the window stepped.

90

“Brother, God knows, how long I've kept this secret,
this sin I confessed, repented, and vowed,
devoting my life to God and country,
not from pride, not for the praise of the crowd,
to live as a monk, till Poland be free.
I said that I'd never reveal my name,
not to you, or even to my son.
Now, from my order, permission has come
In Articulo Mortis, when my work is done—
reveal the truth. I might never come back,
who knows what horrors I might face in Dobrzyn.
There's much turmoil; the French response is slack.
Winter will pass without their stepping in;
I don't think the nobles can wait till then.
My talk of insurrection has them stirred,
only to be spoiled by Horeszko's Warden.
The Count's insane! And he won't be deterred.
It is more grave than even I expected;
Maciek recognized me—I'll be exposed.
If my identity would be detected,
the Warden would not be kindly disposed.
He'd send me back—slashed by his *Penknife*.
This uprising is worth more than my life.
But I must go, although I might perish;
the nobles in Dobrzyn might go insane.
You, and my son, the ones that I most cherish,
be healthy, and pray that soon I might gain
God's grace. You, Soplica, know my secret—

not to succeed would be my one regret.”

The priest wiped his tears and drew up his hood,
opened the window and leapt to the ground,
leaving the Judge with his sorrowful mood.

Tadeusz heard nothing but muffled sound.
He waited a moment, jiggled the handle;
when the door opened, he entered and bowed.
“Dear Uncle,” he said, “like a small candle,
these days quickly burn out. I have allowed
myself too much pleasure, spent little time
with you. This night I am thinking of leaving,
tomorrow the latest. You know the crime
must be punished, there is no use deceiving
ourselves, that’s why I sent the challenge. By law,
in Lithuania, dueling is forbidden;
I must ride to the Duchy of Warsaw.
The Count’s is a braggart, who’ll come when bidden;
he won’t lack courage to settle accounts.
If he’s not blessed by God, he will be punished,
I’ll swim across the river and announce
to awaiting brothers the deed is finished.
I’ll join the Legions—it’s my father’s will,
If that is, in fact, his testament, still.”

“Tadeusz,” his Uncle said, “hot water
has scalded you—or like a fox you hedge—
waving its brush one way, running another.
The Count was challenged and he will acknowledge,
but must you leave today in such a hurry?
The custom is to send a friend before the duel
to settle terms. The Count might end his fury;
he might apologize, playing the fool.
Another fly buzzes around your head;
what drives you away—don’t make excuses;
I am your Uncle, old but not yet dead.
I know the youthful heart and all its ruses.
I’ve heard it said you’ve carried on intrigues
with the ladies. These days it seems our youth
are quick to fall in love—Venus in league
with the devil. Tadeusz, tell the truth.”

“Of course,” Tadeusz mumbled, “there are reasons,
dear Uncle, that perhaps are my mistake,
no, my misfortune, for they are treasons,

beyond correction. And so, for my sake,
ask me no more about my youthful pride—
from Soplicowo, I must quickly ride.”

“Ahah!” said his Uncle, “A love squabble.
Yesterday I noticed you bit your tongue
watching a certain girl; your knees wobble.
And she looked like she had just tasted dung.
It is so foolish—a pair of children
fall in love, countless misfortunes follow.
At first they feel pleasure and all is fun;
but soon they fret and sadness starts to grow,
after the first quarrel--yet neither yields.
One sulks in the corner, the other mute;
sometimes I’ve seen them run out to the fields.
If you are involved in such a dispute,
I’ll have you reconciled, just be patient.
I was young—I know about youthful love.
Tell me what happened; with your consent,
I know secrets that you are not aware of.”

“Uncle,” Tadeusz said, kissing his hand
and blushing. “In truth, there is a young lady,
my Aunt’s ward, Zosia, you can understand.
I’ve seen her a few times, and then briefly,
but now I heard that a match has been made:
the Chamberlain’s daughter is rich and beautiful,
but I want you to know, I am dismayed;
I can’t marry Rosa, though dutiful;
I love Zosia—you can’t expect the heart to change,
whatever else you think you should arrange.
It seems dishonest, yes, almost a crime.
I’ll leave; perhaps I will be cured by time.”

His Uncle interrupted, “Tadeusz,
the way that you express your love is strange;
instead of telling her, you leave her in a rush.
If I arranged that Zosia you would wed,
I’m sure you’d be jumping for joy instead.”

Tadeusz then replied after a pause:
“I am amazed that you would be so kind,
but why should you bother with this lost cause?
Pani Telimena won’t change her mind;
she won’t allow Zosia to marry me.”

“I’ll ask,” he said, “perhaps she will relent.”
“No!” shouted Tadeusz, “Just let it be.
I leave at dawn for another event,
so please, I beg, bestow on me your blessing.”

The Judge tugged at his mustache in anger.
“You call this candid? Your heart’s confessing?
First it’s the duel, then love, and now departure.
I’m sure there’s more; you must be holding back;
I’ve heard some talk; I’ve been watching your trail.
You’re a deceiver! And good sense you lack.
You’ve told falsehoods, but your scheming will fail.
Where did you go the night before the last—
like a hound sniffing around the manor?
Tadeusz, have you seduced Zosia so fast?
and now you intend to run off and leave her?
This will never happen, like it or not,
you’ll marry her. You’ll stand at the altar,
unless you want a flogging. Now what rot
is this about a constant heart? Liar!
I have enough troubles, I have a headache.”
He opened the door and called for Protazy
to help undress, although he’d stay awake.

Tadeusz dropped his head, left quietly;
undressing, he considered these harsh woods.
Never had he been harshly berated,
so he appraised the fairness afterwards.
Who was right? Slowly his heart abated.
What if Zosia found out, but with disdain?
Or Telimena? He could not remain.

So deep in thought, he went to walk outside,
and saw, close by, something like a vision,
slender, frail, and nightgowned—it seemed to glide
with arms raised high in wrathful disposition,
reflecting a trembling beam of moonlight.
It stopped and quietly uttered, “Ingrate!
You sought my glance, now you avoid my sight.
my every word you’d eagerly await,
and now you’ve shut your ears, as though my eyes
and mouth were poisonous. You men, I know,
ignorant of coquettish ways and lies;
I do not wish to torment but to show
you some pleasure, so you should feel indebted.
But no, this triumph over my soft heart

has hardened yours. This conquest has whetted
your appetite for more, for from the start,
the spoils came too easily—and scorn.
This terrible experience has taught,
though you hate me, it's for myself I mourn.”

“Telimena,” he said, “what a strange thought—
my heart is hard and that I feel disdain.
Consider this: we might be seen or heard;
just what would such openness really gain?
It's indecent, a sin.”

“A sin, my word!”

Telimena blurted a bitter laugh,
innocent lamb—if I, as the female
don't care, even if they raise the staff
against my shame—then why should you, the male,
fear notoriety? Ten more affairs
you could confess, and still nobody cares.”

Tadeusz said, seeing her flood of tears,
what would people say about a youth
of my age, in good health, one who prefers
country romance over honor and truth?
So many married men have had to leave
their wife and child behind, just to defend
their homeland, to fight for what they believe.
I'd like to stay, but this is not the end—
according to my father's testament,
I am to serve in the Polish army.
And now that my Uncle's given consent,
I ride at dawn; nothing can deter me.”

“I never intended to block your way,
to block your path to glory and success.
As a young man—I'm sure you'll find the doorway
to someone prettier, richer, no less.
But let me have this one consolation,
please let me know, before we finally part,
about your heart's genuine inclination—
was it love, or simply a trifling sport?
If I could only hear 'love' one more time,
It would be imprinted in heart and mind.
I'd forgive you for your profligate crime,
knowing you loved me once, this to remind.”

Tadeusz, hearing her sobbing request,
that with this trifle she'd be pacified,
was stirred with compassion, also oppressed
with guilt, searching his heart for secrets inside.
Perhaps at that moment he didn't know
what he truly felt. "May God strike me dead
if I led you on. What else could I do?
I like—even loved—you, and what I said
I meant. We spent so little time together;
the hours were sweet; their loss I will regret.
Such tenderness I will always remember,
God knows, you are someone I won't forget."

Telimena grabbed Tadeusz in embrace:
"That's all I dared to hope, now I can live!
I was prepared to die, now I can face
the future, secure that I have your love.
How can you think of abandoning me?
I have my heart, my worldly goods I stake,
to follow you. I'll gladly cross the sea
to savage lands—a paradise we'll make."

Tadeusz tore himself from this embrace.
"What's this? You've lost all sense, it can't be done.
A camp follower would be a disgrace,
I'd be a common soldier dragging one."

Telimena broke in, "but we could wed."
"Never! Not me! I do not wish to marry;
I don't intend to fall in love," he said.
"It's just a trifle; we would both be sorry;
I beg you to be calm; I am quite grateful,
but this is impossible. Yes, we can love
each other, true, but it seems more fateful
to remain apart. Tomorrow I move."

He grabbed his hat, attempting to walk back;
he tried to walk away from Telimena,
but her fierce glare halted him in his tracks,
as though he'd seen the head of Medusa.
Frozen with terror, he looked at her form—
motionless, without breath or life and pale.
Like an attacking knight, she raised her arm,
pointing her finger as if she meant to impale:
"The truth at last," she screamed, "Your dragon's tongue!
Your reptile heart! Why should I even care?"

I scorned the Sheriff, Notary, and young
Count—and you seduce me. How is that fair?
And now you would desert a cast-off orphan.
I know about your masculine virtue,
never expecting this deceitful plan.
So what you said to your Uncle is true—
I know, for I listened outside the door—
that poor Zosia no sooner caught your eye
than you began to deceive her much more.
If one scheme fails, why not another try?
Go, if you must, you can't outrun my curse;
or stay, and I'll reveal your infamy.
I can't predict which one will be much worse;
You won't delude others so sordidly.
your game fooled me, but now it's run its course."

Such insult, mortal to a gentleman,
surely a Soplica had never heard.
Tadeusz shook, pale as a dying man.
"Fool!" he shouted, stamping. "That is my word."

He walked away, her epithet ringing
inside his ears. True, he had been sordid,
deserving her rebuke that was so stinging.
Telimena suffered from what he did,
but though his conscience totally agreed,
she seemed to him even more repugnant,
standing accused of his infamous deed.
He dared not think about Zosia this instant;
he felt such shame beside her innocence.
His Uncle could never arrange this match.
Against Satan's snares he had no defense:
the devil knows which lies and sins will catch
a youth—and when to withdraw with a smile.
Tadeusz felt despised and repugnant;
he'd squandered his future in a short while,
and felt that this was a just punishment.

Amid this storm of feelings, sudden calm
overcame him when he thought of the duel:
killing the Count—what a perfect balm;
he'd die or get revenge upon the scoundrel.
Then he forgot the source of his anger;
it came in a flash and quickly vanished.
deeper sorrows seized him, even stranger—
the thought arose that could not be banished:

if the Count and Zosia loved each other,
what right did he have to ruin their bliss?
If they were to marry, why should he even bother
to destroy other people's happiness?

He fell into despair. How could he save
himself? Where could he flee, but to the grave?

He ran to the shining pools in the meadow
and stood above the bogs, drowning his gaze
greedily in the brackish depths below.
The marshy odor put him in a daze,
as he sucked the gases into his lung.
and he felt the rapture of suicide,
which, like all wild and stormy passions, sprung
from the imagination. Giddy inside,
he longed for the bog, and he would have tried,
but Telimena, spotting his crazed figure,
guessed at his state, as he ran to the marsh,
and though she burned with justified anger,
she was scared. Judgment, not her heart, was harsh.
Sad that Tadeusz dared to love another,
she wished to punish him but not destroy,
and followed, screaming, arms waving above her.
“Please stop, you fool, you are no more a boy.
Marry someone else, for I don't care,
or go away,” she said to his vague stare.

What strange new twist of fate. Along the bank
the Count rode, leading his band of *Jockeys*.
Charmed by the night, the Count helplessly sank,
submerged in underwater harmonies.
Like *Aeolian harps* the choirs resounded, 91
for no frogs sing as sweet as those in Poland.
He halted his horse and remained dumbfounded,
forgetting the expedition he planned.
His ears and eyes bathed in the marshy shapes,
imagining some nocturnal landscapes.

Though dark, the fields and skies now teemed with life.
Across two ponds, almost like two lovers
facing each other, joyous, free from strife,
lying alone in bed without covers—
one pond was clear, smooth as a girl's cheek,
the other murky, dark, as though stippled
with a new beard. And golden sand, like sleek

blond hair encircled one; the other bristled
with osier stalks and curled tufts of willow.
Each had a tiny stream that met between,
like two hands joined, continuing below,
a waterfall into a deep ravine,
glimmering in sharp light from the moon,
fragmented into a thousand slivers.
You'd think a water nymph, humming a tune,
with one hand poured from bottomless pitchers,
sprinkling handfuls of gold from her apron.

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Beyond the ravine to a plain it flowed,
meandered and grew calm, but still ran on,
though only the shimmering moonlight glowed.
like the *Serpent of Zmudz*, which seemed to sleep
amid heather, changing from silver to gold,
and vanish suddenly into the deep
green of moss and fern. Then it recoiled
into an alder wood. The black horizon
rose in the distance—a spirit in mist.

In this ravine, an old mill was hidden;
like a guardian who spies on a tryst
between lovers, angers hearing their talk,
Outraged by what he sees there by the brook,
and mutters threats to those he meant to stalk—
just so this mill suddenly rattled and shook
its mossy forehead, twirled its massive fist,
and clanged its jaw. The nightmare serenade
was drowned in the clamor of grinding grist.
All this startled the Count in his promenade.

The Judge crossed himself: “In the name
of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
you are a gentleman. Did you become
a brigand? Does this behavior befit
a man of your noble birth and station?
I will not permit this brutal attack.”
Soplica's servants rushed into position,
some with clubs, some with guns prepared to crack.
The Seneschal was caught in disbelief,
eyeing the Count, his knife concealed in sleeve.

The battle began. The Judge tried to defend,
and vainly blocked the terrible onslaught.
In the alders, flintlocks sparked without end,

the cavalry tramped cross the bridge and fought.
“Down with Soplica” chimed throughout the air.
The Judge recognized Gervazy’s command.
“We’ll fight,” the Count shouted, “Better beware;
surrender, for I have more allies at hand.”

The Sheriff rushed up shouting, “In the name
of the imperial authority,
give up your swords and drop this senseless game
before I’m forced to summon the army.
You know the fine for sneak attacks at night
are quite severe as writ...” The Count then struck
him with his sword, swinging with all his might.
The Sheriff fell in the nettle, dumbstruck;
wounded or dead, first casualty of night.

“I see,” said the Judge, “this is brigandage.”
The frightened chatter was quickly drowned out
by Zosia’s wailing: she rushed to the Judge
grabbed him round the neck and gave a shout.

Then Telimena ran between the horses,
turned to the Count and knelt, clasping her hands.
“Why have you unleashed these evil forces
upon us? Tell us, what are your demands!”
She gave out a shrill scream, throwing back
her head, her hair streaming. “By all that’s Holy,
I beg you, my dear Count, halt this attack.
Please, I beseech, why don’t you stop this folly;
or would you kill those who stand in your way?”
She fainted and the Count came to her aid.
“Zosia, Telimena, what do you day?
My sword will not be stained during this raid
with innocent blood--you are my prisoners.
I am reminded of the time in Italy,
under the cliffs near Birbante towers,
I captured the brigands’ camp in the valley,
murdered the thieves with guns, while those who threw
down arms were tied with rope to their disgrace,
and then marched back to town for all to view.
Later, they were hanged at Mount Etna’s base.”

And then, for Soplicas, a stroke of luck:
the Count had better horses than the rest,
and so he halted them behind, while he pressed
on, determined that the first blow be struck

by him. He led his cavalry by a mile—
his *Jockeys*, disciplined and obedient.
The others, in true revolutionary style,
were raging, quick to hang, expedient.

The Count had time to cool his burning rage,
deliberating how to end the fight
without bloodshed. He finally set the stage
by locking the Soplicas for the night
inside the manor, prisoners of war,
and posting sentries right at every door.

Meanwhile, the nobles swarmed into the yard,
encircling the manor and storming it.
“Down with Soplica!” the cavalry roared,
but found leader and staff quick to submit.
They wanted a battle and sought a foe;
barred from the manor, they rushed to the grange
and stormed the kitchen, where pots in a row
and the flickering fire brought a change.
The aroma of food, dogs gnawing bones
from the dinner meal inflamed the men,
capturing their hearts. Once hard as stones,
they now warmed by thoughts of food again.
Weary from the march and daylong meeting,
a few exclaimed, “Let’s eat!” Others, “Let’s drink!”
The throng of nobles stood in ranks repeating
these chants, and in the end, could hardly think
of war—when gnawing hunger replaced courage.
The mouthwatering army went to forage.

Gervazy was turned away from the door
of the Judge by the Count’s vigilant guard.
unable to wreak the vengeance he swore,
he decided to play the other card:
to establish the Count on legal ground.
Adept in legal matters, experienced,
he sought the Apparitor, whom he found,
after a search, behind the stove, entrenched.
He grabbed him, dragging him along the path,
and touched his penknife’s tip to this man’s chest.
“Proclaim at once, or you will feel my wrath!
The Count Horeszko, of the *half-goat* crest
is lord of this castle, Soplica manor,
the village, the sown fields and fallow land:
cum gias, boris, ganicrabus,

kmetonibus, scuten, et omnibus robus,
ey quidiudam allis. You know the manner;
now bark the whole thing out, you understand.”

The Apparitor pressed his thumbs inside his belt.
“Dear Warden, please wait, I will carry out
your command, but please consider the result:
such a proclamation will have no clout,
coerced by force and in the dead of night.”
“What force?” the Warden asked. “There’s no attack.
I’ve been polite and if you wish more light,
I’ll strike sparks with my penknife—you won’t lack
illumination; I’ll restore your sight!”

“My dear Gervazy,” said the Apparitor,
“no need to sulk—for as highest court
officer, I won’t debate with rancor.
We all know that a plaintiff might resort
to one like me to deliver his writ,
but he’s just a messenger of the law,
and can’t be punished just for serving it.
I can hardly believe what I just saw;
you have no right to place me under guard;
I’ll write a summons if you fetch a torch,
but I insist we do it in the courtyard.
Brothers, now please meet me on the porch.”

To make his words more audible, he mounted
a pile of logs next to the orchard fence;
but though his oratory was discounted,
he crawled beneath the beams, and in a moment’s
time, he vanished, as though blown by the wind.
A sound was heard: he plopped into the cabbage,
and soon his white hat could be seen behind
the hemp, flitting like a dove freed from a cage.
The Bucket fired a shot but missed his mark,
and from the crunching stakes, it was quite clear
Protazy reached the hops, hid in the dark.
All were certain he wouldn’t reappear.
“I protest!” he shouted—they tried to look
for him between the osier bed and marshy brook.

After his protest died out in the distance,
like a final shot on a ramparts conquered,
Soplica manor gave up its resistance.
The hungry nobles foraged and plundered:

the Baptist found his way to the cowshed
and clubbed one bull and two calves on the snout;
the Razor plunged his sword so that they bled
from the neck; the Awl, likewise, rushing about,
impaled hogs and suckling pigs with his blade.
And now the onslaught threatened the poultry:
vigilant geese, whose ancestors once saved
Rome from the Gaulish tribes' real treachery,
flocked in the corner, vainly screeching for help;
although instead of Manlius, the Bucket
attacked the coop--tying one goose to his belt,
he struck it, while the rest honked wildly.
Geese stuck out their necks, ganders hissed, nipping
at him as he fled, feathers, soft and downy.
It seemed that wings transported him, whipping
like Chochlik, the evil, winged spirit.

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The butchery was so much more ferocious,
though less vociferous among the chickens.
The young Sack climbed a ladder, dangling a noose,
and snared crested roosters and shaggy hens.
One by one, he strangled them and piled
these lovely birds, once fed pearl barely from a sieve,
now dead from this impudent Sack grown wild.
And for this crime, Zosia will not forgive.

Recalling ancient times, Gervazy removed
his belt and asked others to do the same.
Then up from the cellar he pushed and shoved
barrels of mead, brandy, beer. As he came,
they grabbed one and uncorked, snatching others
rolling them to the castle over land.
There, for the night, they camped in their quarters,
where the Count established his post command.

Campfires kindled, men brew, broil, and bake.
Tables sag under the meat; alcohol
flows in torrents. Nobles remain awake,
guzzling, stuffing; and singing fills the hall.
But bit by bit, they yawn and grow drowsy;
eyes blink, heads nod, and each slumps in his place:
one with a bowl, one with a mug now empty,
one with a slab of beef up to his face.
The victors sing, but with a fainter breath,
vanquished soon by sleep, brother of death.

BOOK 9

THE BATTLE

The dangers of a disorderly camp – relief troops and an unexpected surprise – the sad plight of the nobles – the alms' collector's visit and an omen of rescue – Major Plut, with excessive wheedling, brings a storm upon himself – pistol shots, the sounds of combat – deeds of the Baptist and dangers faced by Maciek – the Bucket's ambush rescues Soplica estate – cavalry reinforcements, infantry attack – deeds of Tadeusz – duel of commanders, interrupted by treason – the Seneschal's decisive strategy tilts the scales – Gervazy's bloody deeds – magnanimous victor

The nobles snored so soundly, not even gleaming torches could arouse these sleepers, when the hall was entered by several dozen soldiers. Like wall spiders we call *The Reapers*, that attack dozing flies, barely a buzz, long legs encircling them to suffocate— they entered just like this grim master does; and slumbering nobles shared the flies' fate. Without a buzz, seemingly lifeless, they lay until they were seized by powerful arms that tossed them up like sheaves of hay.

Only the Bucket, famed in district farms for having no equal at meal or feast, who could easily down two casks of mead before his speech or step faltered the least, who capped this night with a similar deed— only he showed signs the others were wanting. He blinked, squinted and what then did he see? A nightmare! Two dreadful faces panting above him, each with mustaches, mangy and long, which they flourished like wings. The terrified Bucket tried first to cross himself, but when he tried he felt bindings around his wrists and realized that he'd lost his freedom. Spirits wrapped him like a baby in swaddling clothes. So hard was he trying to escape, he shut his eyes, and maybe, it seemed his blood ran cold and he was dying.

But the Baptist defended his own camp,
until he found himself bound in his sash.
He wriggled, flapped, leapt wildly with a stamp,
and fell into the sleepers with a crash,
rolling over heads, writhing like a pike
on top of sand. He roared, sounding like a bear:
“This is treachery! Who ordered this strike?”
Sleepers awoke but were unable to answer,
“Treachery, violent treachery—from where?”

The outcry reached the mirrored hall and echoed;
the sleeping Count, his Jockeys, and Gervazy
awoke; and the Warden vainly bellowed,
finding himself and his penknife bound tightly.
By the window he saw a few armed men
in black-vizored caps and green uniforms.
One with a sash ordered the other ten
with the tip of his sword: “Tie up these worms,”
he whispered. The jockeys were bound like sheep;
two guards with bayonets prepared to leap
on him if their commander gave the word.
Gervazy recognized the Moscovites.

He had often been in similar plights;
many times his legs and arms had been bound,
and still he'd freed himself; he knew the art
of breaking rope, sure a way would be found.
Still strong and confident, he tried to start:
crossing his eyes, as if to sleep, he stretched
his arms and legs, stomach contracted,
doubled over, as if both parts attached.
He puffed his chest and strained, his role enacted
like snakes that hide by coiling head and tail.
Gervazy changed from long to short and squat;
the ropes stretched and creaked but to no avail;
they wouldn't snap no matter how he fought.
Almost senseless, he hid his angry face
slumping to the ground to hide his disgrace.

Drums rolled in the distance, at first quite faint,
then grew louder as the rumbling increased.
The Count proclaimed his furious complaint.
The officer ordered the Jockeys released
from ropes but locked inside the lower hall
under guard. The nobles were marched outside

where the Russian army set up a small camp. The Baptist began to curse and cried.

Headquarters stood outside by poplar trees,
with Polish nobles prepared to defend—
Birbaszes, Hreczechas, and Podjajskis;
each was the Judge's relative or friend,
who rushed to his aid on news of attack,
for all had long been at odds with Dobrzynskis.
Who had summoned the Russian battalion?
Who rode through the district and brought them back?
And did Jankiel mount his quickest stallion
to rouse Soplica's allies? The Notary?
Only rumor could name the emissary.

