

Jan Čačot in Byelorussian and Polish Literature

BY

ARNOLD B. McMILLIN

Poet, ethnographer, translator and critic, Čačot played an important role in the cultural life of his time. As a member of the philomath literary circle and a close friend of Adam Mickiewicz he was acclaimed as the principal lyricist of the group and recognized as an influential figure in the Polish Romantic movement. This aspect of his achievement is best summed up by the verse on his tombstone by the Polish poet Odyniec:

'Imię jego w narodzie jest ciągle związanem
Z Adamem Mickiewiczem i Tomaszem Zanem.'

Čačot's principal attainment, however, is reflected in the ethnographical and literary work he undertook in the Byelorussian sphere. As a collector of folk songs and amateur linguist he provided a valuable grounding and stimulus for later ethnographers, whilst with his own original poems and songs he contributed greatly to the development of the Byelorussian literary renaissance in the 19th century.

Jan Čačot was born into a family of the minor gentry on 24 June 1796.¹ For many years both the date and place of his birth were uncertain owing to a lack of written records: Jan Prusinowski, the author of one of the first studies of Čačot, written in 1860² declared him to have been born on the Tyzenhauz estate at Repichaū near Novaja Myša, Baranavičy region, a mistaken view accepted by all the 19th century commentators and even by some more recent writers like Pigoń,³ Stankievič⁴ and Bandarčyk.⁵ Research has, however, shown that Čačot was in fact probably born in the village of Malusycy, some five miles to the north of Varonča (Kareličy region) where he was baptised in the Uniate parish church on 19 July 1796.⁶ It was not until 1806 that his parents Tadeuś and Klara (née Hacıcka) were

1. According to the Julian calendar. All dates in this article are given according to the Old Style.
2. J. Prusinowski, 'Jan Czeczot', *Tygodnik ilustrowany*, I, 23, Warsaw, 1860, pp. 193-5.
3. St. Pigoń, 'Jan Czeczot', *Polski słownik biograficzny*, Cracow, 1938, IV, p. 316.
4. St. Stankiewicz, *Pierwiastki białoruskie w polskiej poezji romantycznej*, Vilna, 1936, I, p. 45.
5. V. K. Bandarčyk, *Historyja bielaruskaj etnagrafii XIX St.*, Minsk, 1964, p. 46. Bandarčyk gives the name as Repichar.
6. L. Podhorski-Okółow, 'Czeczot nieznaný', *Lech*, 3-4, Cracow, 1937 reprinted in *Realia mickiewiczowskie*, Cracow, 1952, pp. 57-9.

driven by extreme financial pressures to move to Repichau where Tadeus became a bailiff on the Tyzenhauz estate.⁷

The three years spent by the young Čačot in the Baranavicy region find reflection in two of his Polish ballads, *Myszanka* and *Uznohy* (the name of a village near Novaja Myša).

Materially the Čačot's life was little different from that of the peasants for, as he himself says in his Byelorussian poem *Da miłych mużyczkoŭ*, '...ja ż miży wami ūzros

Pry bačku i maci...'⁸

but the childhood grief referred to elsewhere in the poem does not seem to have been unrelieved, for in his unpublished autobiographical sketches, *Treny*, he recalls that he was sent away to school in 1809 for 'frightening the forest birds with a catapult' and 'making too free with the girls'.⁹ Incidentally, his first idyllic love affair with a buxom village maiden by the name of Ulana is described in a romance of 1810 not dissimilar to Mickiewicz's *Kochanie* written at about the same time.

