

# ARMENIANS IN JÓZEF ŁOBODOWSKI'S *THE UKRAINIAN TRILOGY*

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## ABSTRACT

The article analyses the image of Armenians and their fate in the novel cycle of the Polish emigratory writer Józef Łobodowski (1909-1988). This cycle, called the "Ukrainian trilogy" (*Komysze*, 1955; *W Stanicy*, 1958; *Droga powrotna*, 1960), is based on experiences of the author, who spent his youth in Kuban during World War One and the period shortly after the Bolshevik revolution. In this trilogy, Armenians do not constitute only an oriental decoration. Writing about these people, Łobodowski realised a more serious intention. He seems to indicate that friendship between the novel's hero, Staś Majewski, and the Armenian boy, Grisha Ashvajanc, means not only incredible adventures but primarily the effective alliance of the weak against threatening powers. This alliance is not only individual but also unites even whole nations.

In works classified as Polish literature,<sup>1</sup> we read primarily about Poles. Of course, there is nothing extraordinary about this, because the literature exists to deal with their affairs. However, representatives of other nations very often participated in Poles' affairs, so they can be found among the protagonists created by Polish writers. When creating them, Polish authors use knowledge acquired during contact with non-Poles. But knowledge about them may also

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<sup>1</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, 2nd ed., Berkeley, 1983, University of California Press, 1983.

come from archival research or carefully selected reading material. And sometimes what writers know about other nations is nothing more nor less than a stereotype. A historian will probably most appreciate works in which the characters are modeled on people living in a specific time and place. However, it is not the writers' task to create historical sources, so it does not matter where the material they use comes from.

Armenians rarely appear in novels and short stories by Polish authors. It is true that throughout history Poles have had the opportunity to come into contact with Armenians, especially with merchants and craftsmen working in Polish cities and towns, but they were not in conflict with them, so, one could say, there was nothing to write about. However, there were writers who created interesting Armenian characters in their works. Undoubtedly, many of them are worth remembering. They certainly make Polish literature more interesting and enrich it with many fascinating topics.

Perhaps for the first time, Zbigniew Kościów drew attention to Armenians in Polish literature.<sup>2</sup> In his pioneering sketch, he lists and briefly discusses various works in which the "Armenian motif" can be found. It is worth quoting his conclusions:

Already from the data presented, it can be concluded that the Armenian motif had quite a significant impact on the work of a large number of Polish writers. The use of this motif ranges from an oriental ornament with an episodic function to a widely developed element with an important meaning. Most of our authors attributed positive characteristics to Armenians and took a sympathetic stance on Armenian issues. Interest in Armenian themes was mainly expressed by authors of historical novels whose action takes place either in the eastern areas of former Poland or in oriental countries. For understandable reasons, Polish writers mainly emphasized Polish-Armenian relations, but they also often noted the contacts of Armenians with other nations that once lived in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This motif is less common in Polish novels with contemporary or close to contemporary themes, and in some of them we can notice a tendency to "de-brown" Armenians. However, the positives prevail, they are the proverbial rule confirmed by exceptions. This does not result from a courtesy idealization of Armenians, but from the realities known to the authors from their own experience or written documents.<sup>3</sup>

However, Kościów does not mention the works of Józef Łobodowski. This by no means brings discredit to this outstanding expert on Armenian issues. Kościów published his article during the communist era, and probably avoided mentioning Łobodowski, who was a fierce anti-communist living in exile. For this reason, Łobodowski's work was virtually unknown in the country. This, of

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<sup>2</sup> Z. Kościów, "Motyw ormiański w literaturze polskiej" [The Armenian motif in Polish literature], *Opole* 8:1987, pp. 22, 28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

course, changed after the fall of communism in Poland, but the novels making up the so-called "Ukrainian trilogy", in which there are numerous Armenians, were published in the country only in 2017.

It is difficult to ignore the Armenians in Łobodowski's trilogy. One of them – Grisha Ashwajanc - is one of its main characters. This fact itself is extraordinary because in general Armenian characters in Polish literature are, although often distinct, usually episodic. However, there are plenty of them in this trilogy.

