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“God has Kindly Given Him Insanity...”¹.

**The Artist’s Melancholy, Depression and the State of Being Rejected.
A Case Study of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski’s *Historia kołka w płocie***

1. Introduction

Ryszard Koziołek, appreciating Kraszewski’s effort and genius, wrote: “In the school history of literature between Polish romanticism and realism, i.e. between poetry and the novel, there is a fifty-year gap of nothing worth reading. Meanwhile, there is a writer who single-handedly described the everyday Polish life of this half-century in its district and emigration diversity”².

More than half a century ago, a volume of *Nowy Korbut*, entirely devoted to Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, recorded thousands of works inspired by his biography and work. The following decades enriched this bibliography with new monographs and treatises - testimonies to the interest in the work of a writer who is completely unique in our literature. Among researchers dealing with the literary output of the author of *Stara Baśń* we find the names of almost all of our significant literary scholars³.

¹ J.I. Kraszewski, *Historia kołka w płocie według wiarygodnych źródeł zebrana i spisana*, Wilno 1860, s. 213.

² R. Koziołek, *Maszyna do pisania*, [w:] tegoż, *Dobrze się myśli literaturą*, Katowice 2016, s. 75–77, 80.

³ M.in. Piotra Chmielowskiego, Bronisława Czarnika, Wiktora Hahna, Adama Bara, Karola Zawodzińskiego, Juliana Krzyżanowskiego, Wincentego Danka, Jana Nowakowskiego, Teresę Nowacką, Józefa Bachórze, Stanisława Burkota, Elżbietę Zielonko, Marię Janion, Marka Troszyńskiego, Ewę Owczarz, Tadeusza Budrewicza, Urszulę

Kraszewski's phenomenon and legend is based, among other things, on the fact that he is a writer who represents European Romanticism in a comprehensive way. We find in him not only a literary vision of the most important artistic manifestos of the time, but also the human psyche in its individual and collective aspect. Leaving aside Bolesławita's biography, one can recreate from his very books the aesthetic attitude of the nineteenth century man, an attitude towards metaphysical and religious issues, the specific colour of the period, versatility and even a rich source of inspiration.

Based on one of many novels about an artist, I will try to present an important subject present in Kraszewski's works, namely the problem of rejection. The issues related to this problem are primarily of psychological nature, including melancholy as an inextricably linked element.

2. Melancholy

Fernando Pessoa's paradoxical definition, which explains melancholy as "nothing that hurts"⁴, seems to be one of the best representations of the problem. Melancholy, despite its bearing signs of self-destruction, characterizes mainly those who are professionally connected with art, and whom Plato did not see as welcome to his utopia, just because of their emotional instability. The character of a genius artist has evolved over the centuries, but the tendency in such a persona to contemplate and perceive the shortcomings of existence has remained as a stable trait. This attitude mainly determines the creative states caused by repeated attempts to answer the most important universal questions. The tendency to contemplate, as psychologists point out, may justify the feeling of loneliness and mismatch with reality. It should be emphasized that man is not a being detached from society, nor is he a mechanism that makes decisions based on irrational drives, and his aspirations are rooted in various existential problems⁵.

Melancholy and the related depression have accompanied man from the very beginning of mankind's existence. In ancient literature, Hippocrates applied the term 'melancholy' to unpleasant memories which caused sadness, and in the Middle Ages, states of depression were called 'acedia',

Krzysiak, Beatę Nawrot, Ewę Ihnatowicz, Annę Bujnowską, Agnieszkę Czajkowską, Ewę Janeczek, Elizę Kącką, Marcina Lułę, Mateusza Skuchę, Pawła Ziębę.

⁴ Extracts cited from publication: F. Pessoa, *Księga niepokoju spisana przez Bernarda Soaresa, pomocnika księgowego w Lizbonie*, przeł. M. Lipszyc, Warszawa 2013 (92 fragment).

⁵ E. Fromm, *Rewizja Psychoanalizy*, tłum. R. Saciuk, Warszawa 2006, s. 29.

and were, according to the image of the world at that time, considered a sin⁶. Kępiński's Melancholy⁷ is insomuch important for the analysis of the attitudes of Kraszewski's characters as it allows us to understand and analyse emotional states that accompany them in the sense of rejection with its causes and effects. As the psychiatrist emphasizes, “Sadness is the human fate. Even the most cheerful are periodically in depression when the world around them gets darker and the person sees everything in dark colours⁸.”