The school he attended in Navahrudak had been founded by the Jesuits but was at that time run by Dominican monks whom Čačot did not hesitate to describe as 'donkeys'.¹⁰ In a letter to Adam Mickiewicz written between 30 September and 20 October 1819, Čačot expressed his dissatisfaction thus:

'Oh, how difficult it is for young people nowadays! Or rather, I should say, how our Dominicans educate their pupils when those who complete their schooling are no better off than those who give it up before the end! There is, in fact, no benefit to be gained from the long years spent studying with them! We were fortunate to be able to emerge from the darkness of chaos into the light.'¹¹

It was at this school that Čačot became friendly with his fellow-countryman Mickiewicz, and when in 1816 they both went up to Vilna university (Čačot entering the faculty of moral and political sciences) their friendship deepened and became established on the firm basis that was to last throughout their lives. Čačot was as slow and delib-

7. The uncertainty about Čačot's place of birth is matched by the confusion over its date: Pypin simply says the 90s; Chodźko 1795; Gloger 1797 or 1794; Korbut, Harecki, St. Stankievič, Braha 1797. Scholars giving the correct year of 1796 are in a minority.

8. Jan Czecot, *Piosnki wieśniacze z nad Niemna i Dźwiny, niektóre przysłowia i idyotyzmy, w mowie sławiano-krewickiej, s postrzeżeniami nad nią uczynionemi*, Vilna, 1846, pp. 62-3.

9. Quoted in L. Podhorski-Okołów, 'Jan z Myszy', *Kurjer warszawski*, 313, Warsaw, 1937 reprinted in *Realia mickiewiczowskie*, Cracow, 1952, pp. 64-9. Podhorski-Okołów also gives a verse by Čačot describing how it came about:

'Nadto swawoli — Oddać go muszą
Do pracowitej gdzie szkoły.
I biednie dziecie, z gołąbka duszą
Wpadło między sokoły.'

10. Letter from Čačot to Jeżowski, 22 August 1820, in Jan Czubek (ed.), *Archiwum filomatów, I, Korespondencya 1815-1823*, Cracow, 1913, 2, p. 244.

11. Jan Czubek, ... *Korespondencya* ..., 1, p. 145.

erate as his friend was quick and impetuous; deeply jealous of their friendship he worried constantly lest Mickiewicz's superior talents should draw them apart ('A difference in learning and talents is a huge barrier'),¹² whilst Mickiewicz would reassure him with generous praises and assertions of his admiration ('I do not perceive any unusual talents in myself, nor any that are higher than your own').¹³ Their correspondence contains many solemn avowals of friendship,¹⁴ although Čačot judged Mickiewicz as strictly as he judged himself, roundly criticising him for such varied faults as being an irregular correspondent, lapsing too easily into depression, perpetrating unpardonable stylistic barbarisms or unpatriotically mixing with the Russian aristocracy in Moscow salons.¹⁵

Čačot's university studies were interrupted after only a year, and he was obliged to work as a clerk on the Radziwiłł estates, known as the Masa Radziwiłłowska, where, however, he maintained his scholarly interests, attempting, as he wrote in a letter to Pietraszkiewicz who was also employed by the Masa, 'to learn as much as possible from life itself'.¹⁶ The reasons for Čačot's sudden departure from the university, until recently always assumed to have been purely economic, are called into question in *Nowy Korbut* where it is suggested that Čačot failed the entrance examination and was thus only loosely attached to the university, mainly by personal ties, until after a year he was finally obliged to stand down.¹⁷ Józef Bieliński, however, in his history of Vilna university, notes that Čačot won the affections and respect of all his colleagues whilst studying there. Bieliński adds further to the confusion surrounding Čačot's name by stating that the 'Political Calendar' for 1825 — a time when Čačot was known to be in the Orenburg region of Russia — listed a Jan Čačot (Jan Czeczot) as the teacher of history and geography at Świsłač grammar school.¹⁸ What is certain, however, is that even after leaving the university Čačot maintained a lively interest in what was going on there, as is witnessed by a series of topical occasional poems like *Wiersz z okazji nakazu golenia wąsów* written in 1819 after a decree by the administration that the fashionable drooping moustaches sported by some of the students be removed forthwith.¹⁹