It is necessary to write about the creator of these Armenian characters<sup>4</sup> in order to fully understand his literary achievements, as he wove numerous autobiographical threads into the stories he told.

Łobodowski was born in Purwiski in the Suwałki region in 1909 into a landowner's family. Shortly after his birth, the family sold their estate and moved to Lublin. When World War I broke out, the future writer's father, Władysław Łobodowski, a colonel in the tsarist army, left for Russia, taking his family with him. Until the outbreak of the October Revolution, the Łobodowski family stayed mainly in Moscow.

The years 1917-22 were exceptionally difficult for the minor Józef. At that time, he lived with his parents and two sisters in Kuban, Yeysk, a small port city on the Sea of Azov.<sup>5</sup> Although he started his studies at a Russian gymnasium, he soon had to leave it. The civil war completely prevented him from leading the life of a young man from the intelligentsia. His father, unemployed and harassed by constantly changing authorities, could not provide for his family. This task fell to Józef, who specialized in the cigarette trade. During this difficult period, the hope of returning to Poland was reassuring. But it was not certain whether he would be able to make it. His father did not make it and died a few weeks before leaving. One of the sisters had died earlier. In mid-1922, Józef left for his homeland with his mother and older sister.

He spent most of the next years in Lublin. There he obtained his secondary school leaving certificate and began to study law at the Catholic University of Lublin; however, he did not complete his studies. He also began his literary activity as a poet in this city.

In the first half of the 1930s, he had left-wing, even communist, views, and he associated with people with similar views. This caused him numerous

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<sup>4</sup> I. Szypowska, *Łobodowski 'Od Atamana Łobody' Do 'Seniora Lobo'* [Łobodowski. 'From Ataman Łoboda' to 'Senior Lobo'], Warsaw 2001; J. Zieliński, *Leksykon Polskiej Literatury Emigracyjnej* [Lexicon of Polish Emigration Literature], Lublin, 1990, pp. 82-84.

<sup>5</sup> There were small concentrations of Poles in this region at that time (A. Sielickij, *Поляки на Кубани: Усторические очерки* [Poles in Kuban. Historical monograph], Krasnodar 2008, pp. 103-30).

problems, including short prison sentences. But in the mid-1930s, he realized that he was going the wrong way, converted and even became an implacable anti-communist.

In 1938, Józef married Jadwiga née Kuryłto. The young couple lived in Łuck for a few months and then moved to Warsaw.

Łobodowski fought in the September Campaign<sup>6</sup> and was interned with his unit in Hungary. From there he managed to escape to France, where he intended to continue the fight. He was arrested and placed in a camp for demobilized Polish soldiers. He left it only after France was occupied by Germany. He then attempted to get through Spain and Portugal to England, to the Polish military units stationed there. Arrested by the Spanish police, he spent two years in the Figueras camp.

He spent the remaining years of his life in Madrid. From 1949, he hosted Polish anti-Soviet and anti-Communist programs broadcast by Radio Madrid. These were the first radio programs broadcast from the West to Poland. Due to this activity, the communist authorities forced his wife, who was living in Poland, to divorce him. In addition to working on the radio, he was involved in literary work and published his works in emigration publishing houses and magazines. He died in 1988. His ashes were buried in the family grave in Lublin.

Till today, Łobodowski is appreciated as a poet. His poetic works, published in Poland, have been discussed many times.<sup>7</sup> However, he is not known as a prose writer, or at least only to a small extent.<sup>8</sup>

His prose is largely autobiographical. *Żywot człowieka gwałtownego* [The Life of a Violent Man], published in Poland in 2014, is the writer's memoir. But he also included many of his memories, artistically processed, in two novel series. To begin with the second one, *Dzieje Józefa Zakrzewskiego* [History of Józef Zakrzewski], the four volumes it comprises were published between the years 1965 and 1970 in exile, and in Poland in 2018. The author uses his experiences from the 1930s. The earlier cycle, called the "Ukrainian trilogy", consists of three novels on which Łobodowski worked in the first half of the

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<sup>6</sup> Poland's reknowned defensive war, against German invasion on September 1, 1939, as well as against the Soviet invasion on September 17.

