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## The historical figures of the Republic in the process of reconstitution of the national imagery: Sidónio Pais and Józef Piłsudski



### Abstract

The subject of this article is the comparative analysis of the role of historical figures and related national myths in the process of reconstituting the national imagery. The establishment of the Republic in Portugal led to a reformulation of the social imagery, which became apparent through “re-enchantment” (G. Durand), an outbreak of cultural activity informed by national mythology. The shift in the attitude towards myths during that period is vivid in literary texts dedicated to the main political figures, such as Sidónio Pais. In *A memória do Presidente-Rei Sidónio Pais (In memory of President-King Sidónio Pais)* from 1920, Fernando Pessoa applies the sebastianist myth so as to achieve the messianization of a historical figure. The use of Sebastianism with the objective of a renovation of national imagery culminates in *Mensagem (The Message, 1934)*, the climax of a process of mythification of the Portuguese reality. In Poland, a similar crucial historical moment is the restoration of the national and democratic state in 1918, associated with the figure of Józef Piłsudski. General Piłsudski is a symbolic figure of independence and a protagonist of the poetic volumes *Karmazynowy poemat (Carmin Poem)* by Jan Lechoń, from 1920, and *Wolność tragiczna (Tragic Liberty)* by Kazimierz Wierzyński, from 1936. These works struggle to break free from the literary myths of the Polish Romantic era. The poems, highly intertextual and dialogical, are an attempt to demythify reality, which makes the role of national myths in Poland different than in Portugal. In the Portuguese context, the myths, though applied emblematically and incorporated in the Sorelian strategy, serve a purpose of national renovation, while in Poland, they are considered the main obstacle to the rebirth of national culture.

Key words: Sidónio Pais, Józef Piłsudski, Mensagem, national myths.

Myths are commonly considered the core of national experience. António José Saraiva defines the historical myths as “a form of imaginary consciousness with which the people define their position and their will in world history”.<sup>1</sup> Miguel

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<sup>1</sup> A.J. Saraiva, *A Cultura em Portugal. Teoria e História. Livro I: Introdução Geral à Cultura Portuguesa*, Lisboa: Gradiva, 2007, p. 112.

Real calls the national myths the historical imaginary centers, charged with the function of founding or re-founding myths.<sup>2</sup> According to Gilbert Durand, myths are ubiquitous in the human world, even if their presence varies in different periods. The present era was inaugurated in the late nineteenth century (a famous *Bezäuberung*, a re-enchantment)<sup>3</sup> and marked by the return of myth, which revaluation is still very visible in all areas of life. According to the researcher, there are two main reasons of the rehabilitation of myth: 1) the saturation (the concept introduced by Pitirim Sorokin), understood as weariness, exhaustion of the predominating world-view, which leads to the demand of the other; and 2) the collapse of classical epistemology and the simultaneous development of anthropology. This re-enchantment was possible by overcoming the positivist paradigm, dominating in the nineteenth century, which led to the restoration of the mythical equilibrium through re-connection between myth and poetry.<sup>4</sup>

In the Portuguese case, this process began in the second half of the nineteenth century through the recovery of the Sebastianism and the Fifth Empire myths and through the practice of their symbolization started by Oliveira Martins and resumed by Teixeira de Pascoaes and Fernando Pessoa. After more than a century of an apparent nonexistence (apparent, since they were at that time the object of the critical examination by the first generation of Romantics), these Portuguese founding myths (the Sebastianism and the myth of the Fifth Empire) find their most complete, culminating ideological and poetic form in the first decades of the twentieth century, corresponding to the establishment of the Republic in Portugal and leading to the reformulation of a Portuguese social imagery. The emergence of cultural activity inspired by national mythology coincides naturally with the establishment of a democratic regime and the attempt of the national self-awareness renewal. The most conspicuous manifestation of this process is the theory of *saudosismo* and the poetry of Teixeira de Pascoaes and the group of Renascença Portuguesa (Portuguese Renaissance). The idea of reformulation of the national conscience is a result of this attempt of the introduction of specifically Portuguese world view. This process was continued and developed by Fernando Pessoa's cultural project, whose great part is constituted by the Sebastianist myth. This shift in attitude towards myths becomes evident in the literary representations dedicated to the leading political figures, such as Sidónio Pais,<sup>5</sup> the assassinated president, whose death impressed Pessoa. In fact, Sidónio Pais was considered a martyr even at that time, deified by the social imagery.

Sidónio Pais is one of the historical figures, which often appear in Pessoa's writings dedicated to the Sebastianist theme. Sidónio Pais is presented as the one

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Real, *Portugal. Ser e Representação*, Algés: Difel Difusão Editorial, 1998, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. G. Durand, "Fernando Pessoa: a persistência europeia do mito e a o reencantamento da modernidade" in: idem, *Imagens e reflexos do imaginário português*, Lisboa: Hugin, 1997, p. 173 and idem, *Mito e sociedade. A mitanálise e a sociologia das profundezas*, Lisboa: A Regra do Jogo, 1983, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. G. Durand, *Campos do imaginário. Textos reunidos por Danièle Chauvin*, Lisboa: Instituto Piaget, 1998, pp. 48–52.