12. Letter from Čačot to Mickiewicz, 6 October 1819, in Jan Czubek, ... *Korespondencya* ..., 1, p. 154.

13. Letter from Mickiewicz to Čačot, 1 January 1820, in Jan Czubek, ... *Korespondencya* ..., 1, p. 353.

14. Jan Czubek, ... *Korespondencya* ..., 1, pp. 83-6, 153-8, 233-5, 345-51, 351-3, 355-8 etc.

15. When accused by Čačot of making bad friends Mickiewicz simply replied, 'My friends and girl friends are not subject to tax.' (*Korespondencya Adama Mickiewicza*, Paris, 1870, I, p. 23.)

16. Letter from Čačot to Pietraszkiewicz, 8 December 1821, quoted in St. Stankiewicz, *Pierwiastki* ... , p. 47.

17. Irwina Śliwńska, St. Stupkiewicz eds., *Nowy Korbut*, Warsaw, 1968, VII, p. 246.

18. Jozef Bieliński, *Uniwersytet wileński (1579-1831)*, Cracow, 1899-1900, III, p. 387.

19. Jan Czubek (ed.), *Archiwum filomatów, III, Poezja filomatów*, Cracow, 1922, I, pp. 53-5.

On 16 June 1818 Čačot became a corresponding member of the philomaths, a semi-secret society of Romantic poets based in Vilna of which Mickiewicz and Tomasz Zan were the principal members. Just over six months later²⁰ on 12 January 1819 he attained full membership and quickly assumed a central role as secretary and chief organiser of the birthday celebrations, poetic contests and fetes champêtres that were a regular feature of the society's activities. It was in this sphere that Čačot produced some of his best Polish poetry as well as the first examples of his Byelorussian verse, not all of which has survived, however;²¹ it was at this time too (the philomaths existed as a body between 1817 and 1821) that Čačot and Zan exerted the greatest linguistic and thematic influence on the poetry of Mickiewicz. Polish Romanticism grew up in the ethnically non-Polish areas of Vilna and Navahrudak and thus, in turning to the people for its characteristic folkloric basis, assimilated much of the Byelorussian popular and historical tradition. Čačot and Zan, who both knew spoken Byelorussian from childhood,²² and later, to a lesser extent, Chodźko, Odyniec and Pietraszkiewicz were all instrumental, by both precept and example, in arousing Mickiewicz's interest in the Byelorussian folklore and drawing him away from the neo-Classicism still dominant in the established literary circles of Warsaw and Cracow.²³ For a short time Čačot's influence could be seen on Mickiewicz's ballads,²⁴ but unlike Čačot and Zan the great poet spent little time on imitations and quickly outstripped these early models in the growth of his poetic imagination.

Zan recalls that the group were fond of using what he calls the 'peasant lingo' amongst themselves,²⁵ and, clearly, the phonetical, morphological, syntactical and lexical provincialisms, or Byelorussianisms, to be found throughout the Polish poetry of the philomaths were a conscious element in its Romanticism and therefore to be fiercely defended by writers like Čačot and Mickiewicz against attacks by the established critics of ethnic Poland, and others, like Moniuszko, who felt the Byelorussian language

20. The article in *Nowy Korbut* suggests that it was only two months.

21. St. Stankiewicz, *Pierwiastki...*, p. 57, for example, notes that a folk-type poem, *Kupalo*, was unanimously acclaimed by the philomaths on 12 December 1818.

22. Z. Kawyn-Kurzowa, *Język filomatów. Słowotwórstwo i słownictwo. Komitet Językoznawstwa Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Prace Językoznawcze 36*, Wrocław, Warsaw, Cracow, 1963, p. 14.

23. Čačot had been brought up amongst village folk traditions and superstitions, and I. Domeyko tells us that whilst in Navahrudak he and Mickiewicz took a lively interest in popular customs and ceremonies, 'observing markets, auctions and church festivals, visiting country weddings, harvesting celebrations and funerals'. (Quoted in St. Stankiewicz, *Pierwiastki* p. 45.)