Cesare Lombroso, a psychiatrist and father of criminology, noted the link between depressive states and a prominent intellect or mastery of a particular field as early as the 19th century⁹. In his view, exclusion itself is more of a “semi-finished product” that allows one to identify a particular person as a genius. Using remnants of biographies of characters known in history, Lombroso draws a portrait of a torn figure: on the one hand, the author's pride requires acknowledgement, constant approval of his own creations, and on the other hand, visible maladjustment, alienation and, finally, a sense of exclusion, are constantly recurring in the psyche of the creator. The “sickly sensitivity” causes a mania of greatness, but also makes creative individuals more exposed to open or tacit ostracism. In his research, the Italian scientist made use of his copious experience of patient observations, which allowed him to see parallels between insanity and genius. These states are obviously not identical. The weaker perception of external stimuli was conducive to the development of spirituality or even was a result of its excessive expansion, and this, according to the author of *Genius and Madness*, led directly to alienation¹⁰.

Exclusion is also a particularly relevant topic in sociological sciences, such as in the case of studies on social exclusion¹¹. In this context, the concept of peer exclusion (or rejection) is particularly important¹².

⁶ K. Maj, *Profesor Kępiński wobec depresji*, [w:] *Przeciw melancholii. W 40. rocznicę wydania „Melancholii” Antoniego Kępińskiego – perspektywy fides i ratio*, pod red. A. Hennel-Brzozowskiej i S. Jaromiego, Kraków 2014, s. 21.

⁷ A. Kępiński, *Melancholia*, Warszawa 1985.

⁸ Tamże, s. 17.

⁹ C. Lombroso, *Geniusz i obłąkanie*, Warszawa 1987, s. 20–30.

¹⁰ Tamże, s. 43–66.

¹¹ Issues related to exclusion and rejection are also a part of one of social sciences – action sociology (with main promotor of it Alain Touraine). Zob. M. Baranowski, *Wykluczeni i wyobcowani. Socjologia działania Alaina Touraine'a*, [w:] „SensusHistoriae”, vol. XXII, Poznań 2016, s. 89–104.

¹² S. Jaskulska, W. Poleszak, *Wykluczenie rówieśnicze*, [w:] *Wychowawcze i społeczno-kulturowe kompetencje współczesnych nauczycieli: wybrane konteksty*, pod red. J. Pyżalskiego, Łódź 2015, s. 156–172.

3. Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's *Historia kołka w płocie*

Turning now to the discussion of one of the artists shown as rejected by Kraszewski, it should be noted that their fates were often presented in a very similar fashion. The writer, using certain feature schemes or important character traits, revealed the key motifs of his work. These certainly included the “peasant question”, especially during Bolesławita’s stay in Volhynia. In order to awaken sympathy for the peasants, Kraszewski wrote *Historia kołka w płocie*¹³, last from folk novel cycle in which he presented the story of Sachar Pakuła¹⁴.

The protagonist of *Historia kołka w płocie*, an artist-musician, unsuitable, due to his artistic profession, for serfdom work, was assigned to the army, from which he escaped to go into hiding in Russia. After a long vagrancy, a very talented violinist, he is admitted to the house of Rogala, a nobleman, as a player. He also falls in love with Natalia, a maid, which is the beginning of his madness. Sachar’s only salvation is playing the violin.

The spiritual absence and unconsciousness of the artist is visible during the concert, during which Sachar, so far perceived as a sane person, falls into a trance and as if becomes a tool of a higher power¹⁵.

Analyzing the motif of the artist in the novel, Kazimierz Maciąg drew attention to the fact that this character could achieve ultimate happiness and fulfillment only in madness. In *Historia kołka w płocie* (1859), madness becomes an artistic victory when the opposition between Sachar, genius and master of the world, and his listeners, the crowd, corresponds to each other, creating a full picture of creative frenzy in artistic perfection¹⁶.

The realistic and bitter picture is connected with allegorical motifs to express the narrator’s solidarity with the romantic art of the “madmen” against the classicistic aesthetics of the enlightened¹⁷. This irony is also used in the author’s comments to show the analogy between Dąbczak

¹³ J.I. Kraszewski, *Historia kołka w płocie według wiarygodnych źródeł zebrana i spisana*, Wilno 1860.