<sup>5</sup> Sidónio Pais (1872–1918) was the Portuguese politician and diplomat, the fourth President of the Republic, assassinated at Rossio Station on 14 December 1918.

who had “mystical qualities of the head of the nation” (“qualidades místicas do chefe de nação”):<sup>6</sup> in spite of being just a false *Encoberto* (the Hidden One), his existence was charged with a symbolic value, which cannot be disdained. To emphasize his importance in the mythical history of Portugal, Pessoa uses the metaphor of the “distant shadow of something to come”<sup>7</sup> (indeed, very close to one of Pascoaes’ metaphors). According to Pessoa, Sidónio achieved the aim that the other *Encobertos* did not manage, which means the contact with the collective subconscious. The famous poem dated on 27.02.1920, *À memória do Presidente-Rei Sidónio Pais* (*In memory of President-King Sidónio Pais*), provides a fairly comprehensive view of Pessoa’s intention to associate this figure to national ideas. We can observe a certain “messianisation” of the president in the poem, accomplished by the evocation of the Sebastianist myth. Even the title is highly significant because of the neologism “president-king”, which evokes the figure of the king-messiah and introduces a strange combination of monarchism and republicanism. Such a combination can be only achieved within the logic of the prophetic time (José Augusto Seabra indicates that one of the fundamental characteristics of the myth is the paradoxical conciliation of the opposites in it<sup>8</sup>). In fact, the president-king would represent in Pessoa’s text the union of two regimes in combat, being the historical figure of the assassinated president the representative of the first one and the victim of another.<sup>9</sup>

The poem, written very early, is an expression of a typically messianic faith in the hidden nature of the assassinated president,<sup>10</sup> which has no continuation in the mature works of Pessoa (where the literal Sebastianism is replaced by a kind of a spiritual vision). Jacinto do Prado Coelho, discussing this poem, arguments that the figure of the dead president becomes the symbol of personal experience through the internalization of the epic matters.<sup>11</sup>

In the first stanza of the poem, the president is presented asleep. For him, who has already passed the boundary between life and death, the world life does not have any interest. The lyrical subject reflects on the possibility of the survival of the president’s “spiritual life”, rejecting the belief in its total annihilation. The as-

<sup>6</sup> F. Pessoa, *Sobre Portugal. Introdução ao problema nacional*, introdução e organização J. Serrão, Lisboa: Ática, 1979, p. 129. Raul Morodo considers the assassinated president a political idealization of Pessoa, interpreting the *sidonismo* of Pessoa as an opportunity of the renationalization of a country, what does not seem to be in conformity with the symbolic character both of president’s figure and the *sidonismo*. Cf. idem, *Fernando Pessoa e as revoluções nacionais europeias*, Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1998, p. 89.

<sup>7</sup> F. Pessoa, *Sobre Portugal...*, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J.A. Seabra, *O heterotexto pessoano*, Porto: s.d., p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Joel Serrão explains the importance given by Pessoa to the president by the disappointment in relation to the Republic in Portugal and as a proof of this hypothesis he indicates the fact that Pessoa was not interested in Sidónio’s life till after his death, cf. idem, *Fernando Pessoa, Cidadão do Imaginário*, Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1981, p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> António Machado Pires is convinced that the usage of the Sebastianist faith is in this case the expression of pain and resignation, cf. idem, *D. Sebastião e o Encoberto*, Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1982, p. 105.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. do Prado Coelho, *Diversidade e Unidade em Fernando Pessoa*, Lisboa: Editorial Verbo, 1987, p. 54.

sumption of a high (although concealed) destiny of the dead president comes from the providential reasoning: “if God was about to take him / Why did he give him to us” (“se Deus o havia de levar, / Para que foi que no-lo trouxe”).<sup>12</sup>

Another designation of Sidónio, this time obviously referring to the figure of *El-Rei*, is “the soldier-king” (“soldado-rei”).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the attributes of the king in the poem are patriotic faith and a anointed sword (as we can assume, the sword of Afonso Henriques, which the young king took to Africa, according to Sebastianist legend). In consequence, we can observe the creation of the image of a president-martyr, in accordance with the example of the King Sebastian. In the same way, the Portuguese people cannot assume the death of the president, just as they could not assume the one of the king.

The royalty was conferred to Sidónio Pais at the time of the premature death. The lyrical subject announces the President-King’s return due to the impossibility of his total annihilation, despite the fact that in that particular moment he could be only visible to the spirit. Another attribute of Sidónio Pais, which also attests his supernatural destiny, is the sword of faith, identified with a cross and appearing more than once. It is a common symbol in Pessoa’s esoteric poetry, always connected to the idea of anointing.<sup>14</sup> The subject of the poem believes in the presence of a shadow which oversees the Portuguese people from beyond-the-world. The motive for this belief is again a simple fact that Sidónio Pais have existed, which cannot be considered an accident, but necessarily the work of providence: “let’s have faith because he was” (“tenhamos fé porque ele foi”).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the reason for his present absence is, according to the lyrical subject, the atonement, being his death interpreted as apparent.