24. J. H. Rychter, 'Świtez, i 'Świtez', *Biesiada literacka*, 2-3, Warsaw, 1887; St. Stankiewicz, *Pierwiastki...*, pp. 71-84.

25. T. Zan, *Notatki pamiętnikarskie* quoted in A. Witkowska, *Rówieśnicy Mickiewicza*, Warsaw, 1962, p. 193.

unworthy of serious attention.²⁶ Nonetheless, it appears that of the philomaths Čačot alone used Byelorussian for creative writing. In the three²⁷ works that have come down to us, all marking philomath birthday celebrations, Čačot, as in his Polish songs and also in his later *Własne piosnki wieśniacze*, remains very close to his folk models in both matter and manner, especially imagery. The first was written for the name day of Jazep Jeżowski, 19 March 1819, and consists of dialogues and speeches in verse by various prominent village characters like the headman and his assistant, choruses of maidens and youths and a romance sung by the peasant Mikita. Even in this, his first Byelorussian work, Čačot displays a mastery of the folk idiom resulting from his continuing and increasingly methodical ethnographical researches, and a remarkably faithful reproduction of the phonetical and morphological features of the Byelorussian language as used in the Navahrudak and Baranavičy regions. The second poem, *Da pakincież horła drać*, was originally written for the birthday of Djoniz Chlewiński but subsequently underwent considerable revision before being offered on the name-day of 'Jarosz' Malewski, 1 November 1819. Again it is so close to the popular idiom as to be almost indistinguishable from a genuine folk chant. The original version of this song has not survived, although mention of it is made several times in the philomaths' correspondence, but the extent to which it was revised becomes apparent from the fact that the later version is largely concerned with exhorting the dedicatee to find himself a partner and submit to the bonds of matrimony, whilst Dionizy Chlewiński, the original intended recipient of the verse, was, in fact, preparing for the priesthood.²⁸ The third of these Byelorussian occasional poems, *Jedziesz mileńki Adam*, was recited at a joint name-day celebration for Zan and Mickiewicz on 24 December 1819, and marks the arrival of the latter in Vilna from Koūna in an appropriately fresh and jubilant manner.

The greater part of Čačot's philomath work is, of course, in Polish, and it follows the same stylistic and formal trends as that of the

26. St. Stankiewicz, *Pierwiaszki*..., pp. 84-94; Syrnon Braha, *Mičkievič i bielaruskaja plyn' polskaje litaratury*, New York, 1957, pp. 10 ff; M. Olechnowicz, 'Polskie zainteresowania językiem białoruskim (od połowy wleku XVI do roku 1863)', *Zeszyty naukowe uniwersytetu łódzkiego, I, Nauki humanistyczne społeczne*, 36, *Filologia*, Łódź, 1964, p. 96; Z. Kawyn-Kurzowa, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 ff.

27. I. I. Kramko, *Historyja bielaruskaj litaraturnaj movy*, Minsk, 1968, II, p. 40, mentions only two of these. The first, *Ach, sztoż my waszeci skazem* (recorded from memory by Ignacy Domeyko in Henryk Mościcki, *Promieniści. Filomaci — Filareci*, 2nd edition, Warsaw, Lublin, Łódź, 1919, p. 19), is merely part of the larger Byelorussian composition 'written by Čačot for the name day of Jeżowski, recorded in Jan Czubek, ... *Poezja filomatów*, 2, pp. 76-84. The second, *Jedziesz mileńki Adam* (in J. Sternawski, *Adam Mickiewicz w poezji polskiej i obcej, 1818 — 1855 — 1955*, Wrocław, 1961, pp. 40-1), is also in Jan Czubek, ... *Poezja filomatów*, 2, pp. 201-3, as is the third one, not mentioned by Kramko, *Da pakincież horła drać*, *Poezja filomatów*, 2, p. 187.