<sup>7</sup> A. Jakubowska-Ożóg, *Poezja Emigracyjna Józefa Łobodowskiego* [The emigration poetry of Józef Łobodowski], Rzeszów, 2001; L. Siryk, *Naznaczony Ukrainą: O Twórczości Józefa Łobodowskiego* [Marked by Ukraine: about the work of Józef Łobodowski], Lublin, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> P. Libera, *Na Marginesie 'Dziejów Józefa Zakrzewskiego' (uwagi historyka)* [On the margin of 'The History of Józef Zakrzewski' (historian's comments)], in J. Łobodowski, *Dzieje Józefa Zakrzewskiego, Część Pierwsza, Rzeka Graniczna* [The story of Józef Zakrzewski, Part One, Border River], Warszawa, 2018, p. 243.

1950s, when he was undergoing treatment for tuberculosis,<sup>9</sup> and then published in the London-based Polish publishing house Gryf: *Komysze* [Thicket] in 1955, *W Stanicy* [In the Outpost] in 1958, *Druga Powrotna* [The Way Back] in 1961. The Test publishing house published them in Poland in 2017, and they were published again by the Instytut Literacki in 2020. In this Ukrainian trilogy, Łobodowski reaches back to what he experienced in the years after the October Revolution, which he spent in Yeysk. It is in the novels that make up this chronologically earlier cycle that interesting Armenian characters can be found.

The protagonist of these three novels is Staś Majewski. Like Łobodowski, he lives in Yeysk with his parents and two sisters. His father is a colonel in the tsarist army, but now he does not practice his profession. The family earns its living by making cigarettes, which Staś sells on the streets. Although he is less than twelve years old, he already has a girlfriend - a Russian girl, Szura. (When Józef was still attending junior high school, he was in love with Nina, and in defense of her he fought with a friend who was harassing her.) Due to the ongoing civil war, life even in provincial Yeysk is becoming more and more dangerous. Young Majewski, together with Szura, moves to the thicket, hard-to-reach areas stretching outside the city, right by the sea. He also intends to bring his family to this place. But it turns out that it is not safe in the thicket at all. During a shootout between rival gangs, he is hit by a random bullet.

Thanks to the help of his friends, he is taken to a Cossack station to recover. Then he lives among the Cossacks for several months, fully accepted by them. He has a new girlfriend - Katia. One day, a strong unit of Bolsheviks attacks the station. Despite the brave defense, the enemy enters the village and massacres its population. His beloved does not avoid death either.

Having survived the attack on the outpost and then numerous adventures, Staś returns to Yeysk. The father has just died in the Majewski house. The boy has an affair with Szura again. There is a possibility of returning to Poland. The Majewskis are preparing for their journey. Staś tries to persuade Szura to go with him, but she refuses. On the day of his departure, he comes to her to say goodbye. Then he goes to the port where the ship for the repatriates is supposed to depart from. He learns that the ship sailed an hour earlier than it should have.

Left alone in the city, he does not know what to do. Finally, the police lock him up in an orphanage where the teachers brutally abuse the children. Nina, whom he fell in love with in high school, is also there. Once raped by her teachers, she commits suicide. Then a rebellion breaks out at the orphanage, allowing the young prisoners to escape.

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<sup>9</sup> Szypowska, p. 145.

Staś is hiding in Yeysk. Then he goes to Rostov-on-Don with Szura. There they are hiding among the Armenians, waiting for the opportunity to go to Poland. Suddenly, Szura catches typhus and dies. Staś, accompanied by another girl, sets off on foot for the country.

The trilogy is full of adventures. In this respect, it brings to mind the novels of the famous Polish writer, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1905, Henryk Sienkiewicz.<sup>10</sup> Probably not all the adventures described in these three novels, only some of which are included in the above summary, were personally experienced by their author or one of his friends. In any case, he lived in the same place and time as Staś Majewski, so it is difficult to completely question his credibility. He certainly does not let his imagination run wild when describing the atrocities of the Bolsheviks and the chaos that reigned in Russian society after the revolution. His descriptions of Kuban, an area of the northwestern Caucasus adjacent to the Sea of Azov, are also credible. Kuban is multinational, with numerous stations of Zaporozhian Cossacks speaking Ukrainian.<sup>11</sup> Maybe that is why these three novels are called the "Ukrainian trilogy."