In this context, there appears a craving for his return, embodied in the soul of the lyrical subject and of those who profess the same belief. Their desire reaches its power due to the spiritual authority of the name of the dead hero. In the twenty-first stanza, appears a phrase “the fields of Redemption” (“Campos da Redenção”),<sup>16</sup> which evokes both the field of battle and the messianic context. In this same stanza, we find illusion, perhaps the synonym of a dream. The president is present in the “corporal” form “of memory [...] / dawning” (“carnal [...] de memória / A amanhecer”).<sup>17</sup> There is a unity between Sidónio and those who expect his coming, as he is the “real spectre made of us” (“spectro real feito de nós”).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup> F. Pessoa, *Da República (1910–1935)*, recolha de textos M.I. Rocheta, M.P. Morão, introdução e organização J. Serrão, Lisboa: Ática, 1979.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>14</sup> We can compare the signification of these elements with the same ones in the esoteric poetry of Pessoa, for example in the interpretation of Y.K. Centeno, “O pensamento esotérico de Fernando Pessoa” in: F. Pessoa, *Mensagem. Poemas esotéricos*. Edição crítica, J.A. Seabra (ed.), Madrid: Archivos/Fundação Eng. António de Almeida, 1993, pp. 359–398 or *idem, Fernando Pessoa: Magia e Fantasia*, Porto: Edições ASA, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> F. Pessoa, *Da República...*, op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

The existence of Sidónio is for the lyrical subject the proof of a divine protection, just as his royalty is granted directly by God, since he did not belong to the royal dynasty. Therefore, it is of a spiritual nature. The anxiety of salvation is also Sidónio's messianic feature. The evocative poetic image of the night falling upon the ruins of the fatherland in the thirty-fourth stanza is very characteristic for the messianic movements (a morning, a dawn must necessarily be preceded by the darkness of night). The second coming of Sidónio may occur under a different physical or spiritual form. In fact, the president does not necessarily have to reincarnate under his previous human appearance: "In a new form or new spirit, / What kind of different pulse or soul it could take / Return as a thought!, / Soul of a name!" ("Em nova forma ou novo alento, / Que alheio pulso ou alma tom, / Regresse como um pensamento, / Alma de um nome!").<sup>19</sup> As it was mentioned, throughout the poem, the name itself has a significant importance (not only in this case – we can simply evoke Pessoa's reflexions about the Kabalistic meanings, for example, about the name of Portugal). The lyrical subject invokes the return in the spiritual form, that of a thought: "impulse, light, vision that would govern" ("impulso, luz, visão que reja").<sup>20</sup> For now, also the sword, the symbol of royalty, is sleeping. What is still alive is the distant memory of *Desejado* (the Desired). The I-speaker draws a poetic image of "a new Alcácer-Kibir at night" ("novo Alcácer-Kibir na noite")<sup>21</sup> and reflects on the unknown sin that led to this punishment (the concept of atonement came out already in the verses quoted above). Afterwards, the lyrical subject asserts without any hesitation or concealment that Sidónio Pais is, in his conviction, the incarnation of King Sebastian: "a tall flower of a marsh of a flock, / Predawn of Redemption / In him once embodied king / Sebastian" ("Flor alta do paul da grei, / Antemanhã da Redenção, / Nele uma hora encarnou el-rei / Dom Sebastião").<sup>22</sup> Moreover, he highlights the eve of salvation,<sup>23</sup> so typical for the messianic creations. The importance of collaboration between those who expect and the messiah should be emphasized again, as it is also present in the texts on the spiritual coming of King Sebastian, achieved as the result of recreation of his thinking.

The relation with the past *grandeur* is also evident, both in this poem and in the posterior writings: "wanting to be what we already have been" ("a querer ser o que já fomos")<sup>24</sup>. Pessoa uses in this text once more the metaphor of the shadow projected into the future, and it is in this tension between the past and the future that the sword appears again: the one of Afonso Henriques, of King Sebastian, and finally of Sidónio Pais. The present time is in the poem equal to the night, to the darkness associated with death (the use of the verb *jazer*, "to lie"). The symbol that also appears in this poem is the famous Hour from *Mensagem* (*The Message*):

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> What is repeated in the suggestive stanzas of *The Message*, for example in a poem *D. Afonso Henriques*.

<sup>24</sup> F. Pessoa, *Da Republica...*, op. cit., p. 237.

“and tomorrow, when the Hour will come / when a new Western verb / Incarnated in heroism and glory, / Bring as your real shield / Your memory!” (“e amanhã, quando houver a Hora, / quando um novo verbo ocidental / Encarnado em heroísmo e glória, / Traga por seu broquel real / Tua memória!”).<sup>25</sup> In consequence, the assassinated president becomes a kind of patron of the universal and national revival, the herald of “the future of the past” (“o futuro do passado”).<sup>26</sup> Only through his existence, proving the vitality of the ancient Portuguese dream, the coming of a new messiah is possible: “WHO WILL BE because you have been” (“QUEM SERÁ porque tu foste”).<sup>27</sup> At the end of the poem, a desired renaissance is closely related to the memory of a past greatness: “and curve would go back again / To what we’ve already been” (“e a curva novamente volte / Ao que já fomos”).<sup>28</sup> The elements of Sebastianist myth return in the last stanza: “and in the air of fog that shudders / (Distant bugle in the morning!) / The DESIRED finally returns / To Portugal!” (“e no ar de bruma que estremece / (Clarim longínquo matinal!) / O DESEJADO enfim regresse / A Portugal!”).<sup>29</sup>