28. St. Stankievič, 'Bielaruskija filomackija vieršy Jana Čačota', *Kałošsie*, 3, Vilna, 1935, pp. 162-3.

other Romantics at this time, essaying anacreontics, odes, Niemcewicz — style chants, ballads in the manner of Ossian and even a one-act opera libretto.²⁹ It was as a lyric bard, however, that he was particularly successful, many of his folk-type songs being put to music by Moniuszko and Zan and sung by the philomaths on their country outings and at other gatherings. His love songs, addressed to Zofia Malewska (later Brochocka) the daughter of the rector of Vilna university, possess what Mickiewicz with characteristic generosity described as 'a fire worthy of Pindar' and are also close to the folk idiom in construction and imagery. In other, more demanding genres, however, Čačot realised his limitations ('What a difference there is', he wrote to Mickiewicz, 'between writing poetry and writing true poetry')³⁰ and accordingly we see him throwing himself less zealously into the various literary trends and fashions of his time, like, for example, anglomania, than did some of his contemporaries.³¹ On the other hand, his more limited literary horizons undoubtedly enabled him to reserve more attention for the common people and their culture and thus, indirectly, to forward the development of Byelorussian literature more than he might otherwise have done.

That the philomaths were not limited to literary interests is shown by Mickiewicz's speech of welcome to Čačot when the latter joined the society in 1819: 'Our society is formed with the most noble aim of benefiting our country, our contemporaries and ourselves; to achieve this we have chosen the noblest of paths — the path of education.'³² On another occasion, in an instruction to Zan, he refers to the achievement of 'general well being', 'the furtherance of enlightenment', 'the establishment of morality' and 'patriotism'.³³ It was doubtless the latter aspect of their activities that took Pietraszkiewicz, Malewski and Čačot to Warsaw with secret dispatches on various occasions, and it was this element that first attracted the

29. A little information on Čačot's earliest Polish works may be found in Jan Prusinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 194. Some of his philomath poetry is printed in Jan Czubek, ... *Poezja filomatów*, although much has been lost since, in contrast to the work of the other philomaths, none of it was published during the poet's lifetime. The ballads and other manuscripts are described in some detail by J. H. Rychter in 'Jan Czeczot i jego nieznanne poezje', *Ognisko domowe*, 79-101, L'vov, 1887 and 'Raptularz Jana Czeczota', *Bluszcz*, 14, 15, 17, Warsaw, 1889.

30. Letter from Čačot to Mickiewicz, 20 December 1820, in Jan Czubek, ... *Korespondencya* ..., 3, p. 96.

31. W. Ostrowski, 'Walter Scott w Polsce 1816-1830', *Zeszyty naukowe uniwersytetu łódzkiego, I, Nauki humanistyczno społeczne*, 29, *Filologia*, Łódź, 1963, p. 117. But if Čačot did not share the other philomaths' infatuation with Scott, Byron, Radcliffe etc. he did, in 1820, begin an intensive study of German, although the only fruits of it seem to have been a few indifferent translations. Some indirect light is thrown on this subject when in a letter dated 20 April 1821 (Jan Czubek, ... *Korespondencya* ..., 3, pp. 266-8) Mickiewicz comments on Čačot's anacreontics thus: 'Your anacreontics are true anacreontics; they possess vigour, poetry and sweetness, but there is a general lack of intellectual content... (It is a pity you do not read Goethe.)'

32. Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziela*, Wydanie narodowe, Warsaw, 1950, V, p. 24.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

attention of the Russian authorities who in 1823 charged senator Novosil'cev with a thorough enquiry into the activities of the group. That Čačot was actually betrayed in panic by Janowski made little practical difference to the outcome of the investigation for all the former philomaths received sentences of greater or lesser harshness, accompanied by the automatic banning of their books. Čačot, who with Zan and Suzin was considered one of the most dangerous elements,³⁴ was arrested on 10 September 1823³⁵ and sentenced to six months' hard labour in Kizyl prison, Orenburg followed by an indefinite term of exile in Siberia for 'the expression of dangerous ideas in verse and in speeches'.³⁶ Never the best of friends, Zan and Čačot contrived to foster their differences even in the alien surroundings of Russian exile, Čačot favouring minimal contact with the local population, Zan attempting to establish relations with the Russians around him only, we gather from a letter from Zan to Mickiewicz to have to put up with Čačot's insistent and maddening criticisms.³⁷ In exile Čačot was more successful than his fellows in maintaining spirits, and he conducted a regular correspondence with Mickiewicz often reproaching the latter for his gloomy thoughts. Continuing to write in Polish he also added to his collections of Russian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian songs and popular sayings, particularly after 1825, the year in which he obtained a transfer from Kizyl to Ufa, the main administrative town of the region, where he worked first as a tutor and then in 1828 as a private secretary.

In 1831 he moved to Tver' and two years later, on the recommendation of the governor of Tver', to Lepiel in the Viciebsk region where he obtained a secretarial post in the administration of the Bierazynski canal. At last, in 1841, an amnesty was declared and Čačot was able to return to his native region where he was warmly welcomed by the well-known archaeologist Adam Chreptowicz who established him as librarian at Ščorsy. The latter estate was famous for its advanced English farming methods³⁸ and also for the magnificent library which had been founded by Adam Chreptowicz's father Joachim.³⁹ During his stay here Čačot was able to do considerable scholarly research, particularly into a rare Polish verse translation of Thomas á Kempis's *De Imitatione Christi* that he discovered in the library, apparently from the Dzvina or Dniepr region,⁴⁰ as well as

34. A. Witkowska, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-73.

35. Z. Kawyn-Kurzowa, *op. cit.*, p. 24. This year is supported by Józef Bie-liński (*op. cit.*, p. 387), but Z. Librowicz (*Polacy w Syberji*, Cracow, 1884, p. 88) gives 14 August 1824.

36. St. Pigoń, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

37. Z. Librowicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 89 ff.

38. The peasants at Ščorsy were unusually prosperous, a fact to which reference is made in two of Čačot's *Wlasne piosnki* (LXVIII and LXIX).

39. D. C. Chodźko, 'Notaty Jana Czeczota', *Pamiętnik religijno-moralny*, II, 8, Warsaw, 1858, p. 193. See also: P. M. Špilevskij, 'Putešestvije po Poles'ju i belorusskomu kraju', *Sovremmenik*, XL, StP, 1853, p. 56.

40. D. C. Chodźko, *op. cit.* pp. 194-8. For more information on this translation see: A. Pług, 'Wypisy i notatki Jana Czeczota', *Kłosy*, XLIX, Warsaw, 1889, p. 102.

engaging in reviewing and translating work,⁴¹ although, of course, his main preoccupation, as always, was ethnography, and it is from the years at Lepiel and Ścory that his well-known *Piosnki wiesniacze* stem.⁴²

When in 1844 Adam Chreptowicz died Čačot, no less impoverished now than he had been in his youth, lived with his former school-friends in various parts of Byelorussia: first with the Ślizień family at Bartniki and then later at Dałmatouščyna with Adam Wierzbowski and at Volna with Rafał Ślizień. In 1847 poor health drove him to move to Druskieniki where he was looked after by one of his cousins, Scholastyka Hacicka. Here he died after a period of paralysis on 1 August 1847.⁴³ His grave lies at nearby Rotnica.⁴⁴