Kuban is a land where Armenians had been settling for a long time. Images of representatives of this nation can be found in Łobodowski's work.

First of all, we should mention Grisha Ashwajanc. He is a friend of the main character of the series. The young Pole survived the greatest difficulties only thanks to him because both of them were *kunaks*, i.e. special friends whose friendship was preserved by a special ritual that involved cutting veins and drinking the blood of the person with whom they had a *kunak* relationship. In the latest edition of the novel, an editorial footnote informs readers that such an arrangement in the North Caucasus is usually established between men belonging to two different nations.<sup>12</sup>

The very appearance of Ashwajanc was extraordinary. The writer describes it this way, introducing it for the first time into his novel:

Despite the summer, he was wearing a sleeveless sheepskin coat, rags made of sacks on his legs, fastened with straps, a wide belt and a Cuban cap with a red button on his ruffled black head (...). He had a face burnt dark brown, huge eyes, and a nose shaped like a curved cucumber. Long monkey arms ending in powerful hands

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<sup>10</sup> A. Danilewicz-Zielińska, *Szkice O Literaturze Emigracyjnej* [Sketches on emigration literature], Wrocław, 1999, p. 264.

<sup>11</sup> Szypowska, p. 192.

<sup>12</sup> Łobodowski, *Komysze* [Thicket], Cracow, 2020, p. 53; cf. T. Kaliściak, „Pobratymstwo w świetle źródeł historyczno-etnograficznych z przełomu XVIII i XIX wieku” [Kinship in the light of historical and ethnographic sources from the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries], *Konteksty*, 4:2020, pp. 209-17.

completed the look. A Caucasian bandit, a half-wild chaban from the Stavropol steppes, an escapee from forced labor - every description suited Grisha Ashwajanc.<sup>13</sup>

Here is another description of Ashwajanc, which the author puts into the mouth of one of the novel's minor characters: "One thug asked about you. Not one of ours, Ormiashka, I mean... Karapiet... Nose like a cucumber, eyes like a wolf's. They call him Grishka".<sup>14</sup> The term "Karapiet" used here is a popular Armenian name, which is used in Russia to call, in a rather negative way, all Armenians.

This Ashwajanc is most often called Grishka, which is the Russian diminutive of the name Grigory. This is probably due to the fact that he lives among Russians or Russian-speaking people. In Armenian his name is Krikor or Gregory. It is also a popular Armenian name. However, Łobodowski never calls him that.

Ashwajanc met Staś Majewski in junior high school. It seems they attended the same class, although he was three years older than the Pole, because he repeated classes many times. Perhaps they were attracted to each other by their minority status; after all, both of them were not Russians, and Russians sometimes showed distrust and even contempt for them. You can guess that happened also at school. However, the action of the novel does not take place during junior high school, but at a time when former junior high school students had to take care of themselves, and often also of their loved ones. The Armenian is doing great. He becomes an important figure in criminal circles. However, the name of a bandit does not suit him at all. He is a very noble man, although he is capable of cruelty, but only towards those who seem to deserve it, who harm the weak and defenseless. As a rule, these are people created by the revolution.

Ashwajanc is aware of being someone extraordinary. On the pages of *Podróż powrotna* he says about himself: "I am a Caucasian eagle, the strongest policemen run away from me."<sup>15</sup> And in another place: "Griska Ashwajanc, Armiashka,<sup>16</sup> Caucasian bandit and avenger of human wrongs".<sup>17</sup> And again: "I don't recognize anyone; I live as I want, with my own head, with my own industry."<sup>18</sup> As such, he largely resembles romantic protagonists.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Łobodowski, *Komysze*, Warsaw, 2017, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Łobodowski, *Droga Powrotna* [The Way Back], Warsaw, 2017, pp. 102-3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>16</sup> *Armiashka* is the Polish diminutive of the word Armenian. In Polish, some ethnonyms have diminutives.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>19</sup> M. Ursel, *Romantyzm* [Romanticism], Wrocław 2000, pp. 165-66.