We can thus observe the evolution of a poetic creation around the figure of Sidónio Pais throughout the poem: first presented as a hero, martyr, great man, heir to the ancient virtues, later designed as the embodiment of King Sebastian, and his life the second coming of the king, and finally seen as the sign of another messiah to come, the herald that makes this appearance possible by playing an indispensable role of the one who encourages and raises hope. Although this change in interpretation of the character of King Sebastian is very clear, this does not mean that there is any contradiction or indecision in the text as to the true character of the President-King. Rather, these three views complement each other perfectly in the logic of Pessoa’s messianic theories: in Sebastianism’s own reasoning all incarnations of a messiah are just one. Sidónio Pais, without any contradiction, can be seen both as the assassinated president, the Desired returned, and the precursor of another messianic incarnation, especially when we discover that the president is nothing more than a false incarnation of the messiah. In his study of the poem, João Medina notes that “Sidónio was not King Sebastian, but only a certain reflexion of the Sebastianist idea, brief glimpse of the messianic Hope, the sudden flash of a prophetic comet in the darkness of homeland life [...] The promise of the Messiah, not the future Messiah”.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>26</sup> F. Pessoa, *Mensagem. Poemas esotéricos*. Edição crítica, J.A. Seabra (ed.), Madrid: Archivos / Fundação Eng. António de Almeida, 1993, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> F. Pessoa, *Da República...*, op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> “Sidónio não foi D. Sebastião, mas tão só uma certa fulguração da ideia sebastianista, brevíssimo lampejo da Esperança messiânica, o brilho repentino dum cometa profético nas trevas da vida pátria [...] Promessa do Messias, não o Messias futuro”: J. Medina, “Fernando Pessoa e o Messias: sobre a visão messiânica de Pessoa e o seu ideário político. A propósito de Sidónio Pais” in: *Um século de Pessoa. Encontro internacional do centenário de Fernando Pessoa*, I. Tamen (ed.), Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1988, p. 233.

Teresa Rita Lopes expressed even more profoundly the meaning of the function assigned to the figure of the President by Pessoa, stressing its mythical aspect: “what Pessoa exalted in Sidónio, especially after his death, had more in common with what he represented – the myth of which he could be a support – than of what he, in fact, was”.<sup>31</sup> Regarding the fact that Pessoa abandoned the idea of a special mission of the assassinated president, we should note his absence in *The Message*, the poetic cycle that gathers all the great figures in the mythical history of Portugal.<sup>32</sup>

The use of the Sebastianist myth in the function of an imaginary renovation reaches its climax in *Mensagem* (*The Message*, 1934), the highest point in the process of mythification of the Portuguese reality. *The Message* is the culmination of a great number of messianic-prophetic ideas in power in the Portuguese society over many centuries. As Onésimo Teotónio Almeida already evidenced in a Sorelian reading of this volume of poetry,<sup>33</sup> we cannot speak of Sebastianism in Fernando Pessoa, but rather of the instrumental usage of the rhetorical function of this myth. One cannot also speak in Pessoa’s messianism. Although it is still possible to consider as messianic the complex of ideas which operates the elimination of the concept of a personal messiah, it is not possible in the case of abolition of the idea of redemption. This idea of redemption is overcome by Pessoa and replaced by the project of the reformulation of the identity. In our opinion, it is only legitimate to discuss Pessoa’s Sebastianism in the sense of the transformation of Sebastianist myth, though always with the awareness that the role and purpose of these transmutations are already divergent. In fact, the Sebastianism has only the function of a congregational myth.

Both in the fragments in prose, and in the *The Message*, the metaphor of the Fifth Empire, withdrawn from the Sebastianist myth is, in my opinion, equal to a spiritual empire or the empire of culture, and it is the name of the future feat of the Portuguese whose main characteristics are universality and anti-centricity. The core of this undertaking is constituted by Pessoa’s cultural project, covering not only the totality of his works, in all its aspects, especially the heteronymous one, but also his life, called by some researchers to be life-poetry,<sup>34</sup> so that everything is included in his existential project. The idea of a spiritual empire is a Sorelian myth: the exact exposure of its contents and meanings is unachievable, being feasible only the definition of the kind of the matter of the empire, that is the cultural one, and its characteristics, namely universality, transnationality and anti-centricity.

These features, used by Pessoa in the construction of the congregational myth are the same as these that according to Boaventura de Sousa Santos characterize

<sup>31</sup> T.R. Lopes, “Mensagem de uma vida” in: F. Pessoa, *Mensagem. Poemas esotéricos*. Edição crítica, J.A. Seabra (ed.), Madrid: Archivos / Fundação Eng. António de Almeida, 1993, p. 347.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. J. Serrão, *Fernando Pessoa...*, op. cit., pp. 154–155.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. O.T. Almeida, “*Mensagem*” – *uma tentativa de reinterpretação*, Angra do Heroísmo: Direcção Regional dos Assuntos Culturais, 1987.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. J. Serrão, *Fernando Pessoa...*, op. cit., pp. 123–140.

the Portuguese culture,<sup>35</sup> thus, particularly by writing *The Message*, Pessoa creates a new myth. Although always with the indispensable support of the national history and mythology, the poet operates its revision and makes its restoration possible to create a new national consciousness in order to gather the national energy and lead to the consequent resurgence of the Portuguese community from decadence. Pessoa, evoking the figures from Portuguese history and mythology (like Sidónio Pais, but especially the figure of King Sebastian), recreates the Portuguese national identity. With the objective of saving the imperial feature, so close to the Portuguese at least since *Os Lusíadas* (*The Lusíads*), the poet decides to transfer the imperial aspirations to the spiritual level, by removing the bias of nationality in favor of universalism. This operation is quite logic, given the low value of Portuguese culture, which Pessoa himself diagnosed at the time as the vacuum.<sup>36</sup>