Although Čačot is known to Polish literature as a talented but unoriginal versifier, translator and literary critic, an important member of the philomath society and, perhaps above all, as the closest friend of Adam Mickiewicz,⁴⁵ it is for his ethnographical work, his interest in the Byelorussian language and culture and, especially, his own Byelorussian verses that Čačot is best remembered today. The first of his six books of *Piosnki wiesniacze* published in 1837⁴⁶ is characteristic of the unscientific approach to ethnography at that time, giving the Byelorussian songs in Polish translation only, of which he admits in his introduction (dated 1834): 'I did not keep too close to the original, although several songs are translated literally; others I imitated more or less closely.' He did, however, intend to give the originals in later books, an intention that was reinforced by the criticisms with which scholars greeted the first volumes as they appeared. The philanthropic basis to his ethnographical interests is emphasised at the beginning of this introduction where he declares: 'Our peasants, a good, peaceful, industrious people, should arouse in us the most benevolent feelings ... In exchange for the work of their hands we can share with them the fruits of our minds and education, thus adding to the general good ... We shall learn that almost every village possesses its, if unlearned, nevertheless sincere and sensitive

41. Čačot's best known review article is of Kraszewski's *Witoldowe boje* published as a separate brochure in Vilna in 1846; in an earlier review of Mickiewicz's *Kurhanek Maryli* he had been deceived into believing the poem to be a translation from Byelorussian, thus testifying to the author's successful immersion in the popular idiom.

Čačot's translations include French morality tales for young girls (he even wrote some himself) and publicist writings by W. Irving. (G. Korbut, *Literatura polska*, Warsaw, 1930, III, p. 67.)

42. After exile Čačot alone of the former philomaths retained his ethnographic interests and philanthropic populist ideas.

43. J. Prusinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 194. Z. Kawyn-Kurzowa, *op. cit.* p. 24, gives the year of Čačot's death as 1846.

44. For a description of Čačot's last weeks and of his death see: A. Pług, 'Grób Jana Czeczotta (*sic*) w Rotnicy pod Druskieniki', *Kłosy*, XXVI, Warsaw, 1878, p. 335.

45. Mickiewicz described Čačot as 'the best friend one could possibly wish for'. (Letter from Mickiewicz to Čačot, 25 October 1819, quoted in St. Pigoń, *op. cit.*, p. 317.)

46. J. C. *Piosnki wiesniacze z naŭ Niemna*, 2 parts, Vilna, 1837, VIII + 106 pages.

bard. How much unforced and fresh poetry there is ! ... Having sincerely loved our dear and good peasants from childhood I wish to offer them proof of my devotion.'

A second book followed in 1839, consisting of twenty-six songs from the Nioman and ninety-four from the Dźvina, once again all in Polish translation.⁴⁷ Above each song the metre (i. e. the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables) is indicated, and in every case the verse is seen to be syllabo-tonic, almost always trochaic.

In the introduction to his third book he says that whilst in the first book he marvelled at the variety of songs within a small area he is now amazed at how similar songs may be found in villages widely separated in distance.⁴⁸ In the collection itself some but not all of these 'similar' songs are adduced for comparison. How far Čačot is removed from a scientific approach, and the degree to which philanthropy may intrude upon ethnography are revealed by his ingenuous admission that in the translated folksongs he had allowed himself to replace 'unfortunate vodka' by the words 'mead' or 'beer', by that time almost unknown in the villages, since, as he declares, 'vodka is the ruin of our peasants'. Čačot goes on to describe how he collected the songs, not, as might be imagined, by going around the villages himself, but rather by inviting various aristocratic young ladies to his place of work where they would be quite happy to recite or sing the songs they had heard from their serfs: the serf girls themselves were, on the whole, too shy to sing their songs in the presence of a man. In the introduction to his last book (of 1846), however, Čačot advises future collectors of folksongs to listen to the peasants rather than the gentry, at the same time warning them not to wear excessively smart clothes since this could only make their task harder.⁴⁹

The fourth book of songs which appeared in 1844⁵⁰ is far the most important for the development of Byelorussian literature since in addition to genuine folksongs both in the original and in Polish translation Čačot offers twenty-eight Byelorussian songs of his own composition. Once again there is an extensive introduction dealing with the language, nature and origins of the folksongs. He notes that until quite recently the language was used by all strata of society and is therefore worthy of the attention of all classes today although it is not rich, particularly in words to express abstract concepts.⁵¹ Čačot reflects on the strong Ukrainian, Polish and Russian influences to which the Byelorussian songs have been subjected over the years (much more in the case of the Nioman songs than of those from the

47. (S. n.), *Piosnki wieśniacze z nad Niemna i Dźwiny*, Vilna, 1839.