He also resembles them in his oriental provenance. He comes from an ancient eastern people. Moreover, he knows other eastern peoples living in the Caucasus, and his knowledge about them makes him stand out among his Russian friends, who are to some extent fascinated by them. One of the heroes, a Russian, Kolya, saying goodbye to the company, turns to Ashwajanc:

- You, Grishka, a specialist in your Caucasian ceremonies. What do you say when someone says goodbye to a *kunak*? Salem-aleikum.

The Armenian smiled with satisfaction and put his hand to his heart, mouth and forehead.

- Aławendy... Mahomet Rassul Ałta... Faticha!

- Wałtabałta! Inszach!

- Ałtasechłta!"<sup>20</sup>

Ashwajanc is undoubtedly an Armenian patriot, although he lives far from his homeland. In a conversation with Awdiotenka, a disappointed revolutionary whom he helps hide, he says: "*The mountains are beautiful, and the most beautiful here in Armenia. There are streams everywhere, greenery abounds, vineyards on the slopes, and herds of lambs roam. A shepherd next to them plays on a duduk.*"<sup>21</sup> From time to time, he gets fed up with life in the underground and then makes plans to return to his homeland: "*to settle in the mountains, not having to hide from the militia and changing hiding places all the time.*"<sup>22</sup> Another time, Armenia is a place where you can take refuge when your current lifestyle becomes impossible: "*It will get too crowded, I will go to the mountains, to our Armenian region, to the Turkish or Persian border.*"<sup>23</sup> Staś persuades him to go with him to Poland, where Armenians also live: "*If I leave this place,*" he says, "*I will go to my country, to our Armenian mountains.*"<sup>24</sup>

The reader does not learn what happened to Ashwajanc. Łobodowski allows him to take care of his *kunak* one last time and sends him on his way to Poland.

Other Armenians also appear in the novels discussed, but none is as extensively covered as him. He is one of the main characters of the novel. The other Armenians are episodic and not as interesting as Ashwajanc, although all of them are positive. However, Staś's father did not have a very good opinion of them and other nations involved in trade: "*Bribers, fraudsters! If not an Armenian for a Greek, then a Greek will trade an Armenian for a few cents.*"<sup>25</sup> In this connection, "*he told an anecdote about a storm at sea that immediately*

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<sup>20</sup> Łobodowski, *Komysze*, Warsaw 2017, p. 79.

<sup>21</sup> Łobodowski, *Droga*, p. 127.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 419.

<sup>25</sup> Łobodowski, 2017, p. 114.



*calmed down when a Jew, a Greek and an Armenian were thrown from the ship into the stormy waves. After some time, a whale was caught, and when it was cut open, it turned out that all three of them were sitting in its belly and playing cards. The Jew lost everything, even his clothes and underwear, even his personal freedom, and just at the moment of catching the whale, the Greek and the Armenian were playing fools over the Jew."*<sup>26</sup>

It is a fact that Greek and Armenian merchants competed with each other. In *Komysze* there was a Greek merchant, Zabagos, who managed to obtain a license to establish a spa and exploit some hot springs. The Armenians also tried to get it. Not having obtained it, they hated their rival.

Armenians are credited with wealth. During his several-month stay in the Cossack station, Staś sometimes teased a girl named Odarka. Once, jokingly of course, he accused her of laziness: *"You should have married an Armenian merchant, and now you would be sitting on an ottoman and drinking sorbets."*<sup>27</sup>

In the first novel of the series there is a scene with the merchant Czacharian. Staś goes to him to buy earrings and a brooch for Szura, and he bargains skillfully. *"Czacharian was wearing (...) a velvet jacket and a black silk scarf on his head. Between a luxuriant mustache and a wedge-shaped beard, there were full, almost crimson lips. At one time, the Armenian was accused of painting his lips, but repeated attempts with a handkerchief dipped in spirit did not produce any results."*<sup>28</sup> Czacharian runs a shop, which is both an antique shop and a pawn shop, and which continued to prosper even under Bolshevik rule. Staś misses someone like that in the station. Having fallen in love with another girl there, he wants to buy her a gift, but he has nowhere to go. *"If in Yeysk or Dołzhansk, you would go to any Armenian you come across and there would be no problem."*<sup>29</sup>

But the times of Armenian merchants seem to be coming to an end. Staś and Katia find out about this when they go to the fair, which is much poorer than in pre-revolutionary times, because there are no Armenians, or Greeks and Persians.