This act of transgression of the limitations of nationality and the attempt of the creation of transnational identity, also in perfect conformity with the Portuguese character according to the poet's diagnosis, should be considered an innovative undertaking in the Portuguese context (having in mind, obviously, the sebastianist theories of António Vieira). For example, the proposition of Teixeira de Pascoaes, though also universalistic, was always supported by the strong patriotic feeling in the traditional sense. Therefore, we can conclude that Fernando Pessoa, being a keen observer of the political, social and cultural reality of the epoch of his life, and, at the same time, a visionary strongly connected to his chosen country, endeavored the reformulation of Portuguese national identity by assuming by himself the role of King Sebastian in the process of creation of a new national myth. The intended effect of this action on the national psyche is included in the metaphor of a spiritual empire that signifies the creation of the first truly universal culture, whose first element was the cultural project of Pessoa.<sup>37</sup>

Hence, as we can see, the national myths play a central role in the process of the reformulation of the Portuguese national identity. These myths participate, through their presence in poetry, in the reconstruction of collective imagery, with always affirmative attitude towards Sebastianism, even if the usage of mythology is instrumental, like it seems to be in case of Pessoa.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. B. de Sousa Santos, "Modernidade, Identidade e a Cultura de Fronteira", *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, no 38, Dezembro 1993, pp. 11–40.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. F. Pessoa, *Ultimatum e páginas de sociologia política*, recolha de textos M.I. Rocheta, M.P. Morão, introdução e organização J. Serrão, Lisboa: Ática, 1980, p. 132 and B. de Sousa Santos, "Modernidade", op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>37</sup> That was later developed by Portuguese philosopher, Agostinho da Silva, since according to him *The Message* can be understood as the announcement of the Kingdom of God, established among the chosen people and achieved through the transformation of mankind. The rhetoric and style of Agostinho da Silva are highly spiritual, while his ideas are purely messianic. Agostinho da Silva identifies the Fifth Empire of Pessoa with the Portuguese colonial empire, denying the existence of any center and judging that its essential elements should be located outside Portugal. Silva identifies the Fifth Empire with the Kingdom of Jesus and proceeds the identification of King Sebastian with Jesus. As observed, Agostinho da Silva instrumentalizes Pessoa's text, incorporating it into his own theories concerning the Fifth Empire. Cf. A. da Silva, *Um Fernando Pessoa e antologia de releitura*, Lisboa: Guimarães Editores, 1988.



In the Polish context, the situation is different. The great return of national myths, especially the myth of the chosen people of “Sarmatians,” the defenders of Christianity in Europe, took place in the early nineteenth century, coinciding with the introduction of the Romanticism in literature. The revival of the myths was caused above all by the socio-political situation, including the extinction of the Polish state in the consequence of partitions in the late eighteenth century (the last partition dates to 1795), which led to the need for nation’s salvation in the area of culture. Thus, literature became a major source of national experience, making it an indispensable resource of the founding myths in the light of the recreation of the national existence in a spiritual level. The Romantic poets, especially Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński operated in their works the symbolization of the myth of the chosen people, leading to messianization of the Polish nation itself. The consequences of this process were so profound that from that moment the Polish national myths had no other existence than as highly literary myths. Not only the major works of Polish Romanticism (especially *Dziady – The Ancestors*, a fantastic drama, as it was called by George Sand), but also its language and literary imagery, totally impregnated by the Romantic texts, became the main reference point for later writers and poets. The Polish poetry became tied to the romantic representations, what is quite clearly visible in all the nineteenth-century literary production, leading in most cases to its schematization and the lack of originality.

To analyze this quality, I employ the concept of “phantom” proposed by Maria Janion on the basis of Freud’s ideas and understood not as the power of imagination, but as the imaginary world and its contents, which in this case is undoubtedly of literary nature.<sup>38</sup> In this perspective, we can see that all Polish post-Romantic literature is stuck in the vicious circle of literary phantoms, i.e. national myths used by the Romantics. Such a tendency is evident in the survival and constant employment of the same group of metaphors, symbols, and even poetic language itself. The same researcher developed the theory of continuation of the romantic paradigm in the social sphere, considering it absolutely current until the year 1989. In fact, this idea is one of the most interesting proposals of the interpretation of Polish contemporary imagery, so that I treat it as the starting point of my analysis. Until the restoration of a political independence in 1918, there were moments of visible intensification of these literary phantoms, which always corresponded to the historical events that aimed at the restoration of the state, i.e. the Polish insurrections. The last moment of this intensification is connected to the beginning of the Great War, which raised great hopes among Poles, who undertook another attempt of restoring the inexistent state. Due to various political coincidences, Poland was restored as a national and democratic state in 1918, with the central figure of Józef Piłsudski.<sup>39</sup> This military and politician, responsible for restitution of the Polish army at the beginning of the war and the main and even

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. M. Janion, „Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej” in: idem, *Prace wybrane*, t. 3, *Zło i fantazmaty*, Kraków: Universitas, 2001, pp. 165–166.