The rising sun seemed ensconced in a gorge,
stripped of its rays, half-hidden in black clouds--
a glowing horseshoe in a blacksmith's forge.
The driving winds enclosed the dawn in shrouds,
as though the clouds carried thick blocks of ice,
and one of the eastern winds sprinkled rain,
which another dried—repeated twice.
And thus, only the cold and damp remain.

The Major ordered that the beams, left to dry
by the fence, be dragged into the courtyard,
where his men employed their axes to pry
them apart, and cut notches in the hard
wood. And then the legs of the prisoners
were placed in openings, another beam
set on top, and nails driven by soldiers,
so legs were squeezed—as though a bulldog team
clamped down their jaws. Their hands were tightly bound,
and to increase the torment, the Major
threw their hats, coats, and tunics to the ground,
as though they'd lost their clothes in a wager.
The nobles sat in stocks, teeth chattering,
as rain increased and clouds were gathering.

And so the Judge was moved to intercede;
Telimena joined in, with Zosia, weeping,
for treatment more humane, they start to plead,
decrying this cruel manner of keeping
captives. Captain Nikita Rykov,
a reasonable man who could be swayed,
agreed with their entreaties well enough,

but Major Plut's orders must be obeyed.

Major Plut was a Pole by birth, once called
Plutowicz, a scoundrel, who often lied
and cheated, whose love of Poland paled,
when—to serve the Tsar—he Russified.

The Major stood outside smoking his pipe.
If someone bowed, he simply raised his nose
and blew out smoke, indifferent to each gripe
or plea. His answer in a cloud of smoke arose.

The Judge made sure the Captain was appeased;
the Sheriff joined in too, and all three tried
to conclude the matter of the manor seized,
without recourse to courts of government.
The Captain to Major Plut quickly went.

“What do we want with all these prisoners?
Take them to trial? So many difficulties
you'll cause the nobles—they'll resent your labors.
There's no reward and none that you will please.
Better to settle the delicate matter;
let the Judge provide due compensation,
The goats will be whole and the wolves fatter.
We'll say that we came at his invitation.
The Russian proverb: *Everything's possible,*
just be discrete, or Take care of yourself,
as well as the Tsar. So let's not quibble;
concord, not discord, leads to the warm stove-shelf.
We'll make no report—there's nothing at stake,
for God gave us hands in order to take.

Major Plut rose, laughing out of anger.
“Have you gone mad? We are serving the Tsar,
not protecting ourselves against some danger;
stupid, old Rykov, how crazy you are!
We are at war and this is a revolt;
it must be quashed at once, or it's too late.
Your bargaining comes as a clear insult;
I'll teach these scoundrels not to tempt their fate.
I know these Dobrzynskis; let them get wet.”
He burst out laughing and looked out the window.
“Take off that coat! At a masked ball we met,
and he is responsible for our row.
I was dancing, when he yelled, ‘throw him out,

that thief,' for at that time I was accused
of stealing and rumors had spread about.
It was not his business, so I refused,
for it was a regimental affair.
I danced the Mazur and he shouted again,
'Thief!' as the nobles all began to stare.
And so I waited till he felt to my grip,
and then I said, 'I'll get even, by God,
The goat will come, save the butcher a trip.'
And now, Dobrzynski, I've cut a birch rod."

He leaned to the Judge, and whispering, said,
"although there are ways if the Judge preferred,
a thousand rubles in cash for each head;
take it or not, for that's my final word."

The Judge bargained, but the Major stalked off
in clouds of smoke, fuming like a foundry,
The Judge behind, emitting a nervous cough,
while the ladies implored—on the boundary
of hysteria. "Major, what will you gain?
There was no battle, blood, there was no pain.
They ate chicken and geese, just as you saw.
They'll pay damages, according to statute,
and there will be no official complaints,
for this was just a neighborly dispute."

"It's clear you've been reading *The Lives of the Saints*,"
said the Major, "and not *The Yellow Book*."
"What *Yellow Book*?" the Judge questioned, confused.
"It's like your statutes with a newer look;
a book of Martial Law," he said, amused.
"It's full of words like *noose* and *Siberia*.
Polish laws have been consigned to the shelf,
since it has been proclaimed in Lithuania.
According to it, even you yourself
should fear Siberia and hard labor."

"I will appeal," said the Judge, "to the Senate."
"Appeal it if you must, but know the Tsar
himself has sanctioned this new, martial state—
and most likely the penalty he'd double.
Appeal, dear Judge, but know that if I must,
I'll turn you in to pay for all this trouble.
We have reason to suspect and distrust;
Jankiel's a spy who has long been observed

frequenting your home. He leases your tavern;
for that alone I'd think that you deserved
to be arrested."

"Me—you would intern?"

So while both sides intensified their wrath,
new guests arrived along the manor path.

A strange entrance indeed! Leading the pack:
a huge black ram rushing like courier;
its horns, like two big loops, were curled back,
decked out with bells and clanging like a crier;
two more protruded from the sides of its skull,
brass bells shaking. Oxen, a flock of sheep
and goats followed behind, their carts so full,
so laden, they sunk into the mud—deep.

All watched the alms-collecting monk enter.
The Judge, acting as host, greeted his guest
from the threshold. The priest sat in the center
of the first cart, and he was dressed
in robes, hiding his face—but recognized
at once by prisoners as he signaled
for silence. Next followed Maciek, disguised
as a peasant, although his secret entrance failed
when the nobles began to shout and cheer.
"Fools!" old Maciek yelled, showing them his glare.
Next came Bartek the Prussian, his coat threadbare;
Mickiewicz and Pan Zan took up the rear.

Meanwhile, Isajewicz and the Podhajskis,
Birbacz, Kotwicz, Wilbik, and Biergel,
witnessing their neighboring Dobrzynskis
subjected to torments more known in hell,
lessened their anger and wished to forgive;
for the Polish noble, though quarrelsome
and quick to fight, is never vindictive.
So, to old Maciek, they eagerly come,
surrounding his cart, awaiting his advice.
He tells them they must wait—repeats it twice.

The Bernardine ambled into the room,
almost unrecognized. Though in his cowl,
his usual meditative gloom
was replaced with a bright and cheerful howl,
a jolly monk of old, his head held high.

He laughed before speaking, chuckling aloud.
 “Good day, fine day, and here’s the reason why:
 exquisite hunting, sirs. What a crowd.
 Prize game! Skin the nobles, take their hide,
 or bridle them, for they’ll kick up a row.
 I congratulate you, Major, what pride
 you must feel, having bagged the young Horeszko.
 A fatty morsel, and rich from way back.
 Don’t let him go for less than three hundred
 gold ducats. Then reach into the sack—
 just a few cents will keep us monks well fed.
 Don’t forget me, for I pray for your soul,
 and often think about the soldier’s fate;
 into a major’s ear dear death will call.
 Remember how Jesuits used to prate:
*Death executes the executioner,
 And hauls the well-dressed man from the ball;
 It bandies about the dandy at dinner;
 Even the priest is soon deceased, quick as the sinner;
 And the uniform he likes best of all.
 Our Mother Death is like an onion,
 When peeled, she’s quick to bring you tears.
 Nothing escapes her vast dominion;
 What’s here today rots and disappears:
 The child that drowns, the rogue that carouses.
 This is what the Jesuit espouses.*

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All that we have—what we now eat and drink!
 And so, dear Judge, I think it’s time for breakfast.
 I’ll sit at the table, what do you think?
 Stewed meat and gravy, Captain, can’t you taste;
 perhaps a bowl of punch filled to the brink.”

The Soplica household gaped at the priest
 and his jolly countenance in disbelief.
 The Judge ordered the cook, “Prepare a feast.”
 Soon punchbowl, sugar, bottles, and stewed beef
 were brought. Plut and Rykov began to eat,
 greedily slurping punch, bolting their food;
 together devoured twenty plates of meat
 in one-half hour, for the punch was good.

The satisfied Major sprawled in a chair,
 drew out his pipe and with a banknote lit it,
 wiping the breakfast crumbs with quite a flair;
 trying to impress women with his wit.
 “Ladies so lovely make a fine aperitif;

I swear by my rank that such a breakfast
is best enjoyed with a lady's kerchief.
We must play cards—*twenty-one* or *whist*.
Or dance the Mazurka. The devil knows
I'm the finest dancer in all regiments."
He leaned towards the ladies, assumed a pose,
replacing his pipe smoke with compliments.

"Let's dance!" shouted Robak. "I'll down this flask,
and though a priest, I can tuck up my gown
from time to time, kick up my heels, just ask.
Consider, though, Major, right now we down
this mead, while your men are freezing outside.
It's fine for us to sport—let them partake."
"Perhaps, though it's not for me to decide,"
said the Major. "If the Judge gives, they'll take."
Facing the Judge, the monk whispered, "Abide
by my wishes, bring them a cask of rotgut."
And so inside the house with laughs and shouts
the command carouses; and then shut
out, the soldiers engage in drinking bouts.

Captain Rykov emptied his cup in silence;
the Major drank and flirted with the ladies,
his zeal to dance becoming more and more intense.
He tossed his pipe and dropping his entreaties,
seized Telimena's hand; but she ran off.
He staggered over to Zosia and bowed:
"Please dance," he said. Then, "Rykov, that's enough;
drop your pipe, we need music, fast and loud.
You play balalaika—take that guitar
and play a Mazurka. I'll lead the dance."
The Captain tightened the strings with a bar;
Plut begged Telimena for one more chance.
"My word, as Major," he insisted,
"I'm Polish and not Russian, and if I lied,
I'm a son of a bitch." Still she resisted.
"Why would I lie? It can be certified;
ask any soldier in the Second Army,
the tenth core of the Second Infantry
of this regiment, that I'm Major Plut;
that no one can dance the Mazur like me—
I'm known for my leaps and my nimble foot;
come now, don't be so coy and standoffish,
I might get mad and then be forced to punish."

He grabbed Telimena and placed a kiss
on her shoulder with a loud, smacking sound.
Tadeusz jumped, for he could not dismiss
this violaton—and knocked Plut to the ground.

“Shoot and aim right for the bastard’s head!”
Tadeusz grabbed and fired, his eye was good,
but he missed, though Plut was singed by the lead,
and deafened by the explosion—quite loud.
Rykov waved his guitar, “This is revolt!”
He cried, bashing Tadeusz with the wood.
The Seneschal watched this brutal assault,
and then swung back his arm and hurled his knife.
It whizzed through the air, between several heads,
and seemed destined to cut short Rykov’s life,
but struck the base of the guitar instead,
piercing, shattering the delicate wood,
shielding the Captain from a certain death.
“Soldiers, revolt!” he cried, loud as he could,
trembling, frightened, trying to catch his breath;
he drew his sword, as he once more grew bold,
defending himself back to the threshold.

The nobles poured in from the other hall;
They climbed through open windows, swords held high,
Maciek’s *Little Switch* in front of all.
Plut, by the door with Rykov, gave a cry
for aid and their nearest men responded.
Gleaming bayonets stuck in through the door,
three black helmets, visors lowered, rounded
the corner—just what Maciek waited for;
he pressed against the wall and watched their entrance,
then raised his sword and struck a mighty blow
that might have severed all three heads at once,
but Maciek’s eyes were poor. Eager to show
his wrath, he missed their necks, walloped instead,
their helmets, which fell clanging to their feet.
Bayonet met sword, but no one was dead;
along the path Russians made their retreat.

Yet more turmoil: for three Soplica allies
vied together to pry apart the beams
and free Dobrynskis, emitting loud cries.
The Moscovite soldiers answered with screams
and took up arms, the Sergeant took his bayonet
and stabled Podhajski, wounding still two more,

shooting a third and slashing all he met.
Some fled, but the Baptist rose up and tore
his ropes, lifted his fist and smashed the Russian,
whose face then struck the lock of his musket
as he fell. There would have been an explosion,
for he jarred the trigger which was reset,
but, drenched in blood, it would not fire at all,
and the Sergeant fell by the Baptist's feet.
Bending down, he seized the gun by the barrel
and waved it overhead, prepared to fight.
Whirling like a windmill, he struck two privates
and one Corporal. The rest made a retreat,
terrified, rushing to the manor gates.

They shredded rope and demolished the stocks.
The nobles, unfettered, humped in the cart
used to collect alms, and found under stacks
a bundle which they quickly tore apart:
rapiers, muskets, scythes, clubs, and cutlasses.
The Bucket uncovered two blunderbusses
and a bag of bullets under the stack.
He loaded both, handing one to the Sack.

More Russians arrived in such disorder—
turmoil so great they couldn't fight back.
Too close to fire, soldiers took the order
for hand-to-hand combat, so close they stood
that steel met flesh, each time inflicting harm,
bayonet against sword, blade on wood,
fist on fist and arm on arm.

Rykov led some of his men to the fence,
calling for his soldiers to make a stand,
to halt their helter-skelter defense,
which forced them to attack by hand.
Unable to shoot throughout the dense crowd,
unable to tell Pole from Moscovite,
he commanded, "Fall in!" yelling quite loud,
but in the uproar his voice was too slight.

Maciek was poor at hand-to-hand combat.
He swung his sword first to the left then right,
tried to retreat, clearing a space that
would let him escape. His slashing saber
sheared a bayonet from a gun barrel,
like a wick from a candle, without labor,

and he rushed to the field through the sorrel.

There he was attacked by an old corporal,
the regiment's bayonet instructor,
who snatched his gun by the lock and barrel,
dodging, leaping, crouching, the target before
him, until one hand let go of the gun
the other thrusting forward like the tongue
from a viper's jaw, its victim to stun.
Pulling it back, jabbing again, he stung.

Old Maciek realized the skill of his foe;
he adjusted his glasses to his nose,
and gripping the hilt of his sword below,
withdrew, staggering from earlier blows,
like a drunkard--his eyes were still tracking
the Corporal's moves, so sure and confident.
To catch him the Corporal was attacking
furiously, a way that almost sent
him tumbling, for the weight of his musket,
thrust far in front, made it hard to balance.
Maciek recovered, struck the bayonet
with his sword—soon as he had the chance,
lowered it and slashed the Corporal's hand
and cut his jaw. Among the Russian losses,
now count the finest fencer in the land,
once decorated with medals and crosses.

By the dismantled stocks, the brave left flank
was close to victory. The Baptist raged
further off, driving them back to the streambank.
Meanwhile, the Razor was also engaged,
one arm swinging below and one above,
like some machine devised by German brains,
a chaffcutter with spikes and knives that move
to cut the hay and likewise thresh the grains.

The Baptist and Razor slaughtered in concert;
one struck above and one inflicted hurt.
but the Baptist abandoned his victory
and rushed to the flank where Maciek faced danger.
Avenging the Corporal's death, so gory,
a young ensign attacked with unchecked anger—
with a spontoon, half-pike and half-hatchet,
a footsoldier's weapon no longer used.
though Maciek tried, his aim was still confused;

the unscathed ensign inflicted a wound,
raising his broadaxe to strike once again.
To stop him, the Baptist circled around
his club. The ensign gave a cry of pain
when it struck his ankle and cracked the bone.
He dropped his weapon and staggered about.
The Baptist lunged, but he was not alone;
a band of nobles joined him with a shout;
Moscovites followed like stampeding cattle;
around the Baptist raged a fierce battle.

The Baptist lost his sword defending Maciek,
and almost lost his life for his service,
for strong Moscovites sprung to his neck.
In his hair, their hands were ensnared like lice;
they pinned his legs, then stretched them to the side,
like spring-cables on the mast of a barge.
The Baptist shook and railed and blindly tried
to fight. Spotting Gervazy in mid-charge,
he called: “Jesus, Mary, use your penknife!”

Recognizing the Baptist’s plea for life,
the Warden lowered his damascened blade
between the Baptist’s head and Russian hands.
The screaming soldiers fled, but one hand stayed
firmly ensnared, dangling from from the strands
of hair, streaming blood. Just like an eagle
that digs one of its claws into a hare
and one into a tree—the hare will pull,
cleaving the bird in two—until the pair
of claws breaks off—one remains in the tree,
one carried off to the fields in the hare.

The Baptist cast his eyes around, now free,
and stretched his arms, trying to find his club,
calling for it, still close to Gervazy,
until he saw his son amid the mob:
with one arm the Sack was aiming his gun,
the other dragging a club six feet long,
with flints and gnarled knobs and knots, a weapon
lifted only by the Baptist’s strong
arm. When he saw his trusted Baptizer,
he grabbed it, kissed it, even leapt for joy.
Musket and sword, pike, helmet, and visor
are useless when the Baptist wields his toy,
moistens its hands and whirls it round his head.

The deeds that followed, the havoc he wrought,
the number of Moscovites lying dead,
would surely be doubted unless he fought
in front of witnesses, with poets to sing.
Yet, once in Vilno, a poor lady saw
a similar and miraculous thing:
from the Ostra gate, she would not withdraw
when a troop of Cossacks entered the town,
and a single brave burgher fought them off;
the entire regiment was mowed down
with the Moscovite General Deyov.

Enough to say that when Rykov came to
most of his men already had surrendered:
twenty-three of them that the Baptist slew
were scattered in the yard and dismembered,
and thirty more were howling in sharp pain.
Some had escaped to hide in the orchard;
some by the river or the hops or grain,
some to the ladies makeshift hospital ward.

Victorious nobles rushed to the kegs,
or stripped their foes of prizes and booty.
Only Father Robak declined the dregs,
for Cannon Law outlined his duty,
forbidding combat. He'd given advice,
even ordered the nobles with his glance,
for he knew the art of war and its price.
He did his part, though he carried no lance.
He called the Polish nobles together;
to secure victory, they'd strike Rykov,
who had been informed by a messenger—
if his men laid down arms, he would get off
with his life, but if they tried to delay,
he'd given his men the order to slay.

But Captain Rykov would not be pardoned:
he stood in the center of his battalion,
"To arms!" he shouted, as his voice hardened.
His men lined up and each one raised his gun
with a clamor, for they were all loaded.
"Aim." The barrels were glowing in the sun.
"Fire in turn." In succession they exploded;
bullets whizzed and locks clicked and ramrods shoved—
the line advanced like a huge amphibian,
as hundreds of glistening legs now moved.

Yet soldiers were still drunk from strong liquor;
their aim was poor, they had wounded a few
but killed no one, though now the fire was thicker
and their shots had inflicted wounds on two
Macieks, and killed one of the Bartholomews.
The nobles were reluctant to shoot back;
they thought they would be less likely to lose
by fighting with swords to halt the attack.
The older ones restrained them in the fire;
they couldn't hold their ground and left the yard.
Bullets whizzed by, forcing them to retire,
and soon were tapping the windowpanes hard.

Tadeusz, remaining inside the manor,
guarding the ladies at his uncle's command,
hearing the gunshot's increasing banter,
rushed outside to take part in the last stand.
The Chamberlain followed right in his tracks,
after his servant brought him his broadsword.
They joined the nobles to fend off attacks.
The Russians let them approach and then poured
a flood of bullets. Isajewicz was hit.
The Razor and Wilblik were badly harmed,
but halted the advance. First Maciek quit,
then Robak, their ardor quickly disarmed.
The Moscovite army watched their retreat;
Captain Rykov set his sights on the stormed
manor, planning the battle's final defeat.

"Fix bayonets," he ordered, "form a line.
"Forward!" The line of barrels, like antlers
on stags with lowered heads, went at his sign.
The nobles halt, shoot back, and then disperse.
The Russian attack met no resistance
crossing its path; the Captain by the door.
"Surrender!" he shouted with insistence.
"Or else I'll burn this manor to the floor."
"Burn it," said the Judge, "and with it, you'll fry."

Oh, Sopllica manor, if your white walls
still shine within lindens that grow sky high,
If nobles still gather inside your halls
to enjoy the Judge's hospitality,
to Bucket's health they would certainly toast--
without his deeds, and his vitality,

the manor'd be destroyed, the Judge a ghost.

At first, Bucket had shown few signs of courage,
though he was first to be freed from the stocks,
first to find his gun in the cart's storage—
his own blunderbuss, hidden under rocks,
with a bullet pouch. But he wasn't anxious
to fight, not trusting his aim when sober;
so he took a mug full of *spiritus*,
and drank to nourish his upcoming labor.

He adjusted his hat, picked up his gun,
ramrod, cartridges, and primed the forelock,
surveying the grounds and the damage done.
He saw the nobles' vain attempt to block
wave upon wave of advancing bayonet.
He rushed over to the dense underbrush,
and lay in wait, concealed in the thicket,
motioning to Sack to join his ambush.

The Sack stood on the porch with his musket
defending the manor where his beloved,
Zosia stayed. Though she held him in contempt,
he'd die for her, so that his love be proved.

Soon the Moscovites renewed their attempt
to seize the manor. The Bucket waited
till they approached; aimed and pulled the trigger;
at once the gun muzzle saturated
the air with bullets. From the side, a bigger
round ripped the air, as the Sack fired his gun.
Startled soldiers fled, leaving their wounded,
which the Baptist disposed of, one by one.

Trying to reach the barn, Rykov, hounded
by bullets, found refuge—the garden fence.
He halted his fleeing men by the hedge,
and changed formation for a new offence,
two sides which protected, to form a wedge,
pointing to the castle, now defended
by a cavalry which had just descended.

The Count, locked in the castle, under guard,
escaped, and with his men, mounted horses
and rode, amid gunfire, straight through the yard,
himself, the head of the charging forces.

From raised black barrels, a fiery thread flew;
hundreds of bullets whizzed, some of them hit.
Three riders fell, one corpse lay in the dew;
the Count's horse went down, taking him with it.
The Warden called for help; soldiers too aim,
about to finish off the last Horeszko—
when, from the other side, Father Robak came,
shielding him with his back, ducking below
the fire. He dragged him from his horse,
receiving a wound, giving the command
to disperse, for the fire was getting worse.
“Aim well and save your shots for our last stand;
take cover by the fence, the wall, the barn;
the Count's cavalry must await its turn.”

Tadeusz knew what Robak had in mind,
and expertly executed his plan.
Sober and alert, he fired from behind
the well, as Moscovite soldiers ran,
for he could hit a coin thrown in the air
with his double-barrel. He singled out
the officers giving them a scare,
proving his skillful aim without a doubt,
and hitting a sergeant-major's gold patch.
The Captain stamped his foot in rage and fumed.
He bit his sword. “Major, we've met our match—
unless we get rid of him we are doomed.”

Plut yelled to Tadeusz, “You are a Pole;
I think it's cowardly to shoot and hide;
come out and fight like an honorable soul,
Like a soldier.” But Tadeusz replied,
“If you yourself are such a gallant knight,
why do you hide behind your own soldiers?
I'm not a coward, but perhaps you're right,
the fire's not out and the ash only smolders,
you've only been stunned—I'm prepared to kill.
Why this bloodshed; the dispute's between us;
pistols or swords, it won't be settled till
we duel. Cannons or pins, what's to discuss?
I'll pick you off like a wolf in a den.”
Tadeusz shot, striking Rykov's men.

“Major,” whispered Rykov, “agree to duel;
avenge yourself on damage to your name;

if someone else kills him, you'll be the fool,
never able to erase the shame.
First coax the gentleman into the field,
either musket or sword, it's all the same.
Suvorov said, *in the end they all yield;*
A gun can stun, but a fight can prove might."
But the Major replied, "you may be right,
yet countless foes with your sword have been maimed;
I command this battalion, I can't leave
my men." So Captain Rykov boldly went;
he raised his sword to wave a white kerchief.
He asked Tadeusz to choose his weapon,
agreed on swords, though Tadeusz had none.
The Count called out as they all searched for one.

"Soplica," he said, "I beg your pardon;
you may have challenged the Major, but I
have good reasons to deal with this Captain.
I saw him storm my castle—he shall die."
"Rather say," Protazy broke in, "our castle."
"I saw him lead the brigands," said the Count,
ignoring him. "He tied up my vassals,
just like on Sicily's Birbante Mount,
I'll punish him for causing this riot."

Russians and Poles became very quiet,
eager to learn which leader would collapse.
The Count and Rykov then approached each other,
staring, bowing, and removing their caps—
for even one about to kill his brother
must observe etiquette. So their swords clashed,
fencers meeting to the shouts of *en-garde*.
They bent their knees, slid forward and back, crashed
and then withdrew—jabbing and thrusting hard.