It should also be added here that Ashwajanc himself is also a very rich man. However, it is not known how he managed to earn so much money. His dealings were certainly not always legal.

Armenians are also very well-informed people. The above-mentioned Odarka, who became the lover of Hassan, a Persian merchant, learned from him about the planned attack on the outpost. *"He's trying to figure things out*

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>27</sup> Łobodowski, *W Stanicy* [In the Outpost], Warsaw 2017, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Łobodowski, *Komysze*, 2017, p. 256.

<sup>29</sup> Łobodowski, *W Stanicy*, p. 254.

*with the Armiashki (...),*" he says, *"and they're always the first to sniff it out."*<sup>30</sup> Of course, Grisha is unrivaled in this respect. Because he knows everything about everyone, he saves his Polish *kunak* many times.

When Staś got out of the orphanage, he couldn't stay in Yeysk, even in hiding, because sooner or later he would be captured again. An Armenian helped him escape and hide in [Nor] Nakhichevan.

Nor Nakhchivan is the Armenian district of Rostov-on-Don, which Staś had the opportunity to get to know well. *"After half an hour of walking, he entered the thicket of streets of a populous district. Small, mostly brick houses, lots of shops, most of them closed, boarded up here and there. Clouds of swarthy, black-haired and black-eyed children. On the benches there are shrunken figures of old men and women, lazing sleepily in the warmth of a summer evening."*<sup>31</sup> Armenians seem to be quite numerous in Rostov. Even though these are post-revolutionary times, merchants, thanks to their resourcefulness and solidarity, are somehow coping. You can see them trading in the local bazaars. In the novel there is a scene of an attack by *bezprizorny* - children without any care - on a meat seller. Or maybe it is the beginning of a good period for them, because it is just the beginning of NEP, i.e. the New Economic Policy, partially allowing capitalism in the first socialist country.

Staś and Szura are hiding with Tina, a hunchbacked Armenian woman who sometimes reads cards. She predicted to them that *"the black cloud is getting lower and lower (...), whoever does not escape from the black cloud in time will be overwhelmed and absorbed"*,<sup>32</sup> which unfortunately came true.

There is a lot about Armenian history in *Droga powrotna*. Therefore, we need to recall Grisha Ashwajanc again, because he is the greatest expert here. In a conversation with the above-mentioned Awdiotenka, he explains the entire history of his nation:

You call us: [Karapiety], [Soleni] - and we just laugh at you. We Armenians have a different idea and way (...). If you read the books, you would see for yourself. The Armenian state existed vast and rich even before Moscow was founded and even much longer. We ate shish kebab and drank good wine while you climbed trees and smoked birch bark. Only then did various misfortunes begin to befall us. These are various Agarian Araps, and the Tartar horde, Persians, Turks... These are the worst. Others, Tatars, for example, came, robbed people, beat up people, kidnapped the prettiest women, but then they went to hell, only to find dust behind them. So the Tatars weren't that bad because they came and went. And in the end, all their power was taken to hell because they couldn't keep it together, they spread around the world like lice after your RSFSR. That's why today Tatars mean nothing. They either

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 423.