¹⁴ Kraszewski wrote a nine peasant novel’s included into series, containing paintings from life of villages from Volhynia nad Polesie. These are: *Historia Sawki* (1843), *Ułana* (1843), *Ostap Bondarczuk* (1847), *Budnik* (1848), *Jaryna* (1850), *Ładowa pieczara* (1852), *Chata za wsią* (1854-1855), *Jermoła* (1857), *Historia kołka w płocie* (1860).

¹⁵ J.I. Kraszewski, *Historia kołka w płocie...*, 165–166.

¹⁶ Triumph of an artist is a common motive in a romantic novel. Zob. np. Novalis, *Henryk von Ofterdingen*, tłum. F. Mirandola, Wrocław 2003.

¹⁷ M. Jankowiak, *Kunszt ironii powieściowej w pisarstwie Kraszewskiego (na przykładzie Historii kołka w płocie, Pamiętnika Panicza i Dziennika Serafimy)*, [w:] *Pochylił się nad Józefem Ignacym Kraszewskim*, Bydgoszcz 1992, s. 78.

and Sachar, as “defeated” characters who have no influence on their fates. Thus, Kraszewski emphasizes even more strongly the motif of exclusion that dominates in *Historia kołka w płocie*. It should be noted that irony itself played a significant role in Kraszewski’s work¹⁸. Being aware of certain (perhaps) technical shortcomings, the writer often “plays” with the reader, allowing him to find his own, albeit sometimes humorous portrait, and the protagonist’s transformation also takes place on an external level. However, Sachar finds a salvation in music. Being a suppressed artistic genius, he falls into extreme emotional states without controlling himself¹⁹.

However, Sachar’s madness is completed by his failure in love matters. Unhappy love is another aspect of, and reason for, rejection as presented by Kraszewski in this work. The young man, shown from the very beginning of the novel as a misfit dreaming of a “higher” birth²⁰ and feeling excluded from other villagers²¹, reveals Kraszewski’s own views on social inequality and the writer’s sensitivity to the peasant’s misery²². Saving himself from the army, escaping from the village, he returns after years, unable to endure life in hiding and lying²³. Not taught to work, unable to make any profit and do any physical work, Sachar ends up in a manor, where he becomes a butler. He can only occasionally make his hosts’ time more pleasant by playing the violin, which is extremely sad²⁴ and at the same time engaging, or he can lose himself in music under the cover of the night. Thus, Sachar

¹⁸ Zob. W. Danek, *Józef Ignacy Kraszewski*, Warszawa 1973, s. 29. Zob. W. Hamerski, *Romantyczna troposfera powieści. Interpretacje prozy Kraszewskiego, Szyrmera i Korzeniowskiego*, Poznań 2010, s. 57–73 i 96–103; E. Owczarz, *Poszukiwanie siebie – poszukiwanie formy. Powieści Kraszewskiego o artyście*, [w:] *Nieosiągalna całość. Szkice o powieści polskiej XIX wieku. Józef Ignacy Kraszewski - Ludwik Szyrmer - Henryk Sienkiewicz*, Toruń 2009, s. 18–19; W. Hamerski, *Ironia romantyczna we wczesnej twórczości Józefa Ignacego Kraszewskiego*, [w:] „Wiek XIX: Rocznik Towarzystwa Literackiego imienia Adama Mickiewicza” 2012, nr 5, s. 364.

¹⁹ Without any doubts madness of artist is perceived as insanity and a mental illness. As Antoni Kępiński says, “(...) it can be stated that not only doctors but also a thinkers and artists contributed to recognition and consolidation of judgements about mental sicknesses” (tenże, *Melancholia*, s. 281).

²⁰ Sachar’s dreams about a higher life state, about being born in a different conditions are constantly found in the pages of the novel and even directly in the sighs of the adolescent. Zob. np J. I. Kraszewski, *Historia kołka w płocie...*, s. 58.

²¹ The villagers considered Sachar as a harmless person. Anyhow exclusion through mocking and making laugh of him appears several times in a pages of a novel. For instance: “Group judged in their own law, and they gave him a nickname Nietiamet, which means foolish person, because he looks like that during the work.” Tamże, s. 59.