Major Plut consulted with Sergeant Gont,
the finest shot in the whole regiment,
seeing Tadeusz unguarded in front.
"You see this scoundrel, who has cruelly sent
your comrades to the grave—if you could aim
under the fifth rib, you'll get a reward,
four silver rubles and a lot of fame."
So Gont cocked his rifle and inched forward;
concealed beneath his comrade's cloaks he fired,
not at the ribs, but right between the eyes.
He missed his mark; perhaps he was too tired.

Tadeusz spun to hear the nobles' cries
of "treachery!" The Baptist attacked Rykov;
Tadeusz sought cover in the garden.
The Russians barely managed to run off,
finding refuge in back of their own men.

So once again, all Lithuanians
fought like brothers, urging each other on,
forgetting their disputes and their factions.
Seeing Podhajski wielding his weapon,
swinging his scythe by the line of Russians,
Dobrzynskis cheered with joy, "Vivat Podhajski!
Fight on brothers of Lithuania!"
Seeing the frightened Moscovites now flee
from the gallant Razor's sword, Skoluba
yelled, "Vivat the Mazovian's attack!"
They fought with zeal, as though they'd been inspired;
in vain, Robak and Maciek called them back.

But while they stormed the Russian line and fired,
the Seneschal had left the battlefield
and snuck to the garden with Protazy--
Cautiously, his new plan was revealed.

In the garden a great old cheesehouse stood
above the fence where Rykov's men assembled.
It was constructed of thin strips of wood
nailed together—a birdcage it resembled--
but a place where blocks of white cheese were stored.
Bunches of sage, thistle, thyme, and cardoon
hung from the top to dry, the herbs adored
by his daughter and kept for her apothecary.
The cheesehouse was almost twenty feet square,
though a single post supported it very
precariously, as though it hung in air
like a stork's nest. And this ancient oak post
tilted, for it was almost rotted through,
ready to collapse before the next frost.

The Judge was often told to build a new
structure and destroy what time had weakened;
but he preferred to renovate, postponed
the work, using props to support the bend.
Even braced, the rotting wood creaked and groaned.

Towards this cheesehouse, swaying above, Russians,

the Seneschal and Protazy both walked,
carrying on mysterious discussions.
Dragging a few long poles, the Steward stalked
through the hemp, behind them with the cook's boy.
Silently, they raised the poles to the height
of the rotting pillar they meant to destroy,
then pushed and shoved the house with all their might,
like raftsmen pushing off the river bank.

The pillar snapped; the cheesehouse tumbled down.
A load of wood and cheese fell with a clank
and the Russian soldiers began to drown.
The line crushed—corpses lay amid the cheese,
once white, now bloodied and splattered with brains;
while those uninjured rushed behind the trees,
where the Baptizer and the Razor reign,
thundering, flashing along with the Switch.
From the manor, a mob of nobles rush;
the Count sends his cavalry from the ditch;
and fleeing Russians are caught in the crush.

Only eight Russians, behind their Sergeant,
defended themselves. They valiantly stood,
gun barrels leveled, trying to prevent
the Warden's attack as well as they could.
He swung his penknife right into their fire.
The priest saw him and scrambled to the path,
to trip him before soldiers could re-fire.
They stumbled and Gervazy showed his wrath,
until bullets were whizzing by their heads.
Saved, Gervazy leapt into the dense cloud,
and slashed, sending Russians to their deathbeds.
The others feared his blade, fled in a crowd;
behind them, the Warden's penknife waving.
The Russians reached the barn door standing open;
Gervazy followed them, swinging and raving;
all disappeared into the pitch black pen.
But Gervazy would not forsake the fight—
groans could be heard outside, and frequent blows,
then silence. The Warden comes into sight,
while at his side his bloody penknife glows.

By now the nobles had taken the field.
The scattering soldiers were once again pursued;
though Rykov stood his ground and would not yield,
until the Chamberlain spoke: "Don't delude

yourself, Captain, you cannot defeat us.
Surrender and your honor won't be stained;
you tried and now there's nothing to discuss.
Wretchedness, not courage, is disdained;
throw down your arms, abandon resistance,
or let our Polish swords do you the honor.
Your only help has vanished in the distance;
you have no choice, you are my prisoner.

Rykov was overcome by this grave threat.
He bowed and gave the Chamberlain his sword,
bloodied to the hilt. "I won't forget,
next time, to bring the big cannon forward,
for Suvorov was right when he insisted—
never attack the Poles without cannon.
If only Major Plut and men resisted
alcohol, we'd have been second to none.
But Plut permitted his soldiers to drink,
and he will have to answer to the Tsar,
for his command has brought us to this brink.
Most honored Chamberlain, don't let this mar
our friendship: remember the Russian saying:
To be friends, you must fight now and again.
You're good at playing as well as slaying,
but please be lenient with my wounded men."

The Chamberlain raised up his sword.
A general pardon was then proclaimed
by the Seneschal. With this new concord,
the numerous soldiers who had been maimed
were treated and corpses cleared from the field.
The healthy soldiers were disarmed and held.
They searched in vain for Plut. He'd been concealed
inside a nettle patch since the repelled
attack; hidden deep in the leaves he lay.
And only when he saw both sides extend
their hands in peace—he left. The last foray
in Lithuania came to an end.

BOOK 10

EMIGRATION - JACEK

*deliberations regarding security of the victors - negotiations with Rykov –
farewell – grave revelations - hope*

The morning clouds dispersed for a moment;
like black ravens they flew up to the skies,
where once again they flocked as their ascent
ended--the sun at the peak of its rise.
From tiny clouds one immense cloud grew,
which covered half the sky; driven by the wind
it thickened and hung lower as it flew,
until it was suspended from behind
and seemed to stand as though braced by a mast,
like some giant sail, taking in all wind.
Across the heavens, south to west, it passed.
The air grew still, but silence would not last,
for it was mute as though struck dumb from fear.
The fields of grain, which had been beaten down,
now raised their golden spikes into the air
and rolled like waves, glowing golden brown.
Then motionless, they gazed into the sky
with bristling stalks. By the side of the road
green poplars and willows appeared to cry;
like mourners by a grave, they bore their load,
striking their brows, flailing their arms outstretched,
their silver tresses by the wind unbound.
Then, like the dead, expressionless, wretched,
they stood like the statue on Sypolos found--
Niobe dumbstruck by the force of her own grief;
one lonely aspen stood with trembling leaf.

Lazy cattle, usually loath to return,
began to run, leaving their cowherd behind,
abandoned their pasture, fleeing to the barn.
The bull began to scrape the earth and grind
its horns against a tree, scaring the herd
with its sinister roar. Cows raised their eyes,
gaping, opened their mouths, and lowing, answered.
The pigs stayed back, gnashing bundles of rye;

grunting they tried to steal hay for their sty.

Birds hide in the forest or in thick grass
of roof thatch, while by the pond ravens flock,
their black eyes watching black clouds pass.
They strut back and forth, as though to mock
the clouds, sticking out tongues from their dry throats,
spreading their wings and awaiting their bath.
Even ravens, sensing the storm that floats
overhead, spread their wings, follow the path
of the rising clouds over the forest.
And finally, swallows, proud of their quick flight,
pierce the black clouds as though someone has pressed
a trigger and gunshot ripped through the night.

By now, the terrible fighting concluded;
the nobles marched their captives through the door,
leaving the field of battle secluded.
Outside, the elements waged their fierce war.

Sunlight still gilded the land to the west,
which shone a dismal yellowish-red tone;
while clouds cast huge shadows over the rest,
like a net which gathered all for its own.
But gusting winds whipped up the still forest;
one after another, strong as a gale,
bringing a rain with drops as big as hale.

Suddenly the wind split apart the cloud;
whirling columns swept across the meadow,
over the pond where they hung like a shroud,
stirring up the muddy water below.
They moved to the fields--willow branches snapped.
The uncut grass, torn like handfuls of hair,
mixes with curling sheaves, flying and trapped
in the howling wind heaving them through air.
One column of wind descends to the ground,
tunnels and digs in the earth new furrows,
openings that another gale found,
raising a pillar black of earth that blows
and whirls across the field on legs of sand,
thin at the base, bulging at the summit,
increasing in fury, growing more grand,
like a pyramid. And coming from it,
as from the funnel of a blaring horn
to herald the storm, a blasting fanfare:

chaos of water and whirling clouds, borne
by the wind with hay and branches stripped bare
of leaves, grass that was plucked, sod that was torn:
wind batters the forest, howling like a bear.
The downpour started, as though from a sieve.
Lightning, thunder, great sheets of water fell,
Buckets drenching the earth without reprieve,
joining watery cloud and watery well
with gigantic strings, blacker than night.
At times the entire horizon cracks;
the storm's angel, the sun, shows all its light,
then hides its bright face and covers its tracks,
as thunder slams its door, right on its face.
Then new darkness, more dense and palpable,
descends. From the same chaotic place,
The thunder-claps cease and the changeable
rain subsides, but only to be aroused
again with furious howls and gushing
water--till everything around is soused.
Minutes later it seems to be hushing
the trees; and quiet, still furnished proof:
constant patter of raindrops on the roof.

Such was the force this dismal storm employed,
casting in darkness the whole battleground.
The road was flooded and the bridge destroyed,
like an ancient fortress with moats around,
the farm was totally impenetrable.
So news of the battle at Soplica estate
did not get out; and this unforeseeable
fortune alone secured the nobles' fate.

In the Judge's room, deliberations
were in progress, as Robak lay in bed,
exhausted, with bloody lacerations,
though sound in mind and very far from dead.
He issued orders—the Judge carried out:
the Chamberlain summoned, the Warden told
to bring Rykov, who was detained about
an hour behind closed doors and offered gold.
But Captain Rykov refused the offer,
throwing down the ducat-laden purse.
“Poles, brothers,” he said, “don't make this tougher;
you say all Muscovites are thieves or worse;
well now you know it isn't always true.
I am Captain Rykov, with quite a few

decorations--eight medals, three crosses:
this one for Oczakov, this for Izmail 96
in Turkey, where we suffered great losses;
this for Novi, where our efforts would fail; 97
this for East Prussia, this Korsak's retreat
from Zurich. Also, to show my prowess
with the sword, I was three times sent to meet
the Feldmarshall; twice the Tsar wished to express
his joy at my role in the Prussians' defeat.”

“And yet Captain,” interrupted the priest,
“What will become of us without your terms?
You gave your word we Poles would be released.”

“It's true I gave my word and that confirms
my pledge--why should I want to ruin you?
I am an honest man, I like you Poles,
for such a joyous group I never knew,
good with the bottle and the battle, fine souls.
In Russia, we say, *If you ride in front
you'll hide tomorrow, for today you beat,
tomorrow you're beaten*. What's the affront?
That's the soldier's lot--even in defeat.
There is no need for anger and hatred.
In Zurich, half our infantry was dead;
I lost my regiment at Austerlitz;
at Raclawice, your famed Kosciuszko, 98
back when I was a sergeant, led a blitz.
Your peasants with scythes put on quite a show
and mowed down my platoon. So much blood spilled
at Ozakov, but what else could I do?
At Maciejowice, alone, I killed
two brave nobles; with this bayonet I slew
them; and as one advanced holding a scythe,
and sliced off the hand of our cannoneer,
still holding the fuse. You Poles take the prize!
I know that your homeland you hold quite dear;
I sympathize, yet I'm the Tsar's Captain--
he commands, I must obey. Let Poland
be Poland, and let Muscovites remain
in Moscow. But the Tsar won't understand.”

To this the Judge replied, “My dear Captain,
everyone knows that you're an honest man.
You've been encamped nearby for years;
please don't get angry when we offer gold;

don't take offence and aggravate our fears.
We know you can't be bought or sold,
but you do lack money, so it appears.”

“My poor soldiers!” Rykov cried out. ‘All hacked
and stabbed--my regiment has been wiped out,
and all because of Plut's command, which lacked
authority. It's his fault, and no doubt
he'll have to answer for it to the Tsar.
Keep the money for yourselves, gentlemen,
my Captain's pay, you'd be surprised, goes far--
enough for punch, pipe tobacco, and when
I want to dine and drink, I visit here,
carouse a bit and chat--that's how I live.
I'll defend you in court, it's only fair,
I'll testify on your behalf, I give
my word of honor. We'll say we visited,
danced and drank, perhaps the punch was strong,
when Plut accidentally exhibited
his gun, which fired...a battle before long.
And that's how the battalion diminished.
But you, gentlemen, use your gold to grease
the inquiry; soon it will be finished.
But pay attention, let me say my piece,
I swear by my rapier that Plut commands;
I am only second. And while he lives
there's trouble, so don't leave it in his hands;
he's full of tricks, so be prepared for what he gives.
Plug his mouth with banknotes, stuff them tight.
Well, gentlemen, and you with the long sword,
where's Plut, I haven't seen him yet tonight,
where is he being held, and what's his word?”

Gervazy glanced about--stroked his bald pate;
he motioned nonchalantly with his arm
as if to show their problems would abate,
that he'd arranged it so there'd be no harm.
Rykov persisted: “Has Plut guaranteed
his silence?” But the Warden felt harassed
by Rykov's talk and clearly disagreed.
He pointed his thumb to the ground and passed
his hand in front, trying, as he swung,
to cut off further discourse. “Now I swear
by my Penknife, that Plut will hold his tongue
for a long time.” The Warden grabbed the air,
snapped his fingers and briskly shook his hand,

as if this were a sorcerer's command.

This gesture was clearly comprehended;
those who heard wondered what the Russian thought;
their gloomy silence had far from ended
when Rykov spoke: "*The wolf that robbed was caught.*"
"Requiescat in pace!" The Chamberlain said.
"It was God's hand," the Judge interrupted,
"not mine--I didn't know that he was dead."
Yet from his pillow the priest erupted,
scolding the Warden, then turning morbid,
"to kill a prisoner is a great sin,
and such retribution Christ would forbid.
You will answer to God, my poor Warden.
And yet there are some grounds for forgiveness;
if the execution was carried out
Pro Publico Bono, not foolishness."
The Warden bowed his head as though devout;
he faced the priest and blinked, his voice was low.
He repeated, "*Pro Publico Bono.*"

There was no further talk of Major Plut,
though the next day they searched the house and ground,
even offered rewards for his corpse, but
he had vanished, was nowhere to be found,
as though he'd been carried off by the stream.
Rumors were rife, and everyone conjectured,
but no one knew his fate. Yet it would seem
the Warden held the key as he lectured,
"*Pro Publico Bono*, the priest explained."
In vain they badgered him to tell;
if the Seneschal knew, the secret remained
locked in his mind, silenced as by a spell.

After negotiations, Rykov bowed
and left the room. Robak summoned the rest
of the warrior-nobles--and this crowd
the grave Chamberlain solemnly addressed.
"Brothers, God favored our weapons today;
I will be blunt, I must admit to you
the consequence of this battle will weigh
heavily upon us, not just the few
who fought--everyone must share the blame.
When the monk spread the news too zealously,
the Warden and nobles compounded the shame.
They misconstrued words, acted jealously.

The war with Russia has yet to begin,
and now whoever's fought and taken part
cannot safely remain anywhere within
Lithuania--they must quickly depart!
You must escape to the Duchy of Warsaw,
Maciek the Baptist, the Bucket, Razor;
Tadeusz too, for there the Russian law
cannot reach cross the Nieman's sandy shore,
where friendly Poles await with open arms.
We'll cast the blame on those who fled our land,
the rest of us will stay here on our farms.
I bid farewell, your country will demand
this much from you, but our hopes are certain--
freedom will come, and you who leave, exiles,
will shortly see a savior in this domain,
an end to Lithuania's trials.
Now let the Judge prepare our men to go,
and I'll supply the gold for the journey."

The nobles felt the Chamberlain must know
the best advice--from the Tsar they must flee.
It was well known that once you fight the Tsar,
you won't find peace, he never will agree,
for you must fight his rule, or rot in far
Siberia. They couldn't speak or comment,
but sadly nodded their heads in assent.

Of all the nationalities, the Pole
alone is known to love his native land
more than his life--that has become his role,
prepared to leave at his country's command,
to wander the earth, to struggle with fate,
homeless and destitute, far from Poland.
He'll live till this tyranny will abate,
apart, in hope, to serve his fatherland.

The men were willing to depart at once.
Only Buchman did not approve the plan,
for he had good sense and kept his distance,
just as the terrible fighting began.
But when he heard them deliberating,
he rushed inside to speak, to cast his vote
or his veto; soon he was debating.
The plan was sound, but he wished to devote
more time; first appoint a legal commission,
consider the aims of emigration,

explore the reasons behind this mission,
and, of course, matters of administration.
If there were more time, Buchman would be followed;
instead, the men hastened along the road.

Tadeusz was detained inside the room
by his uncle, who then addressed the priest:
“It's time Tadeusz became a bridegroom.
We know he loves Zosia, let us at least
ask for her hand before he must depart.
I know Telimena won't oppose the match,
Zosia will finish what her aunt will start;
she will consent to it before his dispatch.
But if we can't prepare a wedding feast,
at least we'll arrange to have them engaged.
A young traveler's heart can be deceived;
He'll meet with temptation at every stage
of the journey. But if he simply glances
at his own ring, he'll think himself a husband.
A ring has power over great distances,
to cool a young man's ardor in a foreign land.”

“Thirty years ago I felt this way--
her name, Marta, and she captured my heart;
we were betrothed, but God took her away,
and left me alone from the very start.
This union was not favored; the poor thing,
the lovely daughter of the Seneschal
was taken--all that remained was this ring,
and memories of this charming girl.
Now when I glance at it, she stands before me.
Never a husband, but a widower,
I still remain faithful to my fiancée.
The Seneschal has another daughter,
so like Marta, but I've never sought her.”
He gazed tenderly at his wedding ring,
and wiped the tears with the back of his hand.
“What do you think, should we plan a wedding?
We all agree that he should be a husband.”

Tadeusz spoke, his voice was animated:
“How to repay this overwhelming act
of kindness? For what you've instigated
surely would provide just what my life has lacked.
You've been concerned about my happiness,
Uncle--if Zosia were engaged to me,

nothing would make me more happy or less
afraid to face my fate. But honestly,
don't ask more, if only Zosia would wait,
perhaps I'd prove my worth beyond treason.
If I were constant, she'd reciprocate;
let me earn the right to her affection,
and after winning fame for trifling deeds,
I will return from the insurrection,
back to my native land and pressing needs.
Then, dear Uncle, we'll discuss your promise;
I'll ask for Zosia's hand on bended knee;
if not already wed, she won't dismiss
my proposal. But Poland isn't free;
now I must abandon Lithuania;
I don't deserve such joy for infamy;
I'm simply unworthy to marry Zosia.”

But Zosia heard his tearful admission,
as she hid, deep in the alcove, peeking
through the cracked wall, at his self-derision.
Her heart fluttered; at once she was seeking
the key to this great mystery. His eyes
were full of tears; why did he fall in love?
And if he truly loved, why these replies
about abandoning her? And yet, these strange
words--that she was beloved--were marvelous,
for never had she heard such an exchange.

She ran to the altar in the next hall,
removed a painting of Saint Genevieve,
and took the reliquary off the wall,
to find a bit of cloth that all believe
to be from Saint Joseph's caftan--for the bridegroom,
too, has his patron saint. Before he'd leave,
she grabbed them both and rushed into the room.

“Let me give you this gift before you go,
and this advice: Always carry this
relic and this picture, so I will know
you think of me, that Zosia you will miss.
May God guide you in health and bring you back.”
She said no more, and barely dropped her head,
and when she shut her eyes, they showed no lack
of tears. Though she was mute, they spoke instead.

Just then the Count and Telimena came;

with great surprise they watched the sad farewell,
and he was moved and felt a little shame.
He glanced at Telimena to dispel
her fears: "Even in such a simple scene
such beauty dwells. Note the simple shepherdess
who joins her soul, as noble as a queen,
to the soul of a warrior, no less
noble. And now like ships at sea, the barge
is parted from the warship by the storm.
Leaving wounds the heart like a gun discharge;
such separation only leads to harm.
And yet, separation, like gusting wind,
is sure to extinguish such a small candle,
whereas a fire strongly fanned from behind
bursts into flame, too furious to handle.
My heart could love more strongly from afar;
I regret I mistook you for a rival,
and that this error almost led to war.
Tadeusz, my sword has been the cause of this quarrel,
for while you chased this charming shepherdess,
I gave my heart to someone else. Now let
us drown for good this foolish vengefulness
in our enemies' blood, and not forget
that we are Poles and not cut-throats.
There are other ways to settle our score--
we'll fight, but not with swords or pikes or threats;
we'll fight to see which one of us is more
prepared to prove his love and serve in exile.
We'll fight against suffering and sorrow,
pursuing enemies in valiant style."
He glanced at Telimena, who tried to show
she understood, but was confused a while.

"But Count," the Judge broke in, "do not insist
on going. Better to stay and be safe;
poorer nobles will be on the Tsar's list,
but you are rich, you can sit back and laugh.
You could buy back your freedom if you wished."

"That goes against my nature," said the Count.
If I can't love, at least I can win glory;
I'll be consoled by fame and thus discount
the woes of love by changing history:
a pauper of the heart, yet rich in glory."

Telimena asked, "What stands in your way

to love and happiness?”

“My destiny
makes it impossible for me to stay,”
replied the Count. “There is some mystery,
some force to urge me on to foreign soil,
to extraordinary deeds. I confess,
today I hoped that I'd remain loyal,
and stand at the altar of the Goddess
Hymen, to honor you and light the flame.
But this boy's provided a fine example,
renouncing his wedding to clear his name,
prepared to tear his wreath and then trample
his fate, to test his heart in bloody war.
This very day I see a brand new epoch:
my heroic deeds will echo from afar,
from the castle perched high on Sicilian rock.
Yet now I see that Poland is my lord.”
As he spoke he struck the hilt of his sword.

It's hard to criticize such strength of will,”
replied the priest. “Go raise a regiment
of men like Prince Potocki, to fulfill
the French demand that we should represent
ourselves. Or match the gift of Prince Radziwill,
who sold his possessions, most of his land
and gave his wealth to the French government;
two new cavalry regiments now stand.
So go, but take money, for we have sent
men across the Niemien where our friends dwell,
but money's scarce, resources have been drained.
So go now, if you must, dear Count, farewell.”

Telimena watched, though her eyes were sad.
“Unfortunately, you won't be restrained,
my knight, for you're relieved and almost glad
to enter war, though you'd return bloodstained.”
She tore a ribbon from her dress and made
a bow, which she then pinned to the Count's chest.
“Glance at my colors when you make a raid;
let them guide you to safety, home, and rest,
amid glistening spears and cannon fire
and sulfurous rain. And if you do win fame
for gallant deeds, when you finally tire
of war, when other brave men will claim
your bloodied helmet veiled with laurel leaves,
remember to look at this bow I've pinned,

and think of the lady, alone, who grieves,
whose colors you would gladly die to defend.”
She offered her hand and the Count then knelt
and kissed it; Telimena raised her kerchief
to wipe her eyes, and it was clear she felt
she'd done her best to show the Count her grief.
So looking down she watched, quite satisfied--
his leave, shrugging her shoulders she sighed.

“Please hurry,” said the Judge, “It's getting late.”
The monk added, “Enough,” and made a face
that frightened them. “Be off! Let this talk abate.”
Together their comments cleared out the place;
the loving pair was driven out the gate.

Meanwhile, Tadeusz embraced his uncle,
and tearfully kissed Father Robak's hand,
who hugged the youth, pressing to his temple,
and made the sign of the cross and this demand,
glancing up to heaven: “God protect you.”
He was weeping; Tadeusz was long gone.
“What's this,” the Judge called out, “What of your vow?
He'll learn nothing of all the deeds you've done;
you'll let him go in ignorance?”

“For now,”
replied the monk, covering his face.
“Why should he know his father hid, disguised,
a murderer, who now is seeking grace?
God knows, I long to tell, don't be surprised;
my silence might atone for my disgrace.”

“It's time to think about yourself. A man
your age, his health failing,” the Judge then said,
“couldn't emigrate. You have a plan--
you know a place to hide yourself instead.
Where should we go--the harnessed cart awaits.
Hide in the woods, and not on these estates.”

Nodding his head, Robak replied, “The lights
are out, it's safe to stay until tomorrow;
summon the parish priest, my final rites
must be administered before I'll go.
All but the Warden leave, and lock the door.”

The Judge carried out Robak's instructions,
and sat beside him on the bed. Once more

Gervazy stands apart with his suspicions,
elbows on his sword's hilt, almost resting
his head, his hand squeezing, his grip--testing.