<sup>31</sup> Łobodowski, *Droga*, p. 315.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

shine shoes on the street or sell carpets. This is what they came up with in their old age. And the Turks settled nearby, built fortresses, and placed their own bashas and *aghas*. And bad times came for the Armenians. They also sent Kurds against us, and this wild tribe knows so much that it murders and robs people. Later still, the white tsar began his rule in the Caucasus. He was acting cunningly. That a Christian supposedly defends and frees them from the unfaithful *bisurman*.<sup>33</sup>

Staś himself, however, “*once read in a history book that Armenians have been living in Poland for a long time, mainly in Lviv.*”<sup>34</sup> Ashwajanc also knows this: “*We were scattered all over the world.*”<sup>35</sup>

*Podróż powrotna* included at least a mention of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey in 1915; the action of the novel takes place only a few years after these events. Ashwajanc alludes to them in his lecture. But they also appear in the story of Czubar, a Cossack from the station where Staś stayed. During WWI, this Czubar was on the Turkish front, among the mountains behind Yerevan, in the town of Igdir. “*There were a handful of Armenian women left there who managed to hide themselves in the mountains in time*”<sup>36</sup> and that is why they were not murdered by the Turks. When the Russians were stationed there, they could feel relatively safe. They provided them with various services in exchange for food. Girls gave themselves to soldiers for a piece of bread.

Ashwajanc reminded them that Armenians in Russia are called not only “*Karapiety*”, but also “*Salty*”. The same Czubar explains where this second nickname comes from: Because “*when the priest baptizes them, he throws a handful of salt into the water.*”<sup>37</sup>

The quite numerous Armenians and the issues concerning them on the pages of Łobodowski’s trilogy certainly make you think. Where did the writer get the information about Armenians that he used to create Armenian protagonists and to raise various Armenian issues? Why did he include them in his novels, which were devoted to the Polish fate?

As stated above, in his novels he included a lot of what he knew from personal experience. Therefore, when describing Kuban and Yeysk, inhabited by representatives of various peoples, he could not omit the Armenians. Similarly, Stefan Żeromski’s<sup>38</sup> novel, *Przedwiośnie* [Early Spring], contains a description of the massacre of Armenians in Baku in 1918 while narrating the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 125-127.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>36</sup> Łobodowski, *W Stanicy*, p. 350.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 350.

<sup>38</sup> Stefan Żeromski’s (1864-1925), was a Polish novelist and dramatist belonging to the Young Poland movement at the turn of the 20th century. He was called the “conscience of Polish literature”

story of Cezary Baryka, who lived in Baku at approximately the same time as Staś Majewski in Yeysk, and took into account the issues of the local Armenians.<sup>39</sup> But Łobodowski could only name them. However, Armenians are much more present in his trilogy. The Łobodowski family probably had some contacts with local Armenians during their stay in Yeysk. In *Żywot człowieka gwałtownego*, the writer, recalling his father's death, writes: "*an Armenian priest blessed the body.*"<sup>40</sup> However, in the novel *W Stanicy*, he mentions Christmas spent in this city two years before, when "*he was with his parents at a service in an Armenian chapel, because Father Dobrzański had just fallen ill with typhus, so there was no Polish shepherdess (...). He remembers how an Armenian priest, tall, very slim, with a dark face and fiery eyes, approached a group of Poles and broke the wafer with them, which is still a Polish custom during Christmas.*"<sup>41</sup> If this event - a very ecumenical one - is not just literary fiction, but was experienced by the Łobodowski family, it could have made the future poet a lifelong friend of the Armenians.

It is also important to note that Łobodowski was erudite. He was well versed in the history and culture of Eastern European countries. In his letter to Stefania Kosowska, editor-in-chief of *Wiadomości*, one of the most important magazines of Polish emigration, he criticizes Wacław Zbyszewski, who claims that the nations of the Ottoman Empire lived together in exemplary harmony.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, it should be noted that in the second half of the 1930s Łobodowski was associated with the Promethean movement.<sup>43</sup> This movement, supported by the state authorities, aimed to establish the best possible ties with all nations oppressed by Soviet Russia.<sup>44</sup> This was achieved, among other things, by popularizing their artistic achievements. Łobodowski was particularly interested in contacts with Ukrainians. But the peoples of the Caucasus were also close to him, as evidenced by the fact that he translated Shota Rustaveli's poem *Vepchis Tkaosani*, in which he was significantly helped by Georgian emigrants.<sup>45</sup> He remained faithful to the ideals of the Promethean movement even when he himself became an emigrant, as evidenced by a large part of his work. There is a lot about Armenians in the discussed trilogy, although the

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<sup>39</sup> *Ararat* 124:1990, pp. 51-52.