²² Tamże, s. 37

²³ Tamże, s. 141–143.

²⁴ Sachar’s talent and genius were noticed in novel pages by inhabitants of the court. Those ones who were familiar with the music were delighted with his play. They were emphasizing the unusual sadness flowing from the violin. Zob. Tamże, s. 170–171.

escapes loneliness by playing the violin. As Erich Fromm emphasized, attempts to move away from alienation could take on various substitute forms, even such as artistic activity²⁵.

Ultimately, the artist, a “bump on the log”²⁶, looks like a lunatic in the eyes of the community, and, at the same time, arouses admiration and fear. He lives in insanity:

Slowly they got used to him and once they recognized him, they treated him like a fool. (...) The girls saw that he was adorable, but they were afraid of him as if he was a ghost. For he had a face of one and he was as silent and sad as those very creatures, which returned from the other world to do penance by wondering the earth in bodies that were not their own. They pointed at him with their fingers as he walked with his head down, never knowing what he did nor what there was around him²⁷ (Hkwp, p. 189–190).

Wishing to abandon his service, Sachar wandered around to play for animals and birds, and then returned to the manor again. There he meets Natalka, a pupil of Miss Adelaide. Natalka immediately becomes interested in Sachar “and they got to know each other somehow, and I don’t know how they got close and understood each other very naturally...” (Hkwp, p. 196). The inappropriateness of the intimacy of a lady and a madman and a reject is immediately noticed. Sachar, without even daring to protest, humbly endures insults, gets used to suffering and living in a sense of exclusion. The young couple decide to wait for the envious people to forget, and the moment when time will heal the wounds of shock and derision. Initially promising to love Sachar, Natalka slowly withdraws, as if fearing the future, misery and judgments of society, as well as the exclusion that constantly afflicts her beloved, and finally sees him as a madman and leaves him without saying a word. The girl is at first the only person close to the unlucky one, the only one who fully accepts and appreciates him. Overnight, Sachar is abandoned by her as well. The woman “recognized in spirit that she was reasonable, and

²⁵ E. Fromm, *O sztuce miłości...*, s. 24.

²⁶ In this way Kraszewski with use of byword is naming a parallel construction between fate of tree in forest and life of boy-peasant. . Zob. np. J. I. Kraszewski, *Historia kotka w płocie...*, s. 189.

²⁷ „Powoli oswojono się z nim i raz uznawszy niespełna rozumu obchodzili się jak z głuptaszkiem. [...] Dziewczęta widziały, że śliczny, a obawiały się go jak upiora. Miał bowiem minę i milczenie, i smutek tej istoty, co z drugiego świata wróciła za pokutę nie w swoim ciele błędzić po ziemi. Pokazywano go sobie z dala palcami, gdy szedł kołując ze spuszczoną głową, nigdy nie wiedząc, co czyni i co go otacza” .. J.I. Kraszewski, *Historia kotka w płocie...*, s. 189–190.

began to think, and somehow feared the future she had seen so bright so far. And Sachar found her in tears, cooler, fearful, still he did not believe that heart could betray him...” (Hkwp, p. 208).

Natalka, accepting the proposal of another man, decides to make a final settlement with Sakharov’s feelings and himself. The girl “having cried a lot ... told herself what Mrs. Rogalina said to her day after day, and immediately matured to think that Sachar was a little madman and living with him was impossible” (Hkwp. p. 210). At the moment of rejection, the young man goes mad²⁸. The huge emotional blow also contributes to his madness, turning²⁹, however, into even more creative frenzy and gaining “artistic momentum”. Having never learnt any note, never seen any player performing, he completed the measure of his talent even more. Madness resulting from emotional rejection, combined with creative genius, becomes grace and salvation³⁰.

Natalka also lives to suffer the decision to leave Sakharov and the fact of his madness. When she has finally recovered, completely changed and shattered, she remains as lonely as the one she has abandoned. Her fiancé never appears again.