The monk began to talk, watching the face
of the Warden, and fixed his gaze, silent,
concealing his secret. Then with the grace
of a surgeon, scalpel poised a moment,
calming his patient with a gentle hand,
the monk softened his look, lowered his gaze.
Gervazy watched and tried to understand;
he covered his eyes just like a man who prays,
to keep from blindly striking his own hand.

"I am Jacek Soplica," said the priest.

The Warden paled and swayed from side to side;
he leaned in front, then all his movement ceased--
like a boulder rolled down a mountainside
halted in mid-course. He balanced on one leg;
his mouth fell open with his white teeth bared,
moustache bristling like the tail of a dog.
He dropped his sword, but with his knees he snared
it before it hit the floor. The long blade
stuck out in back and wagged from side to side.
So, like a wounded lynx, hunted in a glade,
the Warden crouched, ready to spring or hide,
puffed up in a ball, emitting a wail,
twitching his whiskers and lashing his tail.

"Warden," answered the priest, "such human wrath
no longer frightens me, I'm in God's hands.
I beg you in His name to seek His path.
He, who even crucified, forgave the bands
of wretched men who planned his execution.
Please listen to a sinful man's request.
Forget for just this moment retribution;
I beg forgiveness for what I have just confessed.
If, after this you are not satisfied,
do as you wish. He clasped his hands in prayer.
The Warden stood back, shocked and stupefied;
he struck his head and trembled in despair.

The Priest ignored the Warden's fright, and told
the whole story--how he became involved
with Horeszko's daughter, and how the old

Pantler insulted him, and how it was resolved.
But as he spoke, his tale grew more confused;
sorrows were mingled with his accusations.
At times he stopped completely and refused
to explain the complex order and relations.

The Warden knew the exact history
of the Horeszko clan, and sorted out
the tangled strands of this tangled story.
He could fill in the gaps; he knew about
things that the Judge could not have known. Both listened,
bowing their heads as Jacek slowly spoke,
choosing his words and stopping to amend.

“You know, Gervazy, just how often I broke
bread with him, invited to his banquets.
He'd drink to my health and when his glass was upraised,
he'd swear our friendship caused him no regrets,
that never had he known a man so praised.
He would embrace me, and all saw and thought
we shared our souls. What kind of friend was he?
Such sorrow to my soul he quickly brought.”

“During that time the words he spoke to me
were whispered by all those around the district.
'Soplica,' he said, 'You vainly compete
for a magnate's daughter carefully picked,
yet this dwelling is too high for the feet
of a Cupbearer's son to reach.' I joked
when they gossiped and pretended to sneer
at the Pantler and his daughter; I poked
fun at aristocrats and their career.
I only went out of obligation,
saying my wife would have to be my equal.
And yet these jokes hid the devastation
done to my soul, for I was young and full
of daring. New-found freedoms filled the state:
a simple gentleman had the same chance
to wear the crown as some mighty magnate.
Tenczynski asked for permission to dance
with the King's daughter, and they, without shame,
offered her hand. I was equal in nerve
to him, my rank and merit were the same,
The commonwealth I endeavored to serve.”

“It takes only a moment to destroy

the happiness of another, beyond
repair, for it is so easy to toy
with one man's fate, to turn his life around.
A single friendly word would bring such joy,
perhaps a solution could have been found,
and he would live, and his beloved child,
Eva, so fair, might have become my bride.
I--the grateful son-in-law, and he--the mild
grandfather rocking the children who cried.
It might have been; he alone held the key,
but he refused, and thus the crime that followed.
Transgression, suffering, and poverty,
belong to both of us. And yet I vowed
to expiate this sin; I have no right
to accuse, for I bear the entire guilt.
I've forgiven him, though he caused this fight;
yes, in my heart, I did forgive the man I killed.”

“If only he sincerely refused me;
he knew we fell in love; he should have chased
me far way--who knows my destiny?
I would have ridden off, enraged, disgraced;
perhaps I'd curse him, then leave him in peace.
But he was too cruel and cunning for that,
and he let me come and go as I please,
pretending that he never had the thought
that I would try to win his daughter's hand,
for he needed me for my great influence
over the nobles who owned the most land.
He accepted me without reluctance;
encouraged me just as he did before,
as though nothing had changed, and he ignored
my love for his daughter, although it tore
my heart. And when I came he acted bored,
unless he saw my eyes tearful and dark,
or noticed my heaving breast ready to burst.
Then he would throw in some casual remark--
a lawsuit won, how in the hunt he finished first.”

How many times we drank. He was so moved,
he clasped my arm, proclaimed our deep friendship.
It was only my sword, my vote, he loved.
I was courteous; I returned his grip,
although such anger festered deep inside,
I'd salivate, and reach to grab my sword,
to spit on our friendship, regain my pride

by running it through this arrogant lord.
But Eva guessed my aim--I don't know how--
perhaps my eyes revealed my intention.
She seemed alarmed, her cheeks began to glow,
then paled; she somehow got my attention,
this pretty little dove, so calm and mild,
so small and angelic, she looked to me.
I lost my nerve; I was no longer wild;
I couldn't cause her fright or misery.”

“So Lithuania's infamous knight,
in front of whom great lords shook and trembled,
who barely lived a day without some fight,
who'd challenge any group of men assembled,
who raged without the slightest provocation,
letting no man win, not even the King,
who took up evil as an avocation--
I became as meek as a lamb grazing
when this Horeszko spoke. My courage lost,
as though I beheld the consecrated host.”

“How many times I tried to speak my heart;
I even tried to bow down at his feet,
until I'd see his icy gaze and start
to feel new shame, knowing I'd met defeat.
I'd introduce some new conversation,
talk of District Assemblies, or else joke;
I feared so much for my reputation.
Not me--my pride and arrogance spoke;
I couldn't bear the insult to my family name
by stooping so low with this vain request,
having to flee when his refusal came,
from nobles who gossiped with all the rest.”

“Horeszkos refused what Soplicas deserved;
when Jacek asked, the dread black soup was served.”

“So I was lost, not knowing what to do--
I resolved to gather a small brigade,
abandon my home and fatherland too,
to fight Moscow or else the Tartar raid.
I planned to ride to Horeszko's castle
to say goodbye; I hoped he'd see I was
a faithful partisan, almost his vassal,
so he would treat me as a good friend does,
that he'd recall the many times we drank

and fought together, knowing that I'd ride
to the ends of the earth, he'd gladly thank
me for the times we shared, side by side.
I thought that he'd relent and show he had a soul;
even a snail will show that it has horns..."

"So if there is the smallest smoldering coal
of friendship, no matter how slow it burns,
it's sure to burst in flame at farewell,
even the coldest eye with tears will swell."

"When his poor daughter heard that I was leaving,
she turned pale and fainted; she almost died,
unable to speak and not believing
I would abandon her. But when she cried
and tears streamed down her pallid cheeks,
I knew for certain what I'd known for weeks."

"I wept for joy as well as for despair,
sure of her love, and her father's answer.
I would fall at his feet--I could no longer care
what the results of my actions were.
I'd wind like a serpent around his knees;
I'd beg: 'Let me be your son or kill me!'
The Pantler was deaf to my entreaties,
sullen, yet polite, he'd speak differently
about, what else, his very daughter's wedding.
Consider, Gervazy, where this was heading."

"The Pantler said he had a match arranged
with the Castellan's son: 'what do you think?'
He asked, 'You are my friend.' Was he deranged?
Had he sunk lower than a man could sink?
'You know my daughter's beauty and her wealth,
And her husband-to-be is from Vitebsk,
a Senator, of low rank, failing health.'
He sought my advice, but what did he expect?
I can't remember anything I said;
I know that I mounted my horse and fled."

"Jacek!" the Warden said, "So your excuse
is cleverly grounded, not something new.
Believe me, nothing you say will reduce
your guilt; there's nothing you can say or do.
It's happened more than once in history:
Someone falls in love with a King's daughter;

he uses force--it's such an old story.
Perhaps he kidnaps her, and then there's slaughter.
But this is different, there's no respite--
a Polish man in league with Muscovites.”

“That is not true, for there was no collusion,”
Jacek answered in sorrow. “I could not seize
her by force, how wrong is your allusion--
although I could have hid outside with ease
and kidnapped her, or else the castle crumbled,
left in ruins--the Dobrzyn settlement
was backing me--he would have been humbled--
four villages made up my regiment.
If only Eva was more like our women,
healthy and strong, she'd withstand the pursuit,
not frightened by the noise of a weapon.
But Eva, this poor child, barely set foot
outside the castle—for he tried to shield
this frail, faint-hearted spring caterpillar,
barley a butterfly's larva revealed.
To take her by such force would be to kill her.”

“What could I do? Storm the castle? Revenge?
I felt such shame over my rejection,
Gervazy, if you knew, you'd surely cringe;
wounded pride is the Devil's connection.”

“And this demon revealed a better plan:
I'd seek bloody revenge, but hide the cause
of my retribution from all men.
I would uproot my love, not break the laws,
cast her out of my mind, arrange to wed
another, while devising a pretext
to quarrel, and thus to leave the Pantler dead.”

“At first it seemed my plan could not be vexed.
My heart had changed; I applauded my wisdom.
The first poor girl I met I made my bride.
And from such evil, punishment would come:
I could not love her, even though I tried,
Tadeusz's mother, devoted wife,
an honest soul—and yet my monstrous pride
strangled my heart, reviving my old strife,
unfulfilled love and animosity.
I became crazed; in vain I tried to farm
the estate, but I was drowned in self-pity.

The Devil surely introduced more harm.
I grew morose; I could not be consoled;
and from such sins, new sins will surely grow.
I drank too much and didn't talk but growled.
Not long after, my wife died of sorrow,
leaving my son who hasn't yet been told..."

"How much I must have loved--so many years;
no matter where I go, I can't forget;
in front of my eyes she always appears.
I drank; the more I drank the more upset
I was. And though I journeyed far away,
I could not escape my terrible fate.
Now I'm a monk; I wear a cowl and pray,
I try to serve God, though it's come too late.
I'm on my deathbed, wounded, covered with blood.
My dearest Eva, I've spoken so long;
God will forgive; I've done the best I could--
you know that my despair for this is wrong."

"It was not long after Eva's wedding:
everyone talked about the wedding day,
how when her husband handed her the ring,
she almost fainted, unable to stay
at the altar. And soon she developed
consumption, sobbing the whole day and night.
People suggested she might have eloped
with some secret love to escape her plight.
Horeszko, as always, was delighted,
and held banquets and balls for all his friends;
but I, of course, was never invited;
he couldn't use me to achieve his ends.
My life at home was clearly scandalous;
I brought upon myself the world's contempt,
I, whom the district once called marvelous,
who caused lords to tremble when I stamped,
whom Radziwill the Prince once called, "My Dear,"
who left his home leading a retinue
worthy a king--whose saber struck fear
when thousands of swords my followers drew.
I could have taken any lord's castle!
Now children of peasants would laugh at me;
I was reduced to a serf or vassal--
it was a deadly blow to my pride, you see..."

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The Bernardine weakened and dropped his head;

the Warden replied with great emotion:
“God will judge the terrible life you led--
Jacek Soplica, under the hood of devotion,
I can't believe you live as a beggar,
once ruddy and healthy, a handsome man,
whom ladies worshipped and lords would flatter,
the *mustached one*. I see how grief can
age a man, how little does fame matter.”

“I should have known at once--you shot the bear;
who else could aim like that, no one but you.
In all of Lithuania, none can compare;
with your cutlass, second to Maciek too.
I remember how the ladies used to sing:
They tremble when Jacek twirls his mustache;
When he knots it, they'd better start running;
Even Prince Radziwill would fear his lash.
Jacek, you tied a knot against my lord,
and now you've been reduced to such a state.
The mustached one living under God's word,
collecting alms--the judgment of God is great.
And now you'll pay for all the blood you shed;
I swore an oath the day Horeszko bled.”

The priest sat up in bed and rambled on:
“I rode to the castle, demons in my head
that fought for my heart and easily won.
Who'd believe the Pantler'd kill his child?
Just like he ruined me! Right at the gate
Satan enticed me; I looked and grew wild.
How the Pantler reveled! Though it was late,
windows were filled with candles. Drinking bouts.
Music pealed through the halls, and how I wished
the stones would crash down, dislodged by his shouts
of joy, to bury his bald head. Finished!
Think of revenge; Satan will take over;
he'll furnish a weapon, direct all fights.
I had the thought and hid under cover;
his castle was stormed by the Muscovites.”

“There was no plot; who said that was a liar;
with Muscovites I did not conspire.”

‘I watched as different schemes passed through my mind;
laughing, crazed, like a child starting a fire.
I watched, delighted--the devil was kind--

eager for the castle to tumble down.
And once I had the thought to rescue her,
To leap through flames before the walls were gone;
I even considered saving the Pantler...”

“I was amazed by all your brave defenses;
Russians were falling all around; the beasts
shot poorly. When I came to my senses,
seeing their defeat, my anger increased;
I could not bear the Pantler's victory.
For how could he prosper--who was so base?
I rode off cursing his illustrious glory,
when, just at dawn, I looked and saw his face
up on the balcony: his diamond buckle
glowed in the sun; he looked haughty and proud.
He twirled his mustache and seemed to chuckle.
I knew he saw me when he laughed aloud,
and stretched his arm as though to taunt and mock.
I grabbed a Russian gun and barely pressed
the trigger after releasing the lock.
I didn't even aim. You know the rest...”

“The cursed weapon fired! How different
it is to fight with swords, to take your stand,
draw it, attack, parry with your opponent,
try to disarm or check before he can land
the blade. But take a gun, and in a flash,
the mightiest castle will fall with a crash...”

“Yet when you aimed your pistol from above,
I didn't flinch, remember how I stared
into the double barrels; I couldn't move.
something pinned me to the ground; I despaired,
my life meant nothing. Why did you have to miss,
Gervazy, if only you'd caused my death,
I would not have to repent for all this.”

Father Robak then stopped to catch his breath.

“God knows,” the Warden said, ‘I took my aim.
How much blood was shed with that single shot.
Disaster after disaster came.
It's your fault, Jacek, I have not forgot,
and yet today when the Russians fired,
you shielded the Count, the last Horeszko.
You did more than your priestly role required,

risking your life to save me too, and though
I should be grateful, only your monk's hood
protects you from my penknife. You are blessed;
our account is clear, I seek the common good.
God in his wisdom will deal with the rest.”

Jacek stretched out his arm; Gervazy refused
and stepped back. “I won't have my hand defiled
by the touch of a scoundrel I've accused
of a murder that was vengeful and wild,
not *Pro Publico Bono*. But Jacek,
sinking deeper into bed, turned to the Judge;
growing more pale and trembling as though sick,
he asked the parish priest to join the assemblage.
“Don't leave,” he said. ‘I haven't told you all.
I will be dead, Gervazy, by nightfall.”

What's this!’ shouted the Judge. ‘I saw the wound
today; it's small, why fetch the parish priest,
go get the doctor--if he can be found;
perhaps he'll tell us why the pain's increased.”

But Robak interrupted, “It's too late,
brother, you see, I was injured before;
it's badly soiled and the infection's great;
now gangrene has set in; there's little more
than rotten flesh and clotted blood like soot.
What could a doctor do here at my bed?
I'll give back my soul, now or later, but
Warden, please forgive me before I'm dead.”

“And through all this I refused to betray
my country, and though branded a traitor,
I served my nation every single day,
surely my arrogance was not greater...”

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“When I rode by the neighbors turned away
as though I brought the plague; my old friends fled,
they greeted me from afar or shunned me.
And so I also lived in constant dread
that some poor peasant or some Jew would see
me bow, and pause and give a laughing sneer.
The word *traitor* attached itself to me;
I heard it in the fields, echoes so clear,

they haunted me; from dawn to dusk that phrase
hovered above just like a spot before
a sick man's eye, darkening all my days--
And yet, and yet, I wasn't a traitor..."

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"Moscow supported this accusation;
they thought that I was one of their partisans
and gave Soplicas remuneration,
a part of the dead man's wealth and his lands.
Even the Targovica Confederation
offered me a post in their government.
I was even tempted to Russify
myself, none of the magnates would dissent,
One of their own they'd sooner crucify
than disparage a servant of Moscow."

I couldn't betray my country, although
it meant sufferings and degradations;
where haven't I been? How many nations?"

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Then God revealed to me the only cure:
I had to make amends and change my ways,
If possible, to make myself more pure..."

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"The Pantler's daughter, Eva, passed her days
in far Siberia, where her husband,
the Senator, was exiled. She died young,
so her daughter was sent back home to Poland.
I tried to correct my terrible wrong;
Zosia was that daughter! I made arrangements."

"Perhaps I killed him less from disappointed
love than foolish pride and arrogance.
I humbled myself, lived among monks,
I, who was proud from birth, was anointed;
I, who blustered about, flaunted my lust
and fist, lowered my head, collected alms,
called myself *Robak*--a worm in the dust.
I gave up the sword and I lived by the Psalms...
My wretched life had been a kind of treason;

redemption offered the only escape;
serving my homeland became my reason,
to live by blood and work, to consecrate..."

"I fought for my country, I won't tell where;
Not for earthly glory I faced gunfire
and charging swords, yet I refuse to share
my exploits. Quiet acts these times require."

Sometimes I was able to penetrate
the guarded border, conveying commands;
I'd gather information on the state
of affairs, take back news to foreign lands.
My friar's hood is known throughout Galicia,
Wielkopolska too. I worked for a year
lugging stones, chained in a fortress in Prussia.
Three times the Muscovites made their point clear,
cudgelling me in Siberia.
In Spielberg, the Austrians buried me
deep in a dungeon, *in carcer durum*;
yet by a miracle, God ferried me
back to my people, the land I came from,
to let me die at peace with the sacraments..."

"And now, who knows, perhaps I've sinned again;
now I may be the cause of further laments;
perhaps I've hastened the insurrection,
spreading too soon the General's command.
I wanted Soplicas to be well-armed,
at the head of Lithuania to stand.
This wish, so pure, seems to have harmed..."

"You longed for revenge, well now you have it.
God used your sword to bring my punishment;
my plan's cut short and nothing can save it
from this tangled plot of your arrangement.
For years you have conspired to bring me down,
while my whole life was spent with this one goal--
to free Poland--the commonwealth and crown,
which I loved with that earthly part of my soul.
This hope, like my very own child, I nurtured;
I forgive you, though our future you stole."

"Forgiveness comes from God," the Warden assured,
"and if you're ready to accept last rites,
Father Jacek, I won't stand in your way."

You'll get no Lutheran or Schismatic fights
from me. Whoever saddens the final day
commits a sin; I'll give you consolation
instead. When my master fell to the ground,
as I knelt amid the devastation
and dipped my sword in the blood of his wound,
swearing vengeance, my master raised his head,
pointed his hand to the gate where you stood,
and made the sign of the cross. He was not dead;
he forgave the one who had spilled his blood,
and yet, I had such anger and despair,
I vowed to ignore this cross in the air.”

For almost an hour, coughs, groans, and sighs
interrupted the grave conversation.
They waited for the parish priest, till cries
were heard and pounding horseshoes on the run.
The innkeeper rushed to the door and knocked;
panting, he handed Jacek a letter.
It was sent by Fischer, Chief of Staff
of Prince Poniatowski's Polish forces.
It told how Bonaparte now had enough
support; and so his private council endorses
his call for war. The armies will assemble.
with these decrees, the country will resemble
the ancient Union of Lithuania and Poland.

Jacek listened and then intoned a prayer.
The consecrated candle in his hand
flickered, as he held it in the air.
Something was burning in his tearful eyes;
he seemed ecstatic, though none could tell.
“And now, O Lord, to you my soul shall rise.”

All knelt at the sound of the ringing bell,
a sign the parish priest arrived as well.

Across the sky the night was now departing;
the sun's first rays were streaming through the glass;
like diamond arrows they fell straight down, imparting
a glow seen only in icons at mass--
to the bed where the dying monk's face shone
like a Saint beneath a fiery crown.

BOOK 11

THE YEAR 1812

Spring omens – the entrance of the armies – religious services – the official rehabilitation of Jacek Soplica – a conversation between Gervazy and Protazy to expedite the lawsuit – courtship of an Uhlán and a girl – settling the dispute over the Bobtail and Falcon – banquet – presentation of the betrothed couple

Who could forget the year that people call
The year of the harvest, known to soldiers
as *The year of the War*. How they recall
in tale and song, how the excitement endures.
The miracle had long been expected,
preceded by rumor and premonition;
and when the spring sun warmed the neglected
earth, a strange mood seized the Lithuanian
people—they felt that some force would destroy
the earth, yet not without yearning and joy.

When the cattle were driven to pasture
that spring, although they were famished and lean,
they reluctantly went and would not venture
near the spring corn that was already green,
sprouting up from the frozen soil. Instead,
they fell to the ground where the earth was plowed,
where each cow in turn lowered its head,
and chewing its cud of winter feed, bellowed.

The peasants, too, dragging their wooden plows,
did not celebrate the end of winter
by singing songs; they had been hard to rouse
for work, and now they lazily saunter,
as though they forgot how to sow and reap;
halting so often their oxen fall asleep.

They anxiously gazed at the western sky,
as if they expected to see something divine;
something was strange with the birds flying by:
the stork had returned to its native pine,
its white wings spread an early standard of spring.
The chattering swallows flocked by the lake,

gathering mud for the nests they were making.
That night strange calls could be heard in the brake:
the sound of woodcocks dragging bits of hay.
Above the forest, a flock of wild geese,
weary from flight, honking leads the way.
Beyond them, cranes whose wailing would not cease.
hearing this, the watchman asks astonished:
what confusion the winged kingdom brings,
and why the birds had been so early banished.

Soon flocks of finches, plover, and starlings
appear amid bright tufts and flashing plumes,
to rise up in the hills, fall to the meadows—
and so it seems a new cavalry looms:
a strange array of uniforms and rows
and rows of never before seen weapons.
Platoons arrive like gushing, melting snows,
flooding the roads. The clatter of iron
shod feet accompanies the sight of black shakos
and glittering bayonets in the distance,
an infantry countless as swarming ants.

All faced north, for it seemed now that the spring
arrived, everything moved behind the birds,
driven by some mysterious promptings
from the southern paradise northward.

Horses and men, cannon and campfires aglow;
everywhere the earth trembles, a thunderous roar.

War! War! In Lithuania there is no
place so remote, no province so far
away that sounds of war could not be heard.
In forests, where peasants had dwelt for years,
where generations had never ventured
beyond the trees, those who had no other fears
than gusting wind and cold, now heard strange cries.
Men who had known no other guests than beasts
that shared the woods, heard sounds they couldn't recognize:
the sky strangely aglow, something released,
which seemed to stray from the field of battle,
seeking the forest where it tore up stumps,
shredded branches, uprooted the nettle.
The bison in the moss raised up their rumps
and shuddered, the long gray hair of their manes
bristled as they propped themselves on front legs

and gazed at the wondrous sparks in the heavens—
when all of a sudden, amid some twigs,
a smoldering shell whirled and hissed,
and split apart a trunk like a lightning bolt.
The bison had never before witnessed
such might, and fled to hide from the assault.

But where was the battle? The young men ask;
they seize their arms; women throw up their hands
in despair; and they all put on the mask
of war, certain of triumph in their lands.
“God’s with Napoleon!” they shout and weep,
“And the great Napoleon is with us!”

Oh spring, how long our countrymen will keep
alive this memory so glorious—
the war and the harvest. For while the grain
and grass blossomed, so many human hopes
flowered too, nourished by this bloody rain;
and from this, the beautiful dream develops.

Soplica estate lay close to the road,
where two commanders pressed from the Nieman—
our Prince Josef Poniatowski, followed
by the King of Westphalia, Hierononym,
whose armies occupied most of the land
in Lithuania, from Grodno to Slonim.
The king had given his men the command
for three days rest, and though fatigued, worn out,
Polish soldiers complained they would not stand
further delay, eager to load and shoot.

The Prince set up headquarters in the town,
but on Soplica’s estate, forty-thousand
troops set up camp and started to bed down.
The Generals joined them: Dombrowski and
Kniaziewicz, Malochowki, Giedrojc,
Grobowski, along with all the rest.

When they arrived, it was already late;
wherever they could, they set up quarters:
the old castle, the manor, by the gate.
Sentries were stationed all around the borders;
exhausted men went straight to their bedrolls;
over the camp a silence quickly came.
Only shadows of the wandering patrols

appeared, and from campfires, guttering flame.
Watchwords were passed, as sentries changed or crossed
the fields and meadows, checking each outpost.