<sup>39</sup> Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935) – Polish statesman, politician, officer – the „First Marshal” and the leader of the Second Republic of Poland.

mythical figure of the independence, is the protagonist of numerous volumes of poetry, to not to mention the popular legend. Among the poets who dedicated their poems to Piłsudski, we should point out Kazimiera Iłakowiczówna, Leopold Staff, Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Tadeusz Hollender, Roman Kołoniecki and Jan Brzechwa.<sup>40</sup> By this process of mythification, the figure of Józef Piłsudski approaches the legacy of the Romantic imagery. In consequence, the poems dedicated to him by the best poets of the period are an attempt to release this heritage, an attitude very conspicuous in the poetic volumes analyzed in this article: *Karmazynowy poemat (Carmine Poem)* by Jan Lechoń (1920) and *Wolność tragiczna (A Tragic Freedom)* by Kazimierz Wierzyński (1936).

*Carmine Poem*, though published in 1920, contains poems written mostly during the Great War, which makes the context of its reception quite specific. Since the publication of this volume, despite its high poetic qualities, it was considered outdated and very traditionalist and its poems incomprehensible.<sup>41</sup> The apparent lack of relation to the present refers to the fact that a large number of poems was written before the restoration of independence. Both the patriotic thematics and the language caught up in the great Romantic poetry located the volume in opposition not only to the poetic production of the other members of the group *Skamander*, but also to the social and cultural climate of the time. A better expression of this climate are the vitalistic poems, focused on everyday problems, purposely liberated from the patriotic burden, such as volumes *Wiosna i wino (Spring and Wine)* or *Wróble na dachu (Sparrows on the Roof)* of Kazimierz Wierzyński or the poems of Julian Tuwim, simple and humorous, not to mention the avant-garde production, totally uninterested in patriotic thematics. The most common attitude in relation to the painful legacy of the past is well articulated in the poem *Czarna Wiosna (Black Spring)* of Antoni Słonimski. In this text, the subject openly declares the symbolic act of pitching the coat of Konrad (the main character of Mickiewicz's *Dziady*), thereby inaugurating a new national experience, free from the phantoms of the period of the nonexistence of Poland. The intention of the poetic subject of *Carmine Poem* is close to this attitude. However, what makes this volume so interesting is the failure that it experiences in attempting the liberation from the Romantic burden.

The volume opens with the most famous poem of Jan Lechoń, i.e. *Herostratus*, in which the name of the ancient destroyer of the temple of Diana is the symbolic mask of the man who intends to invade the sacred zone of the national imagination. In this poem appear places (Łazienki Królewskie in Warsaw, Teatr na Wyspie) and figure (the shoemaker Jan Kiliński) enshrined in national memory, which must be destroyed to make the rebirth possible. The demolition of the mythical places, like the ritual murder of certain historical figures, is a prerequisite for the beginning of a new era. Poland is presented in a grotesque and mocking way, as a parrot of all nations in a crown of thorns, what symbolically annihilates the Polish mes-

<sup>40</sup> Cf. J. Kwiatkowski, *Dwudziestolecie międzywojenne*, Warszawa: PWN, 2000, p. 171.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. I. Opacki, "Dramat narodowej wyobraźni. Wokół Karmazynowego Poematu Jana Lechonia", in: idem, *Król Duch, Herostrates i Codzienność. Szkice*, Katowice: Para, 1997, pp. 7–74.

sianism. In spite of these violent incentives, the lyrical subject is not sure whether these actions will result: „Because at night I cannot sleep and during the day I get tired / by the thoughts, which grow into my heart as doubts, / And I would like to see once if I can destroy the past, / If I crumble everything into dust, or... awake Poland” („Bo w nocy spać nie mogę i we dnie się trudzę / Myślami, co mi w serce wrastają zwątpieniem, / I chciałbym raz zobaczyć, gdy przeszłość wyżeniem, / Czy wszystko w pył rozkruszę, czy... Polskę obudzę”).<sup>42</sup> The assumptions are two: either the total destruction that will be followed by the attempted annihilation of the Polish symbolic universe, or a rebirth, the awakening of the nation.

In the following poem, highly intertextual, entitled *Duch na seansie* (*The Ghost in the séance*) is an imaginary recreation of the of spiritist séance in which appears the ghost of Juliusz Słowacki. The allusions to the works of this Romantic poet, especially to *Anhelli*, *Balladyna* and *Horsztyński*, constitute an important level of the poem. The ghost of the great poet is also the figure of destruction, which besides the emotional attachment to the national myths (symbolized in this poem above all by the portrait of the duke Józef Poniatowski, a hero of the Napoleonic Wars), points out the inevitability of its obliteration: „Here is, above the sword, hung on the wall / The blackened portrait of the Prince Joseph – / He is approaching it! He has love in his eyes, / The glow not extinguished of a torch – arduous / And when we feel our throats sobbing / of the soldier songs – he rips the portrait to pieces” (“Oto nad szablą zawisnął na ścianie / Księcia Józefa konterfekt szerniały – / Ku niemu idzie! Ma w oczach kochanie, / Żar niewygasły pochodni – zapały / I kiedy w gardle się zrywa nam łkanie / żołnierskich pieśni – drze portret w kawały”).<sup>43</sup> The symbolic destruction of the portrait of the duke-national martyr is the point of transition to normal, everyday life, instead of the Word (in the biblical and Romantic meaning) that the participants were expecting.