The changeability of Sachar’s moods should also be emphasized. The young man, previously ignoring his emotional states, starts to pay attention to his self-esteem and the reactions of the surrounding world. Separation from his beloved makes the man even more insane. As Antoni Kępiński noted, “man sees himself completely differently in a state of sadness, and differently when he is cheerful”³¹. However, as Sachar’s madness intensifies, the environment ceases to matter to him. Focusing solely on himself and finding an escape in playing the violin, he reveals his musical genius more and more intensely. An unhappy yet talented peasant child, who cannot find his place in rural reality due to his great talent and sensitivity, is saved (in the sense of saving physical life). The only salvation for him at the moment of being abandoned, also by his beloved, turns out to be music. It is the madness that accompanies Sachar in playing the violin that saves

²⁸ As a basic factor of falling into insanity, one of psychologist says: “breaking from social norms and conventions, and being unable to follow them”. Zob. A. Kapusta, *Szaleństwo i metoda. Granice rozumienia w filozofii i psychiatrii*, Lublin 2010, s. 119.

²⁹ Modern psychology is putting attention on the fact that there are some limitations to fully understand madness with focus on disorders of patient identity and difficult way to communicate with him. Zob. Tamże, s. 103.

³⁰ Zob. J.I. Kraszewski, *Historia kolka w płocie...*, s. 213–215.

³¹ A. Kępiński, *Melancholia*, s. 123.

him. Losing himself in the sounds of strings and his own work, he survives without bargaining for his own life. Thus rejection becomes a blessing for him. The outcast, being harmless to people around, finally becomes free.

4. Summary

Ryszard Koziółek, quoted at the beginning, calls Kraszewski “The Writing Machine”. The essayist stresses that “(...) in the school history of literature between Polish Romanticism and realism, i.e. between poetry and the novel, there is a fifty-year gap of nothing worth reading. However, there is something there - a writer who described the everyday Polish life of this half-century in its district and emigration diversity”³². We owe a lot to Kraszewski as a writer. It is not only about the variety of the works he published, but also about the fact that he gave the Poles “a novel as a form of self-representation and self-understanding”³³. He relieved Polish people from not reading in native language³⁴. Referring to the judgments quoted in the introduction, it is also worth mentioning that “Kraszewski is a proof that there is a drive that has not yet been discovered by psychoanalysts – the drive to narration”³⁵.

Ewelina Kaczmarska

„Bóg łaskaw dał mu obłąkanie...”³⁶

**Melancholia, depresja i odrzucenie artysty na przykładzie
Historii kołka w płocie Józefa Ignacego Kraszewskiego**

Józef Ignacy Kraszewski to najbardziej płodny twórca literatury europejskiej. Pracowite życie twórcy przełomu romantyzmu i pozytywizmu jest przepełnione obserwacjami społecznymi i poświęceniem się człowiekowi. Ukazane zostają źródła porzucenia czy konieczności odejścia oraz przyczyny rezygnacji z ewentualnych uczuć. Kraszewski w swoich obserwacjach społecznych zajmuje się badaniem życia

³² R. Koziółek, *Maszyna do pisania*, [w:] *Dobrze się myśli literaturą...*, s. 75.

³³ Tamże, s. 77.

³⁴ Tamże.

³⁵ Tamże.

³⁶ J.I. Kraszewski, *Historia kołka w płocie według wiarygodnych źródeł zebrana i spisana*, Wilno 1860, s. 213.

jednostek wybitnych, prezentując ich samotność. Jednak życie artysty, tęsknota za minionym, szukanie tego, co poza zmysłowe, doprowadza także do wątpliwości, rozważań nad sensem egzystencji i inicjacji wewnętrznej. Z utworów Kraszewskiego można odtworzyć postawę estetyczną człowieka dziewiętnastego wieku, ustosunkowanie do zagadnień metafizycznych, religijnych, specyficzne zabarwienie epoki, wszechstronność, a nawet źródło natchnień. Głównym uczuciem, które warunkuje postawy bohaterów Józefa Ignacego Kraszewskiego, jest odrzucenie. Jego przyczyną jest melancholia. Jest to tęsknota za stratą, której nie można opowiedzieć ani ująć w słowa. To także żal i żałoba za czymś, co do końca nie zostaje wyrażone. Antoni Kępiński używa zaś tego pojęcia do szczegółowego opisu stanów depresyjnych, podkreślając, że XIX wiek przyniósł doprecyzowanie samego pojęcia.

Słowa kluczowe: powieść, artysta, geniusz, szaleństwo, melancholia

Keywords: novel, artist, genius, madness, melancholy