The soldiers slept. The Judge, the generals,
the guests, had long been carried off in dream.
Of all the eyes, only the Seneschal's
remained open. Held in such high esteem,
he had to prepare the next day's banquet,
a feast dear to the Polish heart, worthy
of such guests, in keeping with the spirit
of the solemn church and family holiday.
Two couples would exchange their wedding vows;
and General Dombrowski made it known
he wished to eat a Polish meal before he goes.

Though it was late, the Seneschal had flown
about to all the neighboring estates,
collecting cooks to follow his directions.
Some worked by the huge bowls and serving plates,
while he tucked up his sleeves and wrapped an apron
around his waist and donning his nightcap,
roaming through the kitchen, wielding his swatter.
To protect his delicacies, he'd snap
his wrist at any greedy fly, no matter
how small; while with his other hand he took
from his pocket his spectacles and wiped—
and reached for, unwrapped, and opened a book.

The book his hand now tightly gripped
was called *The Perfect Cook*, and it contained
all known recipes for the Polish table,
described in great detail. It is maintained
that when Count Tenczyn served his remarkable
feasts in Italy (which pleased Pope Urban
the Eighth) he followed this book religiously.
The same holds true for the Radziwill clan,
especially *Beloved Karol*, when he
would entertain Stanislaw the King—
they still discuss his marvelous banqueting.

The Seneschal read and comprehended;
he ordered cooks who carried out with skill.
Dozens of knives chopped and cleavers pounded;
not one of the cooks' helpers remained still.
They carried wood and pails of milk or wine,

emptied kettles, spiders, and stewing pans.
Pots were steaming, the stove began to shine,
the leather bellows were pumped to fan
which flared and ignited the wood,
when the Seneschal poured melted butter
over logs. (Only the wealthy would
permit such extravagance, such utter
excess.) Some boys stuffed bundles of dried twigs,
while others set immense roasts on the spits—
beef, deer, haunches of wild boar and stags.
The others plucked wild fowl by pits,
where feathers rose in clouds, the birds stripped bare:
blackcocks and grouse, but not so many hens;
for back when Dobrzynskis attacked the lair,
during the ill-fated foray, the chickens
were slaughtered by the Sack, who didn't care
that he annihilated Zosia's dear flock.
The few that remained were not even fit
for medicine, and the Soplica's stock
of poultry, once known throughout the district,
had not recovered. Yet nothing else was spared
for this banquet; from nearby farms they packed
abundant supplies, which were sent and prepared;
so one might say: *Bird's milk is all they lacked.*
The two things necessary on the host's part,
Soplica's house combined—plenty and art.

On the Day of the Annunciation,
the sacred day of the Blessed Mother,
the morning sky helped with the preparation.
Without a cloud it loomed like some other-
worldly sea, where stars like pearls shone beneath
the waves. Then, from the side a tiny cloud
floating above the earth, plunged into the sheath—
an angel detained by a human crowd
at prayer, that now must rush back to its hearth.

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From all surrounding towns and villages,
Lithuanian people gathered on the lawn,
as though they'd read in the Almanac pages,
that by the chapel, just after dawn,
a miracle would occur. So now they came,
in part because they were devout, in part
from curiosity, which are the same
to those who knew the famous names by heart—
the Generals, the Legion's commanders

who attended Mass today, those honored
like patron saints, who valiantly endured
homelessness and poverty and exile
to serve Lithuania during her trial.

The officers were quickly surrounded;
they stared at soldiers who grouped at the hedge.
The Lithuanians were astounded
to hear these men speak the Polish language,
their countrymen, uniformed, armed, and free.

Mass had begun, although the sanctuary
could not contain the crowds, so people knelt
on grass outside, while looking through the door
of the chapel where holy icons dwelt.
The peasants' heads were uncovered, their hair
was white and pale as flax but shone like gold
ripened fields of grain. And here and there,
girls' braids, adorned with flowers, hours old,
loose-flowing ribbons and some peacock plumes,
blossomed like corncockles and cornflowers
amid the wheat. Then when the bell resumes
its ring, heads bend, like grain before mowers.

This day the farmers bring the first tribute
of spring, and spread fresh-cut bundles of green
around the Blessed Mother. Then they distribute
large bouquets and wreaths around and between
icons; they even decorate the belfry
and galleries. At times the morning wind
stirring from the east, wrenched the flowers free.
They fall upon the heads, praying in kind,
spilling all of their abundant fragrance—
just like a priest at Mass waving incense.

Soon the sermon and the Mass ended;
the Chamberlain addressed the gathering.
He had just been chosen and commended
by the Confederates; and now, this spring,
he was the Confederation's new Marshall,
pleased to wear a Senator's uniform:
the gold-embroidered tunic wasn't all;
his fringed robe was *gros-de-tours* in form,
his massive belt was gold brocade, a sword
hung from it, hilt fashioned from lizard skin;
a diamond pin by his collar was moored,

a square-top hat, white, with feathers tucked in;
costly bunches of herons' crests and egrets'
sat on his head. This hat was only worn
on festival days, for many ducats
were needed to replace a tuft once torn.
So thus attired, he stepped up on a mound
and gathered peasants and soldiers around.

“Brothers, the priest proclaimed from the pulpit,
the Emperor will restore to the crown
our lost freedom, and he will unite it
with the Lithuanian Duchy. So one
nation will fight against the Moscovite.
The Diet has already reconvened;
you heard the official decree last night,
but now some words, for I wish to amend
some rumors concerning the Soplicas,
affecting what the nobility does.”

“Everyone's heard of Soplica's crime:
his sins are widely known and talked about,
but now I think it is the proper time
to tell what I have heard, beyond all doubt,
from the Generals here in our presence.
Jacek did not die, as was reported,
in Rome, although he perished in some sense—
he abandoned his former life, so sordid,
changed his name and calling. His offence
against God and country has been redeemed
by his holy life and deeds so esteemed.”

“At Hohenlinden, when Richepanse
was half-wiped out, and preparing to retreat,
unaware that at a close distance,
Kniaziewicz's men were waiting to greet
their ally, Jacek, called Robak the priest,
ventured amid flying arrows and spears,
carrying news, although the fire increased,
to tell how Poles had just attacked the rear.
Later in Spain, when our Ulhans captured
Samosiera, the fortified hill,
by Koziatowski's side, he was injured
two times. Later, he wandered about, still
risking danger, a trusted emissary
with secret instructions, to examine
the popular current in the country,

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and to establish groups of clandestine societies. When he finally returned to his home, he planned the insurrection—Jacek Soplica was to be honored and given the Legion’s highest award.”

“Today I proclaim the official word—the Emperor has given his reprieve. The blot has been removed, the new accord now clears Jacek Soplica’s name; he will receive the title, *True Patriot of Poland*. So now, if anyone dares to recall that ancient deed, I issue this command: that heinous act has been redeemed, all guilt expiated. Those who denigrate his family are subject to punishment, *Gravis Notae Maculae*. This I state, fully authorized by the government. According to the act signed on this date, now that equality exists—judgment affects both soldier and newly ennobled citizen, peasant, and town resident. For this new law has been extolled in Articles of Confederation, and duly proclaimed across the nation.”

“Regarding the Legion of Honor Cross, although it comes too late, that won’t decrease the glory and won’t diminish the loss. If Jacek could never attain such peace, let this award grant it in death. I’ll place it on his grave, remaining there seven days, and then the chapel wall it will grace, a votive offering to God in heaven.”

Having said this, he walked to Jacek’s grave and hung from the modest cross the order, knotted with cockles and ribbons. He gave the badge (white star, gold crown) its new quarters; the star rays glittered in the daylight sun, the final glow of Jacek’s earthly life.

The others knelt and prayed in unison the *Angelus*: “There will be peace from strife.” The Chamberlain replied, “Forgive a sinner.” The Judge extended his invitation

that all might attend the evening dinner,
already in its final preparation.

Two old men sat outside the house, tankards
of strong mead resting on their knees; they gazed
past the bright-colored budding poppies, towards
the lawn, where the Ulhan's red head-dress raised
its glittering colors like a sunflower
with its rooster feathers and gilded metal.
A girl stood beside him in the bower,
her dress as green as rue, eyes like the petal
of a violet—closely watching this Ulhan,
and children picking flowers by the fence,
who turned away and rushed right through the garden,
afraid to interrupt this lovers' conference.

The old men drink their mead and dip their snuff
from a bark case, continuing their chat.
“Yes, yes, Protazy, it is true enough,”
said the Warden. “I can agree with that,”
replied Protazy the Apparitor.
“Yes,” they repeated in unison, “Yes,”
nodding their heads. “You know, I'm not so sure
I could have foreseen this outcome unless
I recall other, even stranger, suits.
Yes, there are precedents, worse outrages,
worse excesses and unending disputes
resolved by marriage. They're all in the pages
of the Court Record, Borzodobohat
reconciled with Lopat; and the Krepsztuls
with Kupsci; after it Putrament sat
with Pikturna; Odyniec no longer duals
with Mackiewicz, and Turno with Kwilecki.
But wait, there's more, Poles have been embroiled
with Lithuanians more violently
than Horeszkos and Soplicas—reconciled
when Queen Jadwiga settled the matter
outside the courts. It's best when both parties
have something to bargain with; I'd rather
reconcile with widows or young ladies;
then it's easy to strike a compromise.
Lengthy lawsuits occur within the church
or when there are very close family ties;
when marriage is impossible, the search
is long. And it will never be resolved
when Poles and Russians try to litigate,

though both from brothers Lech and Rus evolved.
When Lithuania took the Teutonic state
to court, the princes only won their suit
when King Jagiello finally intervened
to settle for once this unending dispute.
Another famous case was once convened
between Rzymaszas and the Dominicans,
until Prince Dymysza, the convent's lawyer
won the suit, upsetting Rzymysza's plans.
From this we say: *The Lord God is greater
Than Lord Rymysza.* I praise this new accord.
I'll taste your mead instead of your penknife."
Saying this he lifted up the tankard
wishing the Warden a long, healthy life.

"True," the Warden replied with emotion.
"Is Poland's fate truly strange and harried;
and Lithuania's strong devotion
to Warsaw makes them like an old married
couple. What God has joined Satan will tear apart;
God has his own and so has the devil.
Oh, Protazy, soon we shall see the start
of a new world, the end of all this evil.
We'll see our brothers from the Kingdom,
those whom many years ago I served;
we'll greet the confederates when they come.
My deceased master, the Pantler, deserved
to see this day—why did Jacek kill him?
But let's not cry; the Union of Poland
and Lithuania is no more a whim—
everything has been discussed and planned."

"It's also strange," the Apparitor said,
"regarding our Zosia, whose very hand
Tadeusz requests, for last year, instead
of proposals, we had a strange omen,
like a sign from heaven."

"Now we must call
her Pani Zofija," broke in the Warden.
"She's already grown so lovely and tall;
she is Lord Horeszko's only grand-daughter."
"This augury," Protazy continued,
"I saw myself, as well as what comes after.
Last year our servants were eating their food,
drinking their mead during a holiday.
Two fighting sparrows fell down from the attic;

both males—the younger one had a gray band around its neck, the other black. They continued to scuffle in the yard, turning over, tumbling into the dust. I watched: the servants' whispers could be heard; they said the black one was the Count. I trust they meant the gray to stand for Soplica. So when the gray one was on top they shouted, 'Vivat Soplica, that Horeszko's coward' But when the gray seemed to be routed, 'Get up!' they yelled, 'Don't lose to this magnate, for this would surely shame a gentleman.' We laughed, waiting for the fight to abate, which bird would win—or which man. then our little Zosia, feeling pity, covered the fierce warriors with her palm, though they still fought with such intensity, tufts of feathers flew. She was calm, but watching her, all the old wives gossiped, she'd be the one to help them reconcile. Today I see that Zosia will fulfill this prophecy, though if I had to guess, they figured on the Count, not Tadeusz."

"Who can fathom the strange things that occur?" the Warden asked. "It's not miraculous, but nonetheless, there is another matter hard to understand. You know how garrulous I've been, you know much I've longed to drown the whole Soplica family—yet this lad, Tadeusz, how I've watched him as he's grown; I've always been fond of him, always glad to see him at the castle. I always urged him on to difficult stunts and feats, and he'd succeed by devising new ways: when he dislodged doves from the tower heights, or plucked the mistletoe from the large oak, or tried to tear a crow's nest from a pine. He could do anything, I'd often joke, too bad he wasn't in Horeszko's line, and what a shame he was a Soplica. He might have been the castle's only heir; now he'll be the husband of Zofija."

The two old men broke off their talk to stare wistfully, though at times they could be heard:

“Yes, my dear Gervazy, yes...”

“Yes, my dear
Protazy, yes...” The turf bench in the yard
on which they sat adjoined the kitchen wall;
from an open window, steam filled the air,
billowing like a conflagration. When all
the smoke was gone, a white chef’s hat was there,
flitting like a dove. It was the Seneschal,
who stuck his head out through the kitchen window,
eavesdropping on this private conversation.
Finally, he handed them a plate with two
biscuits. “Have this cake with your libation,”
He said, “and listen while I tell the rest:
a quarrel which we thought would end in blood,
while hunting in the Naliboki forest.
at that time Prince Rejtan truly thought he could
play a trick on his friend Prince deNassau.
It almost cost his life; I’ll tell you how
I reconciled the gentlemen and saw
them part as friends.” Although he spoke so slow,
the cook broke in to ask if he was able
to explain how he should set the table.

The Seneschal withdrew; the old men downed
their mead and wistfully returned their gaze
to the lawn where the handsome Ulhan frowned,
conversing with the girl who seemed to praise
this youth, clearly wounded in some fighting,
his arm bandaged, supported by a sling.

“Zosia, you absolutely must tell me
before exchanging rings; I must be sure.
Last winter you told me that you were ready,
but at that time I couldn’t accept your
pledge, because I felt that I had forced your will.
I’ve only spent a little time at home;
I’m not so vain to think you’d wait until
I came—that my glance might suffice the time I roam
throughout the world, having kindled your love.
I’m not a braggart, though I wished to secure
your affections and wandered off to fight the war.
You’ve been magnanimous; your pledge still stands;
perhaps you’re choosing me not out of love,
but out of duty, following commands.
Marriage is not something by which you prove
your loyalty; take counsel of your heart;

ignore your Uncle's threats, your Aunt's entreaties.
I do not wish to force myself on you;
I heard last night that I will be around
a longer time; I will instruct a new
regiment, recovering from my wound."

Zosia raised her head and eyes timidly,
"I can't recall what happened long ago;
I know that everyone said to marry.
Whatever my elders tell me to do
whatever is heaven's will..." She lowered
her eyes again. "Before you departed,
when Father Robak spoke his final word,
that stormy night you hastily started
off, I saw how sorry you were to leave;
your eyes were full of tears and those tears fell
deep into my heart. Truly I believe
that you love me; and I sincerely tell
that all those times I prayed for your well-being,
I saw those tears, so large and gleaming."

"Later, when I had to travel to Vilno
to spend the winter, I longed to return
to this estate and to this room below
the stork's nest, and our first meeting, so stern.
But when you left, my memory of you
sprouted like a seedling after planting;
throughout the winter a tiny tree grew.
That's all I knew; these days I spent waiting
to see this room again—it was as though
something whispered that if I would come back,
I would find you. All winter in Vilno,
I pondered the one thing that I lack;
your name was always on my lips those days;
and even during carnival season,
the ladies said that they knew from my gaze
I was in love, and that was the reason
I felt so strange. So if it's really true,
I guess that I must be in love with you."

Pleased with this new proof of her affection,
Tadeusz pressed her hand and led her out
of the garden, and in the direction
of the first room where both of them had met.

The Notary was there, taking his time,

waiting on the ladies and his fiancée,
bustling about, as if still in his prime.
He handed signet rings and chains and clay
jars and glass cruets, powders and lotions,
as he looked at his bride triumphantly.
She finished her toilet preparations,
sitting in front of the mirror peacefully,
consulting the graces, while her servants
rushed about, curling her hair with irons,
affixing flowers, placing ornaments.

But while the Notary made his motions,
the kitchen boy was pounding on the window;
a hare was spotted, creeping through the garden,
having rushed from the woods, through the meadow.
It sat on its haunches by an open
furrow, frightened and so vulnerable,
a child could catch it. And now it was possible.
The Sheriff dragged Falcon across the grounds;
the Notary followed behind, his Bobtail
yelping. The Seneschal stood by the fence,
waving his fly swatter, leaning on a rail,
watching the massacre from a distance.
The poor beast froze, as hunters tried to restrain
their hounds, grabbing collars, whistling, shrieking.
The hounds perk up their ears, though they remain
sedate, softly smacking their lips—shaking
impatiently, as they begin to sniff the wind,
looking like two arrows set on one string.
The Seneschal yells; the hare flies behind
the plants, under the fence, wildly darting
through the meadow, chased by the yelping hounds.
Falcon and Bobtail fall onto the hare
from either side; a cloud of dust surrounds
the prey, as dogs seem to fly through the air,
sinking their teeth, like claws into its back.
The hare cries out just once, pitifully,
as hunters run to witness the attack,
and hounds tear at the flesh of its belly.

The owners stroke their dogs; the Seneschal
takes out his hunting knife, cuts off the feet
and says, “both hounds have proved to be equal;
so both deserve a leg, the victor’s treat.
Both share the glory for running this race:
The Palace of Prince Pac is quite worthy;

And Prince Pac is worthy of his palace.
 The hound of the hunter is quite worthy,
 and the hunter is worthy of his hound.
 This long and vehement quarrel is done;
 I, whom you chose as stakeholder, have found
 both hounds equal. My verdict: both have won.
 Let me return the stakes to both of you;
 sign the agreement.” The hunters were pleased
 and joined their hands, attempting to renew
 a long broken friendship that almost ceased.

“My stake was a horse and caparison,”
 the Notary said. “And the authorities
 have it in writing; and the Judge has one
 ring in deposit that accompanies
 the wager. Let the Seneschal accept
 as a reminder of this incident;
 let him engrave the Hreczecha crest
 on it, or his own name. In any event,
 the cornelian is flawless and the gold
 eleven karats. Unfortunately,
 the Ulhans commandeered the horse that I’ve extolled,
 but the caparison they left to me.
 Experts praise it for its strength and comfort;
 it is a work of art—the saddle, thin
 like the Cossacks at the Ottoman Court:
 on the pommel, precious stones are set in;
 the seat is covered with a damask pad;
 it’s soft as down to mount; you feel as though
 in your own bed, and you’ll be glad
 to know that when you gallop.” And to show
 just what he meant, Bolesta the Notary,
 very fond of grand gestures, spread his feet
 as though he had mounted a horse, his body
 bent to imitate a galloping retreat.
 “And when you go,” he continued, “sparks fly;
 you’d think the horse was dripping bits of gold,
 because the sidebands are so thickly set;
 the silver stirrups from an ancient mold;
 the leather straps, the bridle and the bit
 have mother-of-pearl buttons and studs;
 a crescent in the shape of a new moon
 adorns the brass breastplate. It’s said these goods,
 the whole outfit, in fact, was captured soon
 after the Turks were defeated at Lvov.
 And so, dear Sheriff, please accept these things;

of my esteem for you, these are the proof.”

“Your gift,” replied the Sheriff, “truly brings me joy, almost as much as what I stood for this wager—my precious dog collar, Prince Sanguszko’s gift, a token of good friendship. It is covered with alligator skin, in-laid with golden spikes, the leash is woven silk. I’d say the workmanship is just as precious as the gem-filled mesh. You know just how I feel about kinship: I hoped my children would inherit it, and though I have none now, I do intend... My wedding is today, but I admit I’d be more pleased to see it in your hand. I humbly give this collar to you now, dear Notary, for what you’ve given me, and also to remind us of this row, that’s been concluded so honorably.” And saying this, the Sheriff gave a bow.

Both men returned, and at the manor table, announced to all that Falcon and Bobtail were both fine hounds, deserving of that label, that his dispute, unlike the Judge’s food, was stale.

It was rumored the hare the hounds had captured the Seneschal raised at home, and slyly released in the garden—that he insured this reconciliation, and that while he thought he fooled all at Soplica’s estate, a few years later, the cook’s young servant brought it up, hoping to stir debate. But that’s as far as the charge ever went: the Notary and Sheriff changed their style, and no one doubted the Seneschal’s denial.

Now in the castle hall the guests assembled, awaiting the Judge’s worthy banquet. The Judge entered—his uniform resembled what Senators wore when the Diet met. Tadeusz followed, escorting his bride, saluting his commanding officers, giving a military bow. He tried to present Zosia, though her step faltered—blushing, her eyes lowered, till finally she

curtsied. (She'd learned what Telimena taught.)
A wreath was placed on her head carefully;
she'd worn these same clothes when she brought
the spring-green sheaf to church this morning
to honor the Virgin. Now, for these guests,
she reaped once more—one hand distributing
grass and flowers, while the sickle which rests
on her brow she adjusts. The Generals
eagerly take the plants and kiss her hand;
she curtsies once more to their greeting calls,
blushing as though responding to command.

General Kniaziewicz reached for her hand,
and after planting a fatherly kiss,
lifted her onto the table to stand.
Everyone clapped, shouting, "Bravo!" at this,
charmed by the girl's beauty and her bearing,
but also her Lithuanian costume,
for these Generals, who lived a wayfaring
life, wandering so long away from home,
found this national dress quite inspired,
reminding them of youth, now so long gone—
and their ancient loves that no longer fired.
With tears they circle the table; not one
is unmoved, as they gaze with curiosity.
While some ask Zosia to raise up her eyes,
others ask her to turn. It is with pity
and bashfulness that she finally complies.

Whether Zosia had been advised to dress
that way, or whether she knew from instinct
(for girls will always know how to impress),
in other ways this day was quite distinct
for her: it marked the first time in her life
her Aunt had scolded, calling her stubborn,
since she refused (thus creating much strife)
to don what fashion dictates must be worn.
Although she wept so much her way prevailed,
and Telimena's reign at long last failed.

Zosia was dressed in a white underskirt;
her tunic had been sewn from green camlet,
bordered with pink. The vest was green and short,
though long pink ribbons from the waist were set
about the neck, which also had fine lace.
And under this vest, her breast was nestled

just like a bud beneath a leaf, in place.
with each movement, her full white sleeves rustled
like wings of a butterfly testing its flight.
These sleeves were thickly gathered at her wrist,
and knotted ribbons held her collar tight.
Her earrings, which none of the viewers missed,
were artfully carved from sour cherry pits,
two tiny hearts with arrows and a flame.
Dobrzynski, the Sack, took much pride in its
fine handiwork. And one time when he came
to visit Zosia, he made a gift of them.
Two strands of amber hung from her collar;
a wreath of rosemary green and its stem
adorned her brow; her braids fell back over
her shoulders, and on her lovely pale brow
(for such is the custom during harvest)
she placed a small sickle that seemed to glow,
so freshly polished was the blade. A guest
might see Goddess Diana in her stead,
the new moon shining above her forehead.

While officers showed their admiration,
one pulled a portfolio from his vest,
and then he began his preparation:
he unrolled paper, ignoring the rest,
and sharpened his pencil and moistened it.
Looking at Zosia, he began to draw.
The Judge barely noticed his sketching kit,
Though he recognized the artist he saw,
even dressed in a Colonel's uniform:
the rich epaulets, his short Spanish beard,
along with this truly Ulhan-like form;
his former bearing had not disappeared.
“Dear Count,” he said, “I see you wear a pen
right on your cartridge belt.” And sure enough,
it was the youthful Count, who had often
promised to fight, though his skills had grown rough;
he'd raised a whole cavalry regiment,
so vast his wealth. And he'd already shown
valor in battle; the Emperor sent
orders to raise his rank and make it known
the Count was now the regiment's Colonel.
Wishing to offer his congratulation,
the Judge called out—although his greeting fell
upon deaf ears. The Count pursued his avocation.