The following poems are dedicated to the Symbolist painter Jacek Malczewski and to the fictional character of the historical novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz, Pan Zagłoba, transferred to the parliament of the restored republic, while *Polonez Artyleryjski* (*Military Polonaise*) is an example of a military, Romantic poetry. *Mochnacki*<sup>44</sup> is a poem of particular relevance for this analysis, being a kind of narration of the concert given by this Polish writer and pianist, referred to in the title of the poem, in Metz in 1832. Because of the motif of the concert, this poem enters into intertextual relation with some other famous texts devoted to patriotic concerts, just like concert of Jankiel from *Pan Tadeusz* of Mickiewicz and *Koncert Chopina* (*The Concert of Chopin*) of Artur Or-Ot. Lechoń's poem is written in opposition to these texts, since from the beginning the situation is completely different: this is a description of a failed concert, of an artist who cannot act because of the audience composed by Prussian officers. The pianist tries to present the national music, filled with mythical figures to the German public, which is not able to accept it. The artist feels the ambivalence of his position and loses

<sup>42</sup> J. Lechoń, *Poezje*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1989, p. 30.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> Maurycy Mochancki (1803–1834) – Polish literary, theatre and music critic of the Romanticism, publicist, pianist and independence activist.

the capacity to act due to this incompatibility and stops the concert, shouting "Citizens! Run away! Blood smells in this room!!!" ("Citoyens! Uciekać! Krew pachnie w tej sali!!!").<sup>45</sup> Certainly, the dependency on myths, but at the same time the danger that they enclose, are visible in this poem.

*Mochnacki* is followed by a poem which is central to our analysis, i.e. *Piłsudski*. This poem is almost incomprehensible without knowledge of the historical context. In this case, it is crucial to know the policy undertaken during the Great War by the governments of some sovereign countries (Germany, Austria and Russia) to promise the restoration of the Polish state while the unique reason was military recruitment of Polish soldiers. In various activities of this kind, the national symbols were used for the purpose of influencing the imagination of Poles. One of these events, the enthronement of an interim institution called *Rada Regencyjna* (The Regency Council), is a situation described in the poem dedicated to Piłsudski. All researchers stress its veracity. What is important in this text, is the confusion people's emotions in Warsaw during this ceremony, easily observable in the text: the joy is juxtaposed to fright, love to abomination. The figure of Piłsudski appears only in the last verse of the poem: „He can't speak! / His uniform is grey" ("A On mówić nie może! Mundur na nim szary")<sup>46</sup> – at that time the general was imprisoned in Magdeburg because of the refusal of the oath to the German authorities. His absence and his silence are very significant, just as the initial allusion to the dramas of Stanisław Wyspiański (a black Rachel). Simultaneously, the presentation of a taciturn figure is the first step towards the mythification of Piłsudski, even more remarkable in the poems of Kazimierz Wierzyński. Piłsudski, although not presented in any other way in *Carmine Poem*, is its central figure, since it is in this figure that we can detect the maximum intensity of this ambivalent relationship to the romantic phantoms. On the one hand, Piłsudski is the follower of this tradition, which guided him in the public life (the reason for imprisonment). On the other hand, he is the one who was aware of the danger contained in these myths (his significant silence in the poem).

The second edition of *Carmine Poem* contains one more poem dedicated to the mother of Juliusz Słowacki. This text is a diagnosis of the situation of an unavoidable coexistence of the new reality with the mythical sphere, of the impossibility of exceeding the national imagery. It is a starting point for a new phase of dealing with this burdensome legacy: not a revolt against the domination of the Romantic phantoms anymore, but the attempt if not of a modernization of the national imagery, at least of the reconciliation with the Romantic heritage.

*Wolność Tragiczna* (*Tragic Liberty*) is a poetic volume published by Kazimierz Wierzyński in 1936, shortly after the death of Marshal Piłsudski, and he is the key figure of all the poems of this book, although not explicitly named. *Tragic Liberty* opens an intertextual dialogue with *Carmine Poem*, since it raises the same issue, but from a different perspective due to nearly twenty years of existence of the independent and sovereign country. The relationship that can be

<sup>45</sup> J. Lechoń, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

noted between these two volumes of poetry, one highly significant for the initial period of the Polish republic, and another not less representative for its final years (a freedom won by Poland in 1918 was lost in 1939 and only regained fully in 1989) is present on several levels: from the metaphors and symbols, the poetic language, by characteristic intertextuality, to the importance given to the figure of Józef Piłsudski.

The fundamental difference between these two volumes,<sup>47</sup> as it emphasizes Ireneusz Opacki, is the situation of prophecy featured in *Carmine Poem*, and a kind of summary and balance of a period,<sup>48</sup> finishing or even ended with the death of Marshal, in *Tragic Liberty*. The freedom mentioned in the title is always tragic because closed in a mythical circle, always blocked by the weight of phantom legacy of Romantic texts. Therefore, the Polish consciousness cannot be satisfied with daily, normal life, always trying to establish the unreal aims and ideas.

The volume of Wierzyński is tripartite.<sup>49</sup> In the first part, from *Klechda (A Legend)* to *Victoria*, we find the representation of the struggle for independence, openly presented through reservoir of the romantic symbols, as well as through a poetic language of Romanticism (also at the level of literary genres, such as in *Klechda (A Legend)* or *Piosenka ukraińska (Ukrainian Song)*). The objective is the evocation of places and events relevant to the biography of Marshal, highlighting especially his Lithuanian provenance, which connects the figure of Piłsudski to the Romantic poet Mickiewicz.

In the second part, from *Victoria* on, Piłsudski is assumed to be the legal and true follower of national myths in the era of independence, on the one hand. On the other hand, he is their prisoner, conscious of their inadequacy and the dangers they bring, what leads to the necessity of their destruction in *Noc Narodowa (National Night)*: “Break the monument, which stands above the town, / Stone spectrum of glory, pillar of my captivity, / The sound of centuries flows over there, tiring me in vain – / Break this empty monument! I want to go down among the people” (“Rozbijcie ten monument, co nad miastem stoi, / Kamienne widmo chwały, słup niewoli mojej, / Szum wieków tędy płynie, na próżno mnie trzodzi – / Rozbijcie pusty pomnik. Chcę zejść między ludzi”).<sup>50</sup> Marshal becomes a monument, petrified by the myth, with which he was charged. In consequence, his release is indispensable in order to let him get into the new current of national life. What introduces the element of tragedy is Piłsudski’s identification with these myths, already empty, but so weighty, and obviously operated against his will (*Rozmowa z Baryką, Conversation with Baryka*).

<sup>47</sup> Opacki demonstrates that Wierzyński enters in a dialogue also with another poetical texts of an epoch, like the poems of Julian Tuwim, cf. idem, “Od Karmazynowego Poematu do Wolności tragicznej” (Problematyka mitów narodowych w poezji Skamandra – zarys), *Prace Naukowe UŚ w Katowicach*, 242, n° 10, Katowice 1978, p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> I accept the division established by Ireneusz Opacki, just as many of his interpretative propositions, cf. *ibid.*, p. 27 and followings.

<sup>50</sup> K. Wierzyński, *Poezje zebrane*, vol. II, Białystok, 1994, p. 296.

In the poem *Ojczyzna chochołów* (*The Fatherland of Strowmen*), two realities, the mythical and factual one, are juxtaposed: the mythical is called “the saint country of ancestors” („święta ziemia praojców”)<sup>51</sup> and the real is metonymically evoked by scurvy and flea straw. The incompatibility of an ideal vision and of the problems of the restored country is unambiguous, what makes the subject name this freedom as tragic. Though, what makes the Polish consciousness so tragic in this situation is not only the inadequacy of this mythical image to reality, but especially the impossibility of ever leaving this mythical circle of the Romantic legacy. The overcoming of the phantom of the paradisaical homeland (raised mostly by *Pan Tadeusz*) is impossible because it always dominates mind and imagination of the lyrical subject, who simultaneously remains conscious of this dialectics. In fact, the unique language and imagery that he knows and can use is the one of the Romantic poetry. The lyrical subject brings forth the idea of the symbolic destruction of the monument of Piłsudski, which is an craving for self-annihilation. Actually, this idea remains an inconsequential symbolic gesture, strongly Romantic due to its emotional content.

For this reason, the last part of the cycle, which starts from the poem *Werbel żalobny* (*Funeral Drum*), comes back to the mythification of Piłsudski with the use of all the Romantic imagery. The Romantic heritage wins, the phantoms continue to hold the national imagination with all their interior oppositions, resulting in the tragic condition of the loneliness of a mythologized, petrified and passive hero, forever circumscribed to the circle of national myths.

As we can see, in the Polish inter-war poetry we can find an attempt to attack or exorcise the national myths in several ways. Here we did not analyze poems that engage in this attack with contempt, concentrating instead on those that engage in a dialogue with the phantom heritage. The authors of these poems acknowledge that the struggle is lost right from the start, and at the same time they diagnose a tragic quality in the Polish imagery. The national myths, in the literary form inherited from the great Romantics, were so deeply rooted in the Polish imagery that they could not be in any way removed: the only solution found was a dialogue with them, which resulted in a tragic perception of the impossibility of achieving any goal. The figure of Józef Piłsudski is a kind of catalyst of mythical thought in the period under analysis, due to his qualities as a true statesman, and there is a large concentration of mythical elements in the poems dedicated to his figure. Maria Janion created an idea of “the Romantic paradigm,” which is much broader than the literary tradition and the imagery elements therein, and covers the whole social sphere. This paradigm survived until the year 1989,<sup>52</sup> demonstrating once again the impotence of the efforts to exorcise the Romantic heritage from the national imagery during the early years of Polish independence.

*Carmine Poem* and *Tragic Freedom* hold an imaginary battle for the liberation of the Polish imagery from the Romantic myths of literary provenance. The poems, highly intertextual and dialogical, are the evidence of a failed attempt to

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. M. Janion, „Zmierzch paradygmatu”, in: *Do Europy tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi*, Warszawa: Sic!, 2000, pp. 19–34.

renew the national imagery and to demythify reality by escaping from the Romantic tradition.

In conclusion, the role of Polish national myths in the reconstitution of the national imagery is different from the Portuguese one. In the Portuguese context, the myths were applied symbolically and used within a Sorelian strategy with the purpose of renovating the national character. In the Polish case, on the other hand, the myths were considered the main obstacle to the national rebirth.