48. (S. n.), *Piosnki wieśniacze z nad Niemna i Dźwiny*, Book 3, Vilna, s. d., XII + 94 pages.

49. Jan Czeczot, *Piosnki...*, 1846, p. XXVI.

50. (S. n.), *Piosnki wieśniacze z nad Niemna i Dźwiny, z dołączeniem pierwotnych w mowie sławiano-krewickiej*, Vilna, 1844, XVIII + 137 pages.

51. *Ibid.*, p. IX. Čačot goes on to lament that, despite the defects in their language, Byelorussians are excessively fond of talking — an idea that he develops further in one of the *Własne piosnki* (LXXXVII).

Džvina), largely as a result of the passage of foreign troops through the region, and he expresses the view that there are few new songs because people are less inventive than they used to be and, moreover, remarkably faithful to their time-honoured, traditional culture. He reflects on the antiquity of the songs, (drawing extensive inferences from the mention in them of 'green wine', and also commenting on the frequent references to the river Danube) and is led to wonder whether his own invented songs may not somehow find their way back to the villages whence they drew their inspiration and, perhaps, 'strengthen the morals of the hard working peasants'.⁵² In fact, some later ethnographers like Kračkovskij⁵³ did take them for originals, including them in their own collections. Finally (XII-XVIII) Čačot gives a reading list of books on the serf question (not only in Byelorussian territories but also in such remote regions as Courland and Estonia) hoping that these books will enlighten the reader about the 'poor and needy existence of the beloved peasants' with a greater eloquence than lies at the author's disposal.

The *Własne piosnki* ('Original Compositions') in this volume are addressed to the peasants (some of them are, in fact, in the form of dialogues) with a purpose that is at once both philanthropic and didactic. Many are concerned with the problems of drink, whilst others touch on such apparently common faults as laziness, talkativeness and lack of cleanliness: to remedy the latter failing Čačot suggests knocking the quarter inch thick dirt off with a stick:

'Oj waźmuże ja dubinu

Oj strasu sažu u ašminu!' (LXXI). Elsewhere his advice is more practical, particularly in the poems concerned with matters like banking rather than burying money, taking sap from birch trees, or installing ventilation and windows in the peasant huts; in these he seems to look forward to later writers like Jelski and Hurynovič. The songs, in general quite musical, are in syllabic verse which, however, in some poems comes close to a syllabo-tonic (trochaic) metre.⁵⁴ The language is remarkably pure Byelorussian of the Navahrudak region, and a study of the vocabulary used in the songs shows it to contain a far smaller proportion of russianisms and polonisms than is to be found in the other main writers of the 19th century. A sequel to the *Własne piosnki*, but this time in Polish, appeared in 1846, consisting of a separate volume of forty-eight songs addressed to the landowners rather than the peasants.⁵⁵ No less didactic in tone, they contrive to combine rationalism with sentimental altruism, but lack the freshness and charm of the *Własne piosnki* or Čačot's earlier Polish poetry.

52. *Ibid.*, p. XI.

53. Jul. F. Kračkovskij, *Byt zapadno-russkogo seljanina*, Moscow, 1874.

54. St. Pigoń, *op. cit.*, p. 317, actually describes the verse as metric (i. e. syllabo-tonic). Je. F. Karskij (*Belorusy*, Petrograd, 1928, III, 3, pp. 39 ff.) characterises the verse *Da miłych mužyczkoŭ* as being in a trochaic metre with the trace of a