Meanwhile, a second couple made their way:
the Sheriff, who'd been faithful to the Tsar,
now served Napoleon, though barely a day
had passed since he wore the Commander's star
for a squadron of gendarmes. Dressed in blue
with Polish facings, his curved saber dragging,
he clinked his spurs, coming into full view.
His finely dressed bride, a few steps lagging
behind, walked, both solemn and dignified.
for she was Tekla, the Seneschal's daughter.
The Sheriff was forced to swallow his pride;
though he loved Telimena, he caught her
one too many times playing the coquette;
so he dropped her, wishing to cause her grief,
and sought out Tekla to help him forget;
and she provided him with much relief,
and though not young, she still knew how to dance—
a good housekeeper, capable and smart,
richly dowered from her inheritance.
Her ancestral village was just a part;
a gift from the Judge had increased her chance.

The group waited in vain for the third pair;
the Judge impatiently sent his servants,
who now returned: "While chasing that last hare,"
one reported, "the bridegroom had poor sense
and brought his wedding ring, which now was lost
in the meadow." And so, the Notary,
almost ready to wed, crossed and re-crossed
his path in vain. Meanwhile, his bride-to-be
slowly prepared, not wishing to hurry
or hastily get dressed. Near her, a flock
of ladies rushed about in a flurry;
she'd barely be ready by four o'clock.

BOOK 12

LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER!

The last old Polish banquet – the centerpiece – an explanation of its figures – transformations – Dombrowski's gifts – more about the Penknife – Kniaziewicz receives a gift – Tadeusz' first official act after receiving his inheritance – Gervazy's remarks – concert of concerts – Polonaise – Let us love one another!

A thundering crash—the great door opened; the Seneschal entered, wearing a hat, his head held high. Yet he did not extend greeting, and he failed to take the spot that he usually claimed: for today he appeared in new character—Marshall of the Court, and using his official staff, he steered the guests, starting with those of great import, directly to the places he assigned, just like a master of ceremonies. He circled and he led, his path designed to accommodate the authorities first—so the Wojewoda's Official took the most prominent spot a velvet chair with ivory arms, cushions lush and full, to his left, Kniaziewicz, Pac, Malochowski, and the handsome wife of the high Official. Farther back sat officers and ladies, young and old, arranged by the Seneschal in alternating pairs, trying to please. Among this group landowners were included, placed where order and decorum suited.

Meanwhile, the Judge had politely withdrawn from the banquet, and by the road outside, was talking to some peasants on the lawn. He led them to a table set beside the garden, seating himself at one end, placing the parish priest at the other. Tadeusz and Zosia did not intend to sit and feast; instead they rushed to gather food and drink, eating as they walked, to serve the seated peasants, for custom bespoke

that new lords and ladies of the manor observe
this rule: First you must serve the common folk.

Inside the guests who waited for their food
were marveling at the great centerpiece,
whose precious metal and workmanship stood
at equal level, value never to decrease.
According to legend, Prince Radziwill
The Orphan had to order it from the Venice
court, to be adorned in the Polish style.
The centerpiece had later disappeared
back when the Swedes invaded the nation,
yet it mysteriously reappeared
in this country gentleman's mansion.
And now it had been polished for the meal;
placed on the table—huge as a coach wheel.

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The centerpiece was completely coated
from rim to rim with sugar and meringue,
as though a fake winter landscape floated
in mid-air. A dark forest was growing
in the center, groves of rich confection;
on either side were different homes and huts,
a peasant village, and at close inspection,
a settlement which a manor abuts.
They were not covered with hoarfrost or ice,
but sugar spun into a snowy froth.
Tiny porcelain figures further entice
the eye, which, by now, is totally loath
to look away; for all these figures wear
Polish costumes—and their poses depict
some great event. They were made with such care;
you'd think that they might cry if they were pricked.

The guests were curious—what do they show?
The Seneschal rose, starting to explain;
he spoke and the vodka began to flow:
“With your permission, honored gentlemen
and ladies, the countless figures you see
depict the history of the Polish
District Assemblies—voting, victory,
triumph, dispute. So let me explain this,
for I have guessed the meaning of this scene.”

“There, on the right, countless nobles gather
to feast, before the Diet will convene;

although the banquet is prepared, they'd rather stand in groups, hold counsel, deliberate—a man right in the center of each pack, while those around him listen and debate; their eyes were open wide, jaws hanging slack. An arm is waving in the air—something new is expounded by an orator; see how his finger explicates, marking on his palm. Each orator is speaking for his own candidate, and his impression can be read auditors' expression."

"There, in another group, a noble stands, hand thrust into his belt, as urgently, he listens to the orator's demands. another cups his ear and silently twirls his long mustache, taking in the speech, storing it deep in memory for now. The orator is pleased that his words reach receptive ears—he has converts. To show he's sure, he pats the pockets of his coat, for inside them he seems to have their vote."

"Another group, and something else takes place; the speaker grabs his listener by the belt. They pull away and each one turns his face; one bristles with the anger that he felt; he shakes his fist to halt the speaker's tongue; apparently, the praises he believes were ones that for another candidate were sung. And so this man, dropping his forehead, heaves his body like a bull at the speaker, who tries to seize him by the horn. And since, of course, one of them is weaker, swords are drawn, while others flee in alarm."

"Another gentleman, off to the side, tries to remain neutral, but vacillates. Then, closing his eyes, he lets fate decide his vote: he lets his fingers halt debates; if his thumbs meet, he'll vote affirmative, but if they miss, he'll cast a negative."

"Behind that scene, a convent dining hall has been transformed by noblemen to hold a District Assembly. After roll call,

the old men sit on benches, while the bold
young nobles, standing, gaze over their heads,
curious to see the District Marshall,
who raises up an urn and then proceeds
to empty the balls. When he's counted all,
the apparitors raise their arms at once;
the newly elected names they announce."

"And yet, one noble clearly disagrees:
he's stuck his head out the window and stares
with looks so bold and insolent, he'd seize
the entire halls just to give some scares.
Who couldn't guess that man shouts 'Veto!'"
See how his boastful challenge stirs the crowd
outside. See them rush to the door and go,
sabers drawn, to the kitchen. Yes, a loud
and bloody battle will break out—but no!
Pay close attention—in the corridor
a priest dressed in chasuble advances.
He brings the *host* and raises it, this prior,
led by a boy in surplice, who distances
the men by ringing a bell with great zeal.
And once they see this man of God, they sheath
their swords and quickly cross themselves and kneel.
And wherever the old priest turns, beneath
his upraised arms, the clink of weapons cease;
for all is calm and all returns to peace."

"Too bad you younger men can not recall
just how it was among our turbulent
sovereign nobles. Though arms were held by all,
when true faith flourished, we ruled by consent.
Laws were respected and no need for police;
liberty grew with order, and glory
from abundance—for those were our decrees.
In other lands, I've heard a different story:
the government maintains soldier and gendarme,
constable and police; but it takes the sword
to guarantee one from another's harm;
there is no liberty; please take my word."

The Chamberlain tapped his tobacco case.
"Pan Seneschal," he said, "could you postpone
until later your history of this place?
We hear, and yet our stomachs growl and groan;
don't take offence—we'd like to eat quite soon."

At this the Seneschal laid down his staff.
“Your excellency,” he said, “one scene remains
to be explained, then you can eat and laugh.
The maker of this centerpiece took pains
to represent the Diet’s history.
Right here the new Marshall is carried out
by his followers, and to his glory,
the nobles toss their hats up and they shout,
‘Vivat!’ Yet the outvoted candidate
lingers alone; upon his gloomy brow
his cap pulled down. Nearby, his wife, in wait
has guessed the outcome. Now she too will show
signs of defeat, thinking of the honor
she might receive, now lost for three more years.
Luckily the maid is almost upon her,
for she’s about to faint or burst in tears.”

Finally, the Seneschal gave the signal
that he’d concluded his lengthy accounts;
servants entered in pairs; their trays were full
of food: first soup was served in great amounts—
beet soup known as *royal* and rich clear broth
prepared with skill as in old Polish times.
Into this broth, the Seneschal throws both
tiny pearls and a golden coin, which chimes
against the pot. Such broth, it’s often said,
fortifies the health, purifies the blood.

And yet what words could possibly evoke
delicious tastes, no longer known or served:
arkus, kontuz, blemas: the first egg yoke
mixed with sweet curds and whey; then veal, reserved
from birth for sausage, within a chicken broth;
the last, a rich and sweet almond aspic.
Then the main courses came: cod stuffed with both
civets and musk; and on the side were thick
caramels, dried plums, pinenuts, and creams.
But the fish were the most extraordinary—
salmon from Carpathian Mountain streams,
sturgeon, caviar from Venice and Turkey;
pike and pickerel, almost a yard long;
capon carp and noble carp and flounder.
Last, they brought a dish, aroma strong;
a masterpiece, an uncut fish, rounder
and longer than most. Only the head was fried;

the center had been baked, and the broad tail
was a ragout, with sauces on the side.

The guests, little concerned about this detail,
don't care about this culinary puzzle;
they eat like soldiers in a castle stormed;
abundant Hungarian wine they guzzle.

Meanwhile, the centerpiece had been transformed.
Stripped of its snow, it turned to shades of green,
as the light froth of ice began to thaw,
revealing a base heretofore unseen.
And so, a new season the guests now saw,
sparkling with green, a multi-colored spring.
The grains come forth, as though with yeast they grow;
saffron wheat and gilded corn now mixing
with rye, in silver leaves and shiny dew;
and buckwheat chocolate was manufactured,
and apples and pears, blooming in an orchard.

The gifts of summer do not last for long;
in vain they beg the Seneschal to halt
the change—for they would like him to prolong
the sun. But it is spinning through the vault
of heaven, as the seasons change. Already,
the grain is painted with gold, and the heat
inside causes a thaw that is steady.
Grass turns yellow to show summer's retreat,
and crimson leaves slowly begin to fall,
as though a wind had stripped the leaves all bare:
once adorned, they now stand naked and tall—
cinnamon sticks and twigs, placed with such care,
to simulate pine groves in such a way
that needles could be made from caraway.

The guests who had been drinking cups of wine
tore off the branches, stumps, and roots to chew
as snacks. The Seneschal, proud of his fine
centerpiece, circled it to get a better view.

General Dombrowski feigned astonishment:
“May I ask if these are Chinese shadows,
or has Pinetti the Conjuror been sent
from Italy with his black magic shows?
Are such displays so commonplace these days
in Lithuania? These customs leave me awed.

tell me—I'm unfamiliar with your ways,
you know I've spent all of my life abroad.”

The Seneschal replied and bowed to this:
“No, Pan General, this is no godless art,
but a clear reminder of the glorious
banquets, which were such a necessary part
of life among our magnates, when Poland
was blessed by God with happiness and might.
All that I've done, I hope you understand,
I've read about in books. You are quite right
to act astonished; such ancient custom,
alas, has all but vanished from our land.
These days new fashions spring upon us from
God knows where. Young men say they cannot stand
such vast expense; grudgingly serving drink and food;
they're stingy with this fine Hungarian wine;
they would prefer to serve something that's rude
and devilish—adulterated champagne
from Moscow. Then, following their meager dinner,
they'll lose so much at cards, that the winner
a hundred gentlemen could entertain.
And yet, I feel I must be very frank
and tell how even our most honored guest
(I truly hope he won't think me a crank)
scoffed at me when I reached into the chest
to get this masterpiece. Antiquated,
he called it, a tiresome contrivance,
better left for children. And he related
how he thought it unfit, at variance
with such a gathering of distinguished men.
And Judge, even you said they'd all be bored.
But after all, it is my own opinion,
having observed our guests lack of discord
and great astonishment—this centerpiece
was well worth it. Besides, when again
will we have so many dignitaries?
You see, Pan General, there's much to gain
in a banquet, by learning this fine art;
for when you entertain foreign monarchs—
yes, even Napoleon Bonaparte—
let me conclude my talk with these remarks.”

A murmur of voices was heard outside
shouting, “Long live Maciek the Steeplecock!”
The crowd pushed through the door by Maciek's side;

then the Judge then took his guest with an arm-lock,
and happily led him to his special place
among the other honored guests. He said,
“Maciek, only a bad neighbor would fail to grace
our dinner table. “It’s almost time for bed;
“I try to eat early,” Maciek replied,
I came only out of curiosity,
not hunger. Even if I really tried,
I couldn’t stay away—I had to see.”
He overturned his plate to show the room
he would not eat, and silenced into gloom.

“Pan Dobrznski,” General Dombrowski
said to him, “Are you the famous swordsman
from the time of Kosciuszko, the very
Maciek know for his *Switch*? But this I can
not understand, you are healthy and spry,
after so many years—look how I’ve aged.
Kniaziewicz, too, has grayed and soon will die,
but you could hold your own if war were waged
today; you could compete with younger men;
your *Switch* still blooms! I’ve heard you gave a thrashing
to the Moscovites. Where are your brethren?
I’d love to see those pocketknives slashing,
those razors shaving, those Lithuanian
relics, the last of their kind, so dashing.”

“General,” replied the Judge, “they all fled
after the victory. Refuge they sought
in the Warsaw Kingdom. They are not dead;
I’m sure they joined the Legions where they fought.”

“It’s true,” a young squadron chief interrupted,
“One of my men, a scarecrow with a mustache,
was a cavalry major who disrupted
so many enemy camps with his lash.
This Dobryznski calls himself *The Baptist*;
Mazovians call him *The Lithuanian
Bear*. But if the General insists,
I’ll order my sergeant to bring him in.
“More of his clan,” a lieutenant added,
“I’ve seen a soldier who is called *The Razor*,
and one who hauls a blunderbuss, who’s led
a band of grenadiers, one a chasseur.”

“But what about their chief?” the General

questioned. “I want to know about this *Penknife*, whose miraculous deeds the Seneschal has extolled, whose deeds seem larger than life.” “This *Penknife*,” the Seneschal responded, is not in exile, though he was in fear that if there was an inquiry he would be hounded. The poor devil, all winter long was near enough, hiding himself in nearby forests. Now he’s returned, for in these times of war, we need just such a knight who’d face all tests; though it’s a shame his youth we can’t restore. But here he is. . . .” The Seneschal pointed into the vestibule, where villagers and servants were huddling in a disjointed mass. Above their heads, one bald head towered, shining like the full moon. Three times, at least, it emerged and once more it disappeared into a cloud of heads, as towards the feast he advanced and bowed to the nobles’ cheers.

“Most excellent Hetman of the Crown, or is it General, whichever is correct, I am the Warden Rembajlo, and this is my *Penknife*—you’ve heard of its effect. It’s not the handle, not the inscription; its fame stems from the temper of its blade. You have already heard the description of its deeds, and praise for the hand that made it work. My service is long and faithful; not just my homeland but Horeszkos’ too, a clan whose virtues all nobles extol. Milord, I do not think a scribe can do with figures and pens to keep his books exact what I, with my *Penknife*, can accomplish—it would tax his powers to add and subtract, for many heads I’ve lopped off with a swish; and yet, my sword has not a single notch; no murderous deed has ever tarnished it. For oftentimes I would prefer to watch from a safe distance, preferring to hit only in warfare or else in a duel. Only one time an unarmed man did fall beneath my blade, and he was just a fool, for whom Our Lord will grant rest eternal. His death, my witnesses must surely know was just—it was *Pro Publico Bono*.”

“Show us,” replied the laughing General, “this famed *Penkife*, this executioner’s delight.” He struggled to raise it with all his strength, then passed it on to the others. In turn they gripped the hilt; only a few could raise it up. Perhaps the famed Dembinski could handily brandish it, with his two powerful arms—this the men could agree, but he was away, and of those present, only the squadron chief Derwinski and Rozycki, the platoon lieutenant managed to swing this pole from iron cast, from hand to hand, in turn, as it was passed.

But General Kniaziewicz, the tallest, turned out to be the strongest of the group, seizing the sword as if it were the smallest rapier, and swinging it with a great swoop. He brandished the blade, which flashed like lightning, calling to mind old Polish fencing moves: *cross stroke*, *mill*, *the crooked slash*, *the frightening downward blow*, *the stolen slash* (a jab that proves the fencing master), attitudes of *tierce* and *counterpoint*, which is the former in reverse.

While he displayed his fencing skills to all, Rembajlo the Warden embraced his knees, and at each turn of sword, he gave a wail. “General, I see that you’ve learned Pulaski’s thrust, that you fought with the Confederates. There is Dzierzanowski’s attack, and there is Sawa’s move; you must have learned these hits from Maciek Dobrzynski’s old hand, but where did you learn that other? And not to boast, but that slashing stroke is my own invention, known in Rembajlo village by a host of Rembajlos only. When they mention that move, they speak of it as *Milord’s Thrust*. Who showed that grip to you? I feel at peace knowing such skill is held by one I trust. For many years, my haunting fears increased, after my death, my sword might rust away—but now it will not rust! Please, General, tell our youth not to use the thin epee, a German billiard cue, fit for a girl.

It saddens me to see one on one's belt.
I lay my Penknife at your feet—my most
dear possession, for which I've always felt
so much. I never had a wife to boast
about, nor children; yet this very sword
was my wife and child, the one who kept
me company, stirring when I stirred,
always by my side, whenever I slept.
When I grew old it hung upon the wall
like the Jews' Commandments. I planned to store it
with me in the grave—that thought I recall,
now that I've found a new owner for it."

The General, smiling, was clearly moved.
"Comrade," he said, "if you would yield to me
your wife and child, the only things you loved,
you'd be a childless and solitary
widower—what sort of compensation
could I provide to sweeten your old age?"
"Am I Cebulski?" he cried with indignation,
"who gambled away his wife, played cribbage
with Moscovites? We have all heard that song.
It brings me joy to know my sword will shine
before the world, held by a hand so strong.
Remember, General, lengthen the line
of your strap, for the blade is very long;
and always when you slash, make your attack
cutting from the left ear, using both hands;
then cut straight from the head down to the stomach."

The General, taking the sword, commands
his servants to place it in a wagon,
for it is much too long for him to wear.
And what became of it has long been one
of the great mysteries. No doubt you'd hear
many versions, repeated every year.

Dombrowski turned to Maciek: "Why are you
so displeased? It seems that our arrival
has made you sour. What does your heart do,
if not skip a beat, when you see, in full
regalia, the gold and silver eagle?
When the trumpets blast Kosciuszko's reveille?
Maciek, I thought the sight of such regal
forces might stir you, but if you can't be
urged to draw your sword or mount your horse,

at least you'll drink and join in with your friend
to toast Napoleon's health, and, of course,
the hope that Poland's slavery will end."

"Hah!" said Maciek. "I see what's happening.
But don't you know, two eagles will not nest
together; it seems that you have been riding,
Hetman, a horse with piebald back and chest.
The Emperor's a hero; we expend
much talk of this subject. And both Pulaskis
often said, when others would defend
DuMorouier the French agent and his decrees,
that Poland was in need of a hero
who was Polish—not French, not Italian,
a true Piast—Jan, Jozef, Maciek, or so. . . . 106
And the army! For the Polish nation?
Fusileers, Grenadiers, and Sappers!
There are more German titles in this group
than national. There might as well be Tartars 107
or Turks—who could understand such a troop?
Or Schismatics, whose faith in God is lacking—
I've seen how they assault peasant women;
they've been plundering churches, pillaging.
The Emperor is bound for Moscow, but when
he goes without God's blessing, he will find 108
the road quite long. I've heard that he's incurred
the Bishops' wrath." Here Maciek stopped and dined;
dipped bread in soup, leaving off his final word.

Pan Maciek's words stung the ears of his host.
Young men grumbled. Compelled to intervene,
the Judge announced that joy was not all lost:
the third betrothed pair at the door was seen.

It was the Notary. And yet he had
to introduce himself, unrecognized,
since in his Polish clothes he wasn't clad.
Telimena, his wife-to-be, legalized
her wish that he renounce his dear *Kontusz*, 109
placing a clause in the marriage contract
to make him change his wardrobe in a rush.
And so, the Notary now wore, in fact,
a French frockcoat. Yet it was clear to all
that this outfit deprived him of his soul.

He strode as though he was afraid he'd fall,

rigid as though he'd prepared for this role
by swallowing his walking stick. He dared
not glance about; he held his composure,
yet all could see just how this bridegroom fared;
a close examination shows his torture.
He doesn't know to bow, or where to place
his hands—this man, once so fond of gesture.
He tucks his hands into an empty space,
feeling for his sash—no longer worn—
only to stroke his stomach. Noticing
his grave mistake, he face begins to turn
crimson; and then, to a distinct hissing
of whispers, he hides them in his pockets,
advancing through a dense thicket of jeers.
the thought of this frock fills him with regrets
and shame, as though disgraced among his peers.
Spotting Maciek, this quickly turned to fears.

The Notary and Maciek had been friends;
yet Maciek casts a glance so furious,
the Notary turns pale and soon defends
himself, by buttoning up his curious
frockcoat, thinking Maciek might plunder it
with his glance. But Maciek only yells out twice:
“You idiot!” And too disgusted to sit
any longer, too shocked to give advice,
he rose, gave no farewell, and quickly went,
mounting his horse, back to his settlement.

But soon the Notary's fair beloved,
Telimena, displayed her ever radiant
beauty; everything from her head to toe proved
she knew the latest styles for this event.
The manner of her gown and her coiffure
a pen could not describe; perhaps a brush
could paint the tulle, the muslin, the cashmere,
the lace, the pearls and precious stones, the blush
upon her cheeks, the look within her eyes...

The Count was astonished to recognize
his former love. He rose from the table,
searching for his sword. “It can't be you!”
He cried. “Here I am, yet you are still able
to clasp another's hand? How could you do
this thing? Unfaithful creature! Fickle soul!
You'd hide your face beneath the earth in shame;

have you forgot your vows? A deed so foul!
Why have I worn your ribbons—for a game?
Woe to the rival who's caused this affront.
Over my dead body he'll have to walk
to reach the altar—to pay for this stunt.”

The guests rose up amid increasing talk;
the Notary was horrified at first.
As the Chamberlain rushed to reconcile
the rivals, Telimena, fearing the worst,
took the Count aside. In her own style,
she slowly whispered: “I am still not married
to the Notary; if you're truly hurt,
tell me right away, nothing's been agreed.
But tell me soon, you must be brief or curt—
do you love me, or have your feelings changed?
Are you prepared to wed this very day?
I'll cancel all the plans that I've arranged;
I'll leave the Notary. What do you say?
To this the Count replied, “Oh, woman, strange,
incomprehensible, and once poetic;
you now appear prosaic; what great change
has made you seek a marriage that would stick
chains around your hands instead of souls?
Please believe me, there are offers of love,
and some of them are made without avowals;
there are ties without obligations of
marriage. For when two hearts can burn apart,
just like the stars they can communicate.
Who knows, the earth reveals his heart,
circling the sun, pursuing the moon, his mate;
he may gaze upon her, but not come near.”

“Enough of this; I'm not some heavenly sphere.”
She said. “But by the grace of God, female.
I know the rest; it's all nonsense to me.
Now I warn you, if from your word, I fail
to marry, if you disrupt this ceremony,
God is my witness, I will attack you
with my sharp nails.”

“I won't” the Count replied,
“disturb your happiness, that would not do.”
With sad eyes and contempt, he turned aside,
trying to punish his unfaithful love,
and with interplanetary fire, tried
another young lady's spirit to move.

The Seneschal, eager to restore peace,
brought up once more his much beloved story—
the wild boar amid the Nalibok trees,
when Prince Rejtan sought to reduce the glory
of Prince de Nassau. But no one really cares;
they finish off their ices, then proceed
to leave the castle, eager for fresh air.

The peasants were passing pitchers of mead
outside; their food had long since disappeared.
Musicians' instruments were set in tune.
All were anxious to dance, yet two whispered
off to the side—they would not break off soon.

Tadeusz spoke: "Zosia, we must discuss
this matter that has occupied my mind.
My Uncle knows; he leaves it up to us.
According to law, the village behind
the castle is part of my inheritance.
And yet, as my wife, a considerable
part falls to you; let's leave nothing to chance;
now that we have Poland, we are able
to profit much from this fortunate change;
but what will the peasants gain from our luck?
Simply another master they'll exchange.
They were governed with kindness, never struck,
but what will happen to them when I'm gone?
I am a soldier; we are both mortal;
I am human too, and I fear my own
caprices; I'd feel more secure if I could tell
the authorities that the peasants' fate
will fall under protection of the law.
We're free; why not let them enjoy our state?
We'll give them land, and not just hay and straw—
the land where they were born, that they've acquired
through bloody toil, the work that makes us rich.
But let me warn you, we will be required
to live more modestly, to make a switch,
if we indeed give our peasants the land;
our income will decrease. Now I was raised
in modest circumstance; nothing grand
and extravagant would ever be praised.
Yet you, Zosia, of higher birth; you spent
your youth in Petersburg; what kind of life
could you expect within a place so distant

from society? You'd be a farmer's wife!"

Zosia replied, "I don't have the authority;
as a woman—it clearly rests with you.
I am too young, but know that I'll agree,
wholeheartedly, whatever you decide to do.
If freeing the peasants makes us more poor,
then you, Tadeusz, will become more dear.
My birth means nothing to me any more;
I was orphaned, and the terrible fear
that I'd remain, Soplicas have dispelled—
in your home, as a daughter, I have dwelled."

"I don't dread country life; if long ago
I lived in the city, it's long forgotten.
To be with hens that cluck, roosters that crow,
that's sure to give me more pleasure than ten
St. Petersburgs. If I have sometimes yearned
for balls and gatherings, well that was childish;
that life would bore me now; I learned
last year in Vilno, when all winter I would wish
to be back home, living the life for which
I was born. And I don't dread the labor;
I'm young, healthy; for me it's not a switch.
I wear a ring of keys; I know which door
each fits—you'll see, I can manage the household."

No sooner had Zosia clearly extolled
the virtues of being a farmer's wife,
than Gervazy approached, amazed and glum:
"I've heard the Judge speak of freedom and life,
but I can't comprehend where this comes from.
What has liberty to do with peasants?
It sounds to me just like some German notion.
Now I trace origins back to events
in paradise: all true men of devotion
agree—we're all descendents of Adam.
But I have heard that peasants stem from Ham,
Jews from Japhet. We nobles come from Shem,
and it is our job to watch over them.
But now the parish priest is teaching us
that this was true according to old law;
that all has changed, of course, it's obvious—
that though Lord Jesus was born in the straw,
surrounded by Jews in a peasant's barn,
he, who descended from kings, had this plan,

that all men, yes, even those poorly born,
would be equal to the wealthiest man.
That is the way it is, so it must be,
especially since I've heard that you've agreed,
my Lady, and you have authority.
But if, indeed, the peasants will be freed,
I warn you, if this liberty lacks
meaning, if it's nothing but an empty word...
For the Muscovites imposed such a tax
when the late Pan Karp's serf-freeing occurred,
the peasants starved, having been taxed threefold!
So this is my advice; you must follow
the old custom and have them ennobled;
a coat of arms, a crest, you must bestow.
Zosia should give the half-goat to her fold;
Tadeusz should give the star and the crescent.
If this is done, I will accept reforms,
the full equality of each peasant
bearing, for all to see, a coat of arms."

"But you, Tadeusz, made your wife upset.
The loss of land will make you impoverished.
God forbid, a Lord's grand-daughter won't get
calluses, not at least until I've perished.
I have a plan; the castle has a chest
in which the Horeszko table service
is kept, along with signet rings, the best
pearl necklaces, rich plumes, marvelous
cutlasses, caparsions—treasures
that the Pantler buried deep in the ground,
that I've protected from all plunderers.
I've guarded them and kept them safe and sound
from Muscovites and you, dear Soplicas.
I also own a good-sized pouch that's filled
with my own thalers; and this small amount
was saved through years of service, from gifts willed
to me. I thought I'd use my golden coin
to mend the castle walls, but now it seems
the farm will need these pennies. I will join
you, Pan Soplica, and what Zosia deems
fit for me—that I'll happily accept.
I'll rock to sleep a third generation
of Horeszkos; your child will be adept
with my Penknife, if that child is a son.
A son, I'm sure, for when the land is torn
by war, new sons are always being born."

Gervazy barely spoke his final word,
when Protazy walked up, quite dignified.
He bowed, then with a gesture self-assured,
withdrew from his Kontusz's inside
pocket, a long panegyric, almost
two and a half sheets long, in rhyme.
A younger, non-commissioned officer composed
the poem—he had been famous at one time
for all the odes he wrote. Later he donned
the uniform, unable to retreat
from the habit of versifying on demand.
The first three hundred lines were quite a treat:
*Thou art the one who has now sent
The exquisite bliss or torment.
When your sweet glance falls on Bellon,
Swords break, as though fell on.
This day cruel Mars yields to Hymen;
The hissing viper to his fen
Crawls back, soothed by your gentle palm;
The Hydra of Discourse is calm....*
But just in time! There was lively applause;
Tadeusz and Zosia began to clap,
wishing he'd halt before the next clause.
This noise awoke the Judge from his short nap,
and at the parish priest's instigation,
he read Tadeusz' bold proclamation.

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Barely had the peasants heard the news,
when they surrounded the young lord and fell
to their lady's feet, where they refuse
to rise until they shout: "May you be well!"
In tears. Tadeusz cried: "Free citizens,
equals, fellow Poles!" And Dombrowski cried:
"to the common folk and to our defense!"
The peasants then repeated from the side:
"Long live our leaders and our new free choice!"
A thousand voices thundered in one voice.

Only Buchman stood apart from the joy;
he praised the plan but wished to modify,
appoint a commission that would employ
legal advisors...and to codify...
But Buchman's point was met with levity;
it could not be applied with brevity.

Out in the yard, the officers now stood
beside ladies, in pairs, while village men
lined up next to theirs. No longer could
they wait: “*Polonaise!*” rang in unison;
the military band assumed its place .

But then the Judge addressed the General:
“I ask you, sir, today might we replace
this orchestra? Today we must recall
the ancient custom of our family
to celebrate just like a village ball.

The *cymbal* player stands, his hands yet free;
the fiddler has already dropped his jaw;
the bagpiper has bowed, he’d like instructions.
If we send them away, then some unwritten law
will be broken, and everyone will be
disappointed. The peasants only dance
to their own music; so let them feel free
to play—for everyone will have a chance
for a good time. Then your orchestra can
play later. He signaled and they began.

The fiddler rolled his sleeves up carefully;
he squeezed the fingerboard, rested the bridge
beneath his chin, and sent his bow quickly
across the strings--a race horse had no edge
on him. The bagpiper blew, inflating
his sack, and then began to flap his arm
as if it were a wing anticipating
flight—his puffed-out cheeks had all the charm
of the moon-faced children of Boreas.
A *cymbalon* player was all they lacked.

Of all the *cymbalom* players, one was
far superior—none had the impact
of Jankiel, who put all others to shame.
(Janiel had hid, God knows where, all winter;
but when the Generals appeared, he came.)
About his skill there was no dissenter;
he was the master and he was unequalled.

And so they begged old Jankiel to take part;
they pointed to the instrument, appealed
to his good sense, complimenting his art.
The Jew declined; he claimed his hands were stiff,
out of practice, and that he’d be embarrassed
to play in such a state. He felt that if

he did, the gentlemen would fail to be impressed,
three times he bowed and tried to back away;
but Zosia saw this modest ploy and ran
to him, bringing the sticks he used to play.
She smiled and curtsied in front of the old man,
and stroked his long gray beard: “Jankiel, please stay,
you promised me you’d play my wedding day.”

Jankiel was fond of Zosia, so he shook
his beard to show that he would not refuse;
then to the center of the crowd they took
a stool and placed the *cymbalom* he’d use
across his knees. He waits for the command,
meditative, like an old veteran,
called back to active duty for his land.
His grandsons lift, although they barely can,
a heavy sword, which once brought him good luck;
two pupils kneel beside the instrument
and tune the strings, testing as they pluck.
Jankiel half-shuts his eyes, becomes silent,
holding the hammers in the air a moment.

He lowers them—a triumphant measure
rings out; until he strikes the strings more briskly,
more like torrential rain than the pleasure
of good music. The crowd stares uneasily;
yet this is just a test; the storm grows soft;
Jankiel breaks off, holding the sticks aloft.

He played again; the thick strings vibrated,
as though struck by the wings of a housefly,
so lightly that it seemed the sound abated.
The master turned his gaze up to the sky,
as though he was expecting inspiration,
surveyed his instrument, sure of his skill,
raising his hands after a respiration,
then lowered them both at once—strings, once still,
resounded wildly when the hammers pounded;
listeners were shocked, and yes, astounded.

It seemed a Turkish Janissary band
marched up with clanging cymbals, bells, and drums,
inciting soldiers to martial command.
The Polonaise of the Third of May comes
breathing with joy upon the rippling strings.
Girls are eager to dance, boys take their place,

though some old men are thinking other things—
recalling the time before the disgrace,
those joyous years after the Third of May
Constitution, when they all celebrated
(all Senators and Deputies) all day
and night, when whole nation was elated.
They gave a rousing welcome to the King:
“Vivat!” they cried, “the Diet and the nation!”
and these *Vivats* they heard in Jankiel’s playing.

The music underwent a transformation:
the tones intensified, new rhythms shaped;
the master introduced a new false chord,
just like a hissing snake, or metal scraped
on glass, which sent a chill through the assured
listeners. They felt something sinister
intrude upon their joy, and so wondered
if the instrument went out of tune, or
if the master, once so skilled, had blundered.
But no, he struck these strings so traitorous,
disturbed the melody—this was his aim:
to split the chords with brash inglorious
tones, confederated to hurt and main
the harmony. At once the Warden knew
what Jankiel’s music meant. He hid his face
and cried: “I know that voice that rings untrue--
betrayed at Targowica, that disgrace!”
Then suddenly the strings snapped with a hiss;
the hammers rushed to the top of the scale;
and in new rhythms, reintroduced bliss,
until bass notes struck up another tale.

One could hear a thousand noises sweeping
across the strings—soldiers march off to war,
attack and fire; groaning children, weeping
mothers—the master evokes the horror
of war so well, the village girls shiver,
recalling the grief of the massacre
at Praga by the Vistula River,
the tale they’ve heard in song. But they are glad
when all the strings ring forth with joyous sound,
as if the master meant to choke these sad
outcries, beating them into the background.

No sooner had the listeners relaxed,
than once again the clanging strings grew calm;

a few strings buzzed, their tautness barely taxed
by lightly tapping sticks in Jankiel's palm.
It seemed a fly or two tried to break free
from a spider's web; and perhaps they did...
More strings joined in to build a harmony,
uniting legions of chords in splendid
new memories full of grief and sorrow.
They heard the wandering soldier's song,
Through forest and wood we dutifully go...
(Half-dead from woe, hunger, he moves along,
to fall by the feet of his faithful steed,
the horse that will dig his grave with its leg.)
and yet, for more of this old song, they plead;
the soldiers recognize their lives and beg
to hear again, recalling times with dread
when they too sang—from their homes departing,
marching into the world, all those not dead
humming the tune, their arms and clothing carting,
cross land, sea, burning sand, and crippling frost.
And when in foreign lands they often camped,
hearing this song stirred them. All was not lost.
they bowed their heads, recalling how they tramped.

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Then Jankiel strove to elevate the mood;
something unheard rang out; he calmly glanced,
surveyed the strings, and with both hands imbued
the music with such art, the hammers danced.
The strings resounded like a large brass band,
and from the trumpets wafted to the sky,
the march of triumph known to all—*Poland
Has Not Yet Perished*. This was followed by
March, March Dombrowski, as everyone cheered,
for Dombrowski himself already had appeared.

It seemed that even Jankiel was amazed
by his own playing; he dropped he hammers,
lifting his arm. When they were fully raised,
his fox-skin hat fell onto his shoulders;
he blushed; his gaze revealed his very soul,
the flush of youth revealed inside his stare.
At last the old man looked at General
Dombrowski, before he covered up his eyes
to hide his gushing tears. "We've had to wait
for many years with mournful wails and sighs
for your arrival. You're almost as late
in coming to save us as the Messiah

is to us Jews. Long ago, wandering bards
prophesied throughout Lithuania;
heaven proclaimed it when comets flew towards
our land—so live, wage war. . . .” The old Jew wept
as he spoke, for just like a Pole he loved
his native land. To show his deep respect,
General Dombrowski, who was truly moved,
held out his hand to be kissed by the Jew.
Jankiel removed his cap and bowed down too.

It is time to begin the Polonaise:
the Chamberlain steps up and tosses back
his kontusz sleeves; he twirls and proudly displays
his mustache, choosing Zosia from the pack.
He bows, inviting her to lead the dance
with him; others line up in pairs behind;
after his signal, all couples advance.
Red boots glitter, sabers, lovingly shined,
and rich brocaded belts gleam in the sun.
The leader slowly treads, without effort,
but from each step and each deliberate motion,
his every thought and feeling they report;
right here he steps, as though he wants to ask
his partner a question; he leans his head
to whisper in her ear; she tries to mask
her face, to bashful to follow his lead.
He doffs his cap, and bows once more—she deigns
to glance at him, keeping her stubborn silence.
He slows the pace to see if she complains,
and smiles when she finally returns his glance.
Then, more quickly, sizing up his rivals,
he pulls his heron-flumed cap over his brow
and shakes it till it’s cocked just right and twirls
his mustaches again, satisfied for now,
the envy of all. All the couples follow
right in his tracks, though he’d like to escape
with his lady, and so he halts the flow,
raising his arms to change the dance’s shape.
No sooner does each pair approach, than he
humbly invites couples to pass him by—
while he withdraws somewhat meditatively.
And so the course is changed; but they reply
to his elusive move; couples pursue
insistently, and from all sides they snake
around. But then, to show his wrath is true,
the hilt of his sword he forcefully takes,

as if to say, I do not care for you
who envy me. His eyes are full of challenge,
advancing straight into the dancing throng;
they dare not block his path and rearrange
themselves, to fall in line before too long.

Exclamations chime from every side.
These are, perhaps, the last looks that they'll get,
their final chance to view this dignified
dance, led in such a way—they won't forget.
Couples followed, moving with pomp and joy;
the circle unraveled, then contracted—
a giant snake in some serpentine ploy.
The dappled folds and colors distracted;
the different uniforms, ladies and gents,
soldiers, glittering like the slithering scales,
so that the setting sun gilds these garments,
so bright above the turf and the fence rails.

Although the dance is spirited and quick,
Corporal Dobrzynski, still known as the Sack,
does not dance and does not hear the music;
he stands aside, ringing his hands in back,
recalling when he was Zosia's suitor:
flowers gathered, baskets braided, birds' nests
raided, earrings carved—how he had pursued her!
Ungrateful girl—he'd answer her requests;
such wasted gifts. And though she always fled
from him, although his father had forbidden,
he still went to gaze at her from the shed;
how many times within the hemp he's hidden,
to watch her in the garden pluck out weeds,
pick cucumbers, or feed her poultry grain.
Ungrateful girl—not to care for his deeds!
He dropped his head, thinking of her disdain,
and whistled a Mazurka. Then he jammed
his cap over his ears and left the scene.
By the cannon which had been left unmanned,
picking some cards and hoping for a queen,
he joined some old campaigners sitting down.
He drank with them, hoping to lose the past,
and if not to sweeten his sorrow, then to drown
it, for Dobrzynski's heart was constant and steadfast.

Zosia flutters about, and though she leads
the dance, she barely can be seen; the yard

is vast—she blends in with the plants and weeds.
Her dress is green; she has yet to discard
her wreath, garland, and flowers. And as she spins,
she disappears from sight, although she guides
the dance, showing where each new figure begins,
an angel directing the planetary tides.
Her place is revealed by the dancers' eyes
and outstretched arms, as they gather around her.
In vain her partner, the Chamberlain, tries
to stay by her side, though she must defer
to one of his rivals; they've lost their place
as head couple; now they must quickly yield
to another pair, setting a new pace.
General Dombrowski now heads the field,
but not for long; another pair cuts in.
The Chamberlain, devoid of hope, walks off;
Zosia, wearied by this navigation,
meets Tadesusz, brushing against his cuff.
She stays with him to finish out the phrase
and ends the dance. To prove she is finished,
she carries out more wine on large round trays.

The evening warm and still, the sun diminished;
across the sky, here and there, clouds are strewn,
deep blue above but rosy in the west;
and these small clouds portend the best of fortune
and fine weather. A flock of sheep at rest,
some resemble; others look like wild ducks
in formation. In the west are curtains,
many folds of gauze, bright pleats and tucks,
pearly at the top, gilded where that wanes,
and purple in between. The sun still glows,
then slowly pales and grays; it cannot keep
its fire, and draws some clouds about it, bows
its head, and with one breath, it falls asleep.

The nobles continue to drink and toast:
“Vivat Napoleon, the Generals!
Vivat Tadeusz, Zosia, and their host,
the Judge. Vivat the married couples!”
They drank, praising themselves who attended,
those invited who couldn't come, and all
their friends. And long before the night ended
they toasted the dead, sacred to recall.

And I was there among the guests and ate
their food and drank their vodka, wine, and mead;
all that I heard and saw about their fate
I've written in this book for you to read.

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Notes and Commentary

Some of the commentary to this text was provided by Mickiewicz himself. Other notes were taken from various sources:

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Introductory Note

The Polish Commonwealth was formed by the union of Poland (with its predominately Polish population) and Lithuania (which was populated by Lithuanians in the north Byelorussians and Ukrainians in the south.) The union came about in 1386 when Queen Jadwiga (Hedwig) of Poland married the pagan Lithuanian Prince Jagiello, who accepted Christianity at that time. Both nations had long been at odds with each other and the Teutonic Knights of the Cross. The Polish-Lithuanian Union was ruled by the Jagiellonian line until Zygmunt August died childless in 1572, and the throne became elective. Although the union was fairly loose at the beginning, by 1569 the two states agreed to form a common Diet, which met at Warsaw. Lithuania, however, chose to retain separate officials, treasury and army. From the earliest days of the union there was movement of Polish nobility to Lithuania as well as the Polonization of the Lithuanian nobility. The peasantry remained Lithuanian or Byelorussian.

The inhabitants of the Polish Commonwealth enjoyed personal freedom but no political rights. The country population was divided into the *Szlachta* (nobility or gentry), who fought the country's battles, maintained the entire political structure, and the *Chlopi* (peasants) who were closer to serfs and cultivated the estates of the *Szlachta*. The *Szlachta*, who formed about one-tenth of the population, were all of equal rank legally, though differences in wealth and property did create political distinctions. Some of the *Szlachta* owned little more than a peasant's plot of land; others lost their land and became attached, even as servants, to wealthier households. The great landowners, or magnates, were able to support private armies from the hordes of nobles and landless dependents. These magnates exerted great influence on the country's affairs.

After the Jagiellonian Dynasty, and the introduction of the elective principle, the Commonwealth was beset by civil wars, which caused a decline in power in the 17th and 18th century. The king was elected for life by the entire *Szlachta*, and theoretically, every noble was eligible for the crown. Poland also had a peculiar parliamentary system

which also contributed to its decline. Laws were passed by a Diet in which the upper house (Senate) was formed by bishops, *wojewodas*, castellans, and ministers, while the lower house was comprised of elected deputies. A unanimous vote was required for all measures. Even stranger, any single deputy could dissolve the Diet with a veto. This, a single veto, could undo all the Diet's previous work. This law of *Liberum Veto* (free veto), as well as the elective nature of the throne, offered countless opportunities for foreign influence. The district Diets or assemblies not only elected deputies to the main Diet, but also instructed them how to vote and choose local officials. The principle of *Liberum Veto* led to numerous rebellions or confederacies, since political reform was virtually impossible. During these confederacies, a group of citizens would band together, choose a marshal, and seek to overthrow the established order. If they succeeded, they became the new government, but if they failed, they were not liable to punishment.

The 17th century was disastrous to Poland. The nation was devastated by the Swedish invasions (1655-1660) and war with the Cossacks. Although King Jan Sobieski defeated the Turks at Vienna in 1683—a victory which saved the rest of Europe from Turkish domination—it was old Poland's last military triumph.

During the 18th century, Poland sunk further and became dependent upon Russia. In 1764 Catherine II caused Stanislaw Poniatowski, her favorite, to be elected king. In 1768 Polish patriots, in hopes of staving off the Russian ascendancy, organized the Bar Confederacy, which struggled for four years. Its defeat led to the first partition of Poland in 1772, in which Russia received a large portion of the former Lithuanian province. Various deputies from Novogrodek (Mickiewicz's native region) including Rejtan and Korsak desperately opposed the partition, which was, finally, sanctioned by the Bar Confederation.

In 1788-1792 the Four Year Diet's attempt to save the nation led to the Constitution of the Third of May, a measure that was drawn up in secret and rushed through the Diet when opponents were absent. This transformed Poland from an aristocratic republic into a constitutional hereditary monarchy and abolished the *Liberum Veto*. It also secured religious toleration.

In 1793, however, a group of conservative nobles who upheld the old anarchic state of affairs formed the Targowica Confederation with the full support of Russia. Its purpose was to undo the constitution. As a result of Targowica, Russian troops entered the country, overcoming Polish troops under Prince Jozef Poniatowski, the king's nephew, and Tadeusz Kosciuszko. This led to the second partition of Poland in 1793, which further reduced the commonwealth to one-third of its former size. In 1794 Kosciuszko led a popular revolt, but in spite of victory near Krakow, was defeated by the newly allied powers of Russia, Prussian, and Austria. Kosciuszko was injured and taken

prisoner by the Russians, and Warsaw fell when the Russian commander Suvorov led a massacre of the Warsaw suburb of Praga. In 1795 the rest of the Polish Kingdom was divided by the three powers.

Many Poles, at this time, thought of transferring the nation's government to France, and of joining the fight against their common enemies. The most famous leader Jan Henryk Dombrowski, who helped form the new Polish Legions, which fought at first in Lombardy, northern Italy. Poland's national anthem, *Poland has not yet perished...*, was composed during this campaign. In 1798 Dombrowski aided the French capture of Rome, and Kniaziewicz was made commander of the city's forces. In 1800 the Legions were also victorious at Marengo; however, Napoleon did nothing to help the Polish cause. In 1803 Legions were sent to quell a slave insurrection in Santo Domingo, where many perished.

After Napoleon's decisive victory at Jena in 1806, he gathered more Poles around him. A large force was organized under Prince Jozef Poniatowski and Dombrowski, which captured Danzig (Gdansk) and won the battle of Preussisch-Eylau, while Napoleon defeated the Russian forces at Friedland. In 1807 the Peace of Tilsit created a new state known as the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, ruled by the King of Saxony, under Napoleon's protection. The Nieman River divided the Duchy from Russian-Poland. In return, the Duchy was obligated to furnish troops to Napoleon, and in 1808, Polish cavalry under Koziatowski led the capture of Samosierra in Spain.

Polish hopes soared after 1809 when Napoleon increased the size of the Warsaw Duchy with land Poles helped wrench from Austria. This tardy and ungenerous act did much to justify the Polish belief that Napoleon would help restore the Commonwealth. In 1811 many Poles believed Napoleon to be unconquerable, and eagerly awaited the outcome of his Russian campaign. The outcome, however, was a crushing blow to Polish hopes. Not only was Napoleon's Russian invasion repulsed, but his returning army was defeated at Leipzig in 1813, where Prince Jozef Poniatowski was killed. Two years later, the Congress of Vienna gave the largest part of Poland to Russia, to be governed as a constitutional state. A desperate insurrection in 1831 ended in total failure; all pretense of Polish self-government disappeared. Mickiewicz began to write *Pan Tadeusz* in 1832.

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The term foray (*zajazd*) needs some clarification. It was virtually impossible during the Polish Commonwealth for judicial decrees to be carried out, since the government had no executive authority. The more powerful nobles maintained

household regiments—Prince Radziwill's private army numbered several thousand men. A plaintiff who received a favorable verdict, therefore, had to employ his own army. A foray took place when armed kinsmen, friends, and neighbors set out, verdict in hand, along with an apparitor, and gained possession of the goods or lands under adjudication. The apparitor's proclamation made the act legal, and more often than not, these forays were without bloodshed. In ancient Poland, these legal decrees were usually respected by even the wealthier and powerful magnates. However, forays became increasingly violent and frequent during the nation's decline.

The word *Pan* also needs some clarification. In Polish it has several meanings: gentleman, Mr., sir, you, master, God, and historically it referred to a squire. *Pani* is the feminine equivalent.

Book 1, The Farm

1. Everyone in Poland knows of the miraculous image of Our Lady at *Jasna Gora* in the Pauline monastery in *Czestochowa*.
2. Tadeusz Kociuszko was the most famous Polish Patriot and was also from Lithuania. He is known to Americans for his distinguished service in the Revolutionary War. In numerous paintings he is shown wearing a Krakow peasant costume, leading a peasant revolt.
3. Rejtan was a member of the Bar Confederacy who went insane and killed himself.
4. A soldier and poet from Wilno who perished during the Praga massacre.
5. A deputy in the Four-Year Diet or Assembly.
6. This refers to the massacre at Praga, a Warsaw suburb across the Vistula (Wisla) River.
7. The song of the Polish Legions under General Dombrowski, “Poland has not yet perished, as long as we live....”
8. The Seneschal (*wojski* or *tribunus*) was once an officer responsible for the wives and children of the nobility, though the role later became merely titular. There was a custom in Lithuania to give respected persons ancient titles, which became legalized through usage.
9. The Official or Chamberlain (*Princeps Nobilitatis*) was formerly the Judge in boundary disputes.

The passages about agricultural life echo

First Georgic [excerpt] by Virgil

When spring begins and the ice-locked streams begin
To flow down from the snowy hills above
And the clods begin to crumble in the breeze,
The time has come for my groaning ox to drag
My heavy plow across the fields, so that
The plow blade shines as the furrow rubs against it.
Not till the earth has been twice plowed, so twice
Exposed to sun and twice to coolness will

It yield what the farmer prays for; then will the barn
 Be full to bursting with the gathered grain,
 And yet if the field's unknown and new to us,
 Before our plow breaks open the soil at all,
 It's necessary to study the ways of the winds
 And the changing ways of the skies, and also to know
 The history of the planting in that ground,
 What crops will prosper there and what will not.
 In one place grain grows best, in another, vines;
 Another's good for the cultivation of trees;
 In still another the grain turns green unbidden.

translated by David Ferry

10. An allusion to Seutonius' *Life of Vespasian*.
11. A reference to the *plica polonica*, a scalp condition in which the hair becomes matted and twisted together—common among peasants in the northeastern border regions of Poland.
12. There were many such apocryphal stories among the Russian peasantry about this general.
13. The Notary was an appointed clerk of the court.
14. The Sheriff (assessor) was a type of rural policeman, elected or appointed.
15. King Stanislaw Poniatowski—see introductory notes.
16. Niesolowski the Governor was the last *Wojewoda* of Nowogrodek. He presided over a revolutionary government in Wilno. A *Wojewoda* was the chief dignitary of a Polish province.
17. According to Polish mythology, three brothers (*Leck*, *Czech*, and *Rus*) were founders of the Polish, Bohemian, and Russian nations.
18. There was a famous factory in Sluck that produced gold brocade and large belts.
19. The Court Calendar (*Trybunalska Wokanda*) was a long narrow book which listed the names of plaintiffs and defendants. Protazy, as apparitor or bailiff, was obligated to carry summonses and make legal proclamations.
20. This is an allusion to Napoleon's golden eagles and the

silver eagles of Poland, since the Polish coat-of-arms shows a white eagle on a red field.

21. Polish Legions -- see introductory note.
22. General Jan Henryk Dombrowski, 1755-1818—see introductory note.
23. Warsaw Duchy—see introductory note
24. *Robak*, in Polish, means worm.

Book 2, The Castle

25. The Archbishop—between the death of one sovereign and the Election of another, the Archbishop of Gniezo was *Interrex*.
26. The Pantler (Stolnik) was an old Lithuanian title, often translated As “Cupbearer.”
27. The Castellan was next in dignity to a Wojewoda. This title Required some military service and entitled its holder to a seat in the Senate.
28. Black soup, served at the table to a young requesting a young woman's hand signified refusal. It was a thick soup of duck's or goose's blood, vinegar and spices.
29. The Constitution of the Third of May 1791 was said by Edmund Burke to be the noblest benefit received by any nation at the time, "being built on the same principles which make our British Constitution so excellent."
30. From *The Oath*, translated from the Yiddish by Harold Rabinowitz, a novella by Chaim Grade about Jewish life in Lithuania between the two world wars:

“Nonetheless, Gavriel began going to the Rabbi for lessons once again, and even visited him in his store. By the store's doorway, during the summer, there stood baskets of fruit, at which Gavriel gazed with sad longing. The fruit seemed to him like a joyous greeting from the fields and forests, and he could gauge the time of the season by the kinds of fruit in the baskets. The blackberry season was slong since past, and so was the season for red raspberries and the hard green gooseberries. The transparent white currants had also disappeared, and the yellow honey-sweet cherries and soft, mirror-smooth blackcherries became rare visitors. Now juicy ripe plums beckoned him with their dark-purple skins and deep-red fleshy bodies. The vegetable gardens were having their say too: the first young potatoes with their cherubic rosy skins were soon followed by the large, bulbous potatoes; radishes with notched heads as tough as bark; sparkling white

heads of cabbage; and green cucumbers—thin and twisted, some wide and swollen. Next to last year's wreaths of onions, lying on the wooden stands in their thin brown skins, this year's fresh green ones winked with their long white heads crowned by their stubby roots. Each time Reb Avraham-Abba raised his eyes from his book and looked out the open door at the fruits and vegetables outside, he would once again reflect that only he who makes a blessing over the fruit and knows that nothing grows by itself has the double joy of the blessing as well as the fruit."

31. River Barges (*Wiciny*) are large boats on the Nieman used to trade
With the Prussians, principally grain.
32. *Zrazy* are "rashers," a Polish dish of minced beef combined with butter
Spices, onion, salt, pepper, egg, breadcrumbs—fried, broiled, or stewed.
33. *Bonoczyk* is a diminutive for Bonoparte (Napoleon).
34. *Sukin* is a name taken from the Polish word for bitch—"suka."
35. *Kuzodusin* means, literally, "goat-strangler."
36. *Bialotrowicz* was the last Secretary of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania ,
highly honored for his virtue and patriotism.
37. Prince Dominik Radziwill was a great lover of hunting, who emigrated
to the Warsaw Duchy and equipped, at his own expense, a cavalry
regiment, which he commanded. He was the last male of one of the most
powerful noble families in Poland, if not all of Europe.

Book 3, Flirtation

38. Fox-Maiden (*Lisica – Cantarellus cibarius*)
Pine-Lover) *Borowik – Boletus edulis*)
Orange-Agaric (*Rydz – Araricus deliciosus*)
Fly-Bane (*Muchomie – Amanita Muscaria*)
Leaf-Mushroom (*Surojadki – Russala*)
Kozlak – Boletus
Funnels (*Lajki – Agaricus chloraides*)
Whities (*Bielkai – Agaricus pieratus*)
Puffballs (*Puchawski – Lycoperdon bovista*)
39. A reference to a popular song of the time, *Serce nie sluga*,
"The heart is not a slave."
40. Compare this to *A Walk in Rural Russia*, Vladimir Soloushkin:

“I remember that once we were strolling through some botanical gardens in the Caucasus. The trees bore labels with wonderful names inscribed on them: yucca, eucalyptus, laurocerasus. After a time we grew tired of marveling at the spread of the branches, the thickness of the trunks, the quaintness of the foliage.

Suddenly we saw a quite unusual tree, like no other in the whole garden, it was white as snow, a tender green like young grass, and it stood out sharply against the somewhat uniform coloring of the background. We saw it then with new eyes and valued it in a new way. The label told us that there stood before us a common birch.

Just try lying under a birch tree on soft, cool grass, when only fragments of sunlight and the clear blue of the midday sky are glimpsed through the leaves, how the birch will whisper to you, bending softly to your ear, what tender words and wonderful stories it will murmur, and what a feeling of contentment it will bring!

The think of a palm tree. One cannot even lie beneath it, for either there is no grass at all, or it is dry, dusty and prickly. The leaves of the palm rattle in the wind as though they were tin or plywood, and there is no caress of feeling in the sound.”

41. Orłowski was a noted Polish genre painter.
42. Leaches were a bred of small English bulldogs used for hunting game, especially bears.

Book 4, Diplomacy and the Chase

43. Prince Giedymin (died 1341) had a prophetic dream on the mountain of Ponary--the founder of Lithuania. Lizejko (the last pagan high priest of Lithuania) founded the city of Wilno (Vilnius in Lithuanian). Mindowa the Great of Mendog and Witenas were early Lithuanian princes.
44. Kiejstut and Olgierd were the sons of Giedymin. Kiejstut’s son, Witold, was a warrior-prince; Olgierd’s son was Jagiello.
45. Zygmunt August (1548-1572) crowned himself with a soft cap (*kolpak*)—a great lover of hunting.
46. The Baublis tree was a great, ancient oak, sacred in pagan times. Its interior had been transformed into a museum of Lithuania antiquities.
47. The parish church in Mickiewicz’s Nowogrodek stood near a grove of lindens, Many of which were felled in 1812.

48. Jan Kochanowski (1530-1584) was the greatest Polish poet before Mickiewicz. *Czarnolas*, Blackwood, was his country estate. One of his poems describes this linden:

Seat yourself beneath my leaves and take a needed rest;
The sun won't reach you, I promise you won't be oppressed.
The highest, hottest rays, like dripping liquid tallow,
Will not pull back or scatter my tiniest shadow.
Here you'll find cool wind seeping from field and plain;
Here nightingales and starlings bewitchingly complain.
From my fragrant flower the hardworking, diligent bee
Ennobles gentlemen's tables with gathered honey.
And I know how to rustle my leaves, how to repeat
The soft sound, to lull you to a sleep that is sweet.
And though I bear no apples, you will be just as pleased
Had you chanced upon the Garden of Hesperides.

49. *Kolomajka* is a Ukrainian dance, sung and danced at the same time.

50. *Mazurka* is the diminutive for of *Mazur*, one of the five Polish national dances—popularized, of course, by Chopin.

51. *Jeszcze Polska nie zginela....* "Poland has not yet perished..." is the Polish national anthem. It was originally sung by the Polish Legions under Dombrowski.

52. The *cimbalom* is a harp-like instrument played by striking the strings with small sticks or hammers. The instrument is still common in some regions of Poland and Slovakia, and with Gypsy bands in Hungary and Romania. It is similar to the American Appalachian mountain hammer dulcimer.

The is also, most likely, a reference to Psalm 137:

By the Rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea we wept when we remembered Zion.
We hanged our harps upon the willows, in the midst thereof.
For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song, and they that wasted us
Required of us mirth: saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion."
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

53. Jews in Poland, though not persecuted, formed a separate class and did not participate in the government. Although separated from Poles by religion, customs, and language, instances of intermarriage and assimilation were not uncommon.

54. The image of Our Lady of Czestochowa, partially burned during the Swedish invasions of the 17th century, is thought to have saved Poland from total

devastation. The icon is known as *Matka Boska Czestochowa, Czarna Madonna*, or “The Black Madonna.

55. For some Poles at the time, peasants were thought to have descended from the Biblical figure of Ham.

56. “Each to a Senator equal...”—an old jingle expressing the equality before the law of the Polish nobility.

57. Maciej Strykowski (1547-1583) was a chronicler of the early history of Lithuania.

58. The Seneschal’s horn recalls the following passage from Vergil’s *Aeneid*.
(Translation, Robert Fitzgerald):

Now the fierce goddess...

Sounded the herdsman call: on her curved horn
She sent into the air a blast from hell
At which all groves were set at once a-tremble
And the deep forest rang and rang again.
The lake of Trivia heard it, far away,
So did the River Nar, whose current pales
With sulphur, and Velinus of the springs,
And frightened mothers held their children close.
Then truly at the sound, the signal given
By that dire trumpet, weaponed and on the run
From every quarter, farmers and foresters
Came together.....

58. Domejko and Dowejko—there is a story that one of Mickiewicz’s schoolmates. Ignacy Domejo, who later became Rector at the University of Santiago, Chili, claimed that he once challenged the young Mickiewicz to find a name that rhymed with Domejko. Mickiewicz, who was well-known for his skill at improvisation, came up with Dowejko.

59. Bottles of Danzig (Gdansk) vodka have little gold leaves at the bottom. The city of Gdansk was annexed by Prussia in 1793.

60. *Bigos* is a type of hunters’ stew which was usually made in large quantities, put in barrels, and stored in cellars. A recipe:

Traditionally 1 pound of boneless pork, cut into small cubes
3 cloves garlic, minced
3 onions, quartered
½ pounds of mushrooms, quartered
2 cups beef stock
2 tbs sugar
2 bay leaves
2 cups sauerkraut, rinsed and drained

3 apples, peeled, cored, in chunks
2 cups canned tomatoes
1 cup diced cooked ham
1 and ½ cups Polish sausage, in chunks
salt and pepper to taste <http://www.soupsong.com/rbigos.html>

61. In *The Aeneid*, Queen Dido cut a bull's hide into strips, and enclosed a large territory within the hide; on this spot she built Carthage.

Compare this hound/rabbit chase to the following passage in Ovid's

Metamorphosis, Book 1:

by his own passion, [Apollo] accelerates,
and runs as swiftly as the Gallic hound
chasing a rabbit through an open field;
the one seeks shelter and the other, prey—
he clings to her, is just about to spring,
with his long muzzle straining at her heels,
while she, not knowing whether she's been caught,
in one swift burst, eludes those snapping jaws,
no longer the anticipated feast.....

Book 5, The Brawl

62. *Kompot*-- A compote is a dessert made of fruit cooked in sugar syrup.

Compotes may also contain spices.

63. Philip, from the village of Konopa (Hemp) was a member of the Diet, who, once obtaining the floor, wandered off. Thus the proverb: *He has popped up like Philip from Hemp*.

64. This is an untranslatable pun in Polish. *Niemiec*, the Polish word for German, is derived from the Polish *niemy*, or dumb, mute.

65. Prince de Nassau-Siegen (1745-1808) was a famous warrior and adventurer, a Russian General who defeated the Turks at Oczakov; he was later defeated by the Swedes and spent time in Poland, where he was granted the rights of a citizen. His hunting exploits in Africa were known across Europe at the time.

66. *Spolia optima*, spoils of honor, the arms taken by a Roman general from the commander of the enemy after defeating him in single combat on the battlefield.

67. Warden/Screech Owl: in Polish *klucznik-puszczyk*.

68. The “peasant rites” refer to the Lithuanian festival known to Mickiewicz as *Dziady* (Forefather’s Eve), which is also the title of Mickiewicz’s most famous play. The ritual was still performed at this time, and goes back to pagan times, known as “the feast of the goat.” The Shaman (*Kozlarz*) was considered both priest and bard. After Christianity came, peasants gathered in secret in chapels near the graveyard and spread a feast of food, drink, and fruits to invoke the spirits of the dead. This was thought to bring relief to souls in Purgatory.
69. See introductory note.
70. A long mustache was a prized possession among Polish noblemen. The Polish also contains a pun on the words *wasalow* and *wa,salow*, vassals and mustached ones.
71. Settlements of the gentry lived in *Zascianki*, the name given to settlements of the landed nobility in order to distinguish them from peasant villages. They were inhabited by the poorest of the lesser nobility, who were, in fact, peasants. Since the wearing of swords was restricted to noblemen, it was not unusual to see such a peasant-wearing noble wearing an old rusty sword as he followed a plough, barefooted.

Book 6, The Dobrzyn Settlement

72. *Kisiel* is a Polish dish of jelly made with oat yeast, which is washed with water until all mealy parts are separated from it—hence the proverb.
73. Bignon was a French statesman and Napoleon’s Warsaw representative from 1810-1812.
74. According to old Polish law, a convicted slanderer was compelled to crawl under a table and bark three times like a dog, pronouncing his recantation.
75. “Pure-blooded Mazovian...” from the region around Warsaw, *Mazowsze*. They often had very dark, almost black hair and blue or grey eyes.
76. Vertumnus was the Roman god of the seasons, of growth and change.

77. Maciek joined the Bar Confederates who opposed the King because of his Russian connections, but when the King declared his support for the Confederacy, Maciek supported him. After the King deserted the patriotic Poles to support the Targowica Confederation, Maciek opposed him. Thus, Maciek was known as “Steeplecock,” or one who followed whatever prevailing wind blew.
78. The opening line of a popular song by the sentimental poet, Franciszek Karpiński (1841-1825).
79. see note #18.
80. A traditional Polish greeting still used today—*Niech będzie pochwalony//Na wieki wieków* (“Let Him be praised//For ever and ever.”)

Book 7, Consultation

81. In 1568, a Polish man, Pszonka, founded a satiric society called the Babin Republic on his estate near Lublin. It awarded “diplomas of virtue” to criminals and conferred honors for various follies committed—a quack was appointed doctor, a coward appointed general, etc.
82. In the Constitution of the 17th and 18th century Poland, there was an institution called the *liberum veto*. All bills had to pass the *Sejm* (parliament) by unanimous consent and if any legislator cast a veto, the bill was not passed and the entire legislature was dissolved.
83. The order of Piarists exerted much influence over education, after the Jesuits were expelled. They were partially responsible for introducing and popularizing French thought, which eventually threatened to deluge Poland.

Book 8, The Foray

84. It was customary to hang fossils in churches. These were regarded as the bones of giants who once roamed the earth.
85. The comet of year 1811.

86. The Maid of Pestilence is said to appear to Lithuanian seers and bards when plague or famine will strike. She is said to wander through desolate graveyards and meadows, wearing a fiery crown. She was tall as the great trees of Bialowieza and she waved a bloody kerchief. Mickiewicz described her in an earlier work, *Konrad Wallenrod*.
87. Jan Sniadecki (1756-1830) was an astronomer and professor in Wilno. Mickiewicz saw him as the worst embodiment of the cold, rationalistic 18th century.
88. Jassy was in Romania where peace was concluded between Russia and Turkey. The implication is that Branicki and the Targowica Confederates rushed to the protection of the Russian army.
89. Prince Adam Czartoryski (1734-1823) was a cousin to Stanislaw Poniatowski.
90. Obviously, for the plot to make sense. Tadeusz is unable to hear what transpires.
91. Compare Coleridge's *Aeolian Harp*:
- And that simplest Lute,
 Plac'd length-ways in the clasping casement, hark !
 How by the desultory breeze caress'd,
 Like some coy maid half-yielding to her lover,
 It pours such sweet upbraiding, as must needs
 Tempt to repeat the wrong ! And now, its strings
 Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes
 Over delicious surges sink and rise,
 Such a soft floating witchery of sound
 As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve
 Voyage on gentle gales from Faery-Land...
92. In Polish, *Switezanki*, or inhabitants of Lake Switez. This is an invention of Mickiewicz, who titled one of his early ballads, *Switezanka*."
93. This is a type of Polish with Latin case endings.

Book 9, The Battle

94. During the Gallic siege of Rome in 390 BC, a mythological account told how Marcus Manlius held out for months with a small garrison on the citadel, while the rest of Rome was abandoned. When Gauls attempting to scale the Capitoline, Manlius was roused by the cackling of the sacred geese and threw down the assailants.

95. Jozef Baka (1707-1780) was a Jesuit who wrote “Reflections on Inevitable Death, Common to All,” a compilation of short doggerel rhymes. Father Robak seems to be reciting some.

Book 10, Emigration—Jacek

96. Izmail was a fortress in Bessarabia, captured from the Turks by Suvorov in 1790. Byron wrote about this same place in *Don Juan*.

97. Novi was in Italy, where Russians and Austrians defeated the French in 1799.

98. Raclawice is a village near Krakow, where in 1794 Kosciuszko’s army of 6,000 (including 2,000 peasants armed with scythes) defeated a Russian force of over 7,000.

99. Karol Radziwill (1734-1790) was called “My Dear,” from a phrase that he constantly repeated. He was the wealthiest magnate in Poland, and in 1785 entertained King Stanislaw with a reception that cost him millions.

Book 11, The Year 1812

100. The Feast of the Annunciation—March 25.

101. At Hohenlinden, the Polish corps led by General Kniaziewicz decided the victory.

102. Napoleon freely used Polish troops in his Spanish campaign. In 1808, Polish light cavalry units, under the command of Koziatulski captured Somosiera. This is described in detail in Stefan Zeromski’s novel, *Ashes*.

103. The reference is to the magnificent palace built in Jezno, Lithuania by Antoni Michal Pac.

Book 12, Let us Love one Another!

104. Radziwill the Orphan traveled widely and published an account of his journey to the Holy Land.

105. The Pulaski family were organizers of the Bar Confederacy. Kazimierz Pulaski was a hero of the American Revolution who died in Savannah, Georgia in 1779.
106. Piasts were the first royal dynasty of Poland. The term came to stand for a native Polish candidate for the throne.
107. Apparently, Maciek sees everything not Polish as either Russian or German.
108. Pope Pius VIII excommunicated Napoleon in 1809.
109. The *kontusz* was the old Polish nobleman's long coat, girded around the waist. It characteristically had turned-back upper false sleeves. The Notary's predicament was not uncommon.
110. Polish writers of the 17th and 18th century composed countless panegyrics of complimentary verses in honor of great personages. The poems were noted for their stale classical images and far-fetched metaphors.
111. The Polonaise (the French-version of the Polish *Polonez*) is a stately Polish national dance used to open banquets and balls. It derived from the peasant *chodzony*, or waling dance, and it only became popular among the nobility after it was adopted by the French court and called the "Polonaise," or the Polish one. Later it was reintroduced into Poland and has remained popular even within Polish communities in America.
112. Janissaries produced a very noisy Turkish martial music, popular in Europe and Eastern Europe in the 18th century. Both Mozart and Beethoven composed several pieces based on this music. (see the CD: *The Waltz: Ecstasy and Mysticism, Concerto Koln, Sarband.*)
113. The song is still popular—*Pod lasem, pod borem...*, or "Through forest and wood..."
114. Although the poem ends on a note of optimism, Mickiewicz's image of the clouds presages the disaster that lay ahead.
115. This ending imitates the conventional ending of Polish fairy tales.

A Note on the Translation

The whole of *Pan Tadeusz* is composed in the “Polish Alexandrine,” or 13 syllable, rhymed couplets. The typical line is further broken down into two units, each with three stresses and seven syllables before a Caesura.

LITwo ojCZYZno MOJa! / ty JEStes jak ZDROWie;

Ile cie TRZEba CENic, / ten TYLko sie DOWie.

It must be noted that Polish is a highly inflected language (6 case endings in common usage) and that, unlike English, word order is relatively free. Thus, even to modern Polish readers, over 5,000 rhymed couplets barely strain the ear. The same cannot be said of the contemporary American or English reader who might wince at the necessary syntactical inversions and artifice needed to maintain the form. To my ear, the rhymed couplet seems inextricably linked to a very specific type of 18th century satirical verse or Dryden or Pope—decidedly pre-Romantic in character. And the 6-beat Alexandrine, rarely successful in English, seems, quite simply, too slow and plodding for the lively wit and action in *Pan Tadeusz*, which is only occasionally elegiac and stately. Therefore, I have chose to create a version of *Pan Tadeusz* that is primarily 10 syllables with 5 stresses, with alternating rhymes. (Though occasionally, I do employ rhymed couplets at the end of a stanza, somewhat in the manner of Byron’s *Don Juan*.) I must stress, though, that I have not followed this form so rigidly; I have taken formal liberties when I felt that other things—narration, meaning, translation, music, sense, etc. became more important. I was equally concerned with the formal concerns faced by contemporary poets writing in English, and I have tried to create a poem that is both contemporary and traditional, accessible and hauntingly distant.

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Madame Lafayette equated the translator with “a lackey whose mistress sends him to pay someone a compliment; whatever she said politely, he renders rude.”

And Milan Kundera sketched a portrait of the translator as good-natured dope, the shaggy dog of letters panting at his author’s heels:

“I meet my translator, a man who knows no Czech.

--Then how did you translate it?

--With my heart.

And he pulls a photo of me from his wallet. He was so confident that I actually believed it was possible to translate by some telepathy of the heart.”

“Wycliffe translated out of the Latin into the Anglican tongue, not the Angelic tongue... Thus, the Gospel pearl is cast froth and trodden under foot of swine, and what was dear to both the clergy and laity is now made a subject of common just to both, and the jewel of the clergy is turned in the sport of the laity.”

Henry Knight on, writing in the 14th century about an early translation of the Bible into English

Three grades of evil can be discerned in the queer world of verbal transmigration. The first, and lesser one, comprises obvious errors due to ignorance or misguided knowledge. This is mere human frailty and thus excusable. The next step to Hell is taken by the translator who intentionally skips words or passages that he does not bother to understand or that might seem obscure or obscene to vaguely imagined readers.... The third, and worst, degree of turpitude is reached when a masterpiece is finished and patted into such a shape, vilely beautified in such a fashion as to conform to the notions and prejudices of a given public. This crime, to be punished by the stocks as plagiarists were in the shoe buckle days.”

Vladimir Nabokov, “The Art of Translation”

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“Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water, even as Jacob rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well.”

From a preface to the King James Bible, Miles Smith

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