<sup>40</sup> J. Łobodowski, *Żywot Człowieka Gwałtownego* [The Life of a Violent Man], Warszawa 2014, p. 37.

<sup>41</sup> Łobodowski, *W Stanicy*, p. 307.

<sup>42</sup> Łobodowski, *Listy Do Redaktorów „Wiadomości”*, Toruń, 2015, p. 306.

<sup>43</sup> Łobodowski, *Żywot*, pp. 107, 189-90, 274-75.

<sup>44</sup> L. Wyszczelski, *Polska Mocarstwowa. Wizje I Koncepcje Obozów Oolitycznych II Rzeczypospolitej* [Power Poland. Visions and concepts of political camps of the Second Polish Republic], Warsaw, 2015, pp. 198, 201, 214, 219.

<sup>45</sup> Łobodowski, *Żywot*, p. 190.

Prometheans had some problems with them because of their pro-Russian nature, present even among political exiles.<sup>46</sup>

Undoubtedly, Armenians in the discussed novel series are not “oriental decorations”. When writing about them, Łobodowski was probably pursuing a more serious idea. It seems to suggest that the friendship between Staś Majewski and Grisha Ashwajanc is not only about incredible adventures, but above all an effective alliance of the weak against the powers that threaten them, that such an alliance does not have to be isolated but can even unite entire nations. Unfortunately, this suggestion did not reach many people who read Polish for several decades. However, arriving now, it remains fully relevant.

ՀԱՅԵՐԸ՝ ԵՈՂԷՖ ԼՈՊՈՏՈՎԱՔԻԻ ՈՒՔՐԱՆԱԿԱՆ ԵՌԱԳՐՈՒԹԵԱՆ  
(THE UKRAINIAN TRILOGY) ՄԷՋ  
(ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ)

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Յօդուածը նուիրուած է լեհ աքսորական գրող Եոզէֆ Լոպոտովսքիի (1909-1988) “Ուքրանական եռագրութիւն” անուանուած վիպաշարքին մէջ հայկական ներկայութեան: Եռագրութիւնը - բաղկացած երեք վէպերէ - *Komysze (Մացառույր, 1955), W Stanicy (Յառաջագոյն դիրքը, 1958), Droga powrotna (Վերադարձի ճամփան, 1960)*, հիմնուած է փորձառութեան վրայ հեղինակին, որ իր պատանութիւնը՝ առաջին համաշխարհայինի եւ յաջորդող համայնավար յեղափոխութեան առաջին տարիները անցուցած է Քուպանի մէջ:

Այս վէպերը լոյս տեսած են նախ արտասահմանի մէջ, 1955-61 տարիներուն, եւ միայն վերջերս - Լեհաստանի ապախորհրդայնացումէն ետք - Լեհաստանի մէջ, 2016-20ին:

Յօդուածագիրը կը վիճարկէ թէ եռագրութեան մէջ հայերը լոկ արեւելեան յարդարանք մը չեն: Այլ, Լոպոտովսքի աւելի խորունկ նպատակ մը հետապնդած է ընդգրկելով հայերը, ջանալով հաւաստել թէ վէպին հերոսին՝ Սթաշ Մայեւսքիին եւ հայ Կրիշա Աշվայեանցին միջեւ հաստատուած բարեկամութիւնը չ'ենթադրեր լոկ անհաւատալի արկածախնդրութիւններու շարք մը, այլ կ'արտացոլացնէ տկարներու դաշինք մը՝ սպառնացող ուժերու դէմ: Այս դաշինքը միայն անձնական-անհատական բնոյթ չունի, այլ՝ հաւաքական ու ընդհանրական:

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<sup>46</sup> P. Libera (ed.), *II Rzeczpospolita wobec ruchu prometejskiego* [The Second Polish Republic and the Promethean movement], vol. IV, Warsaw 2013, pp. 54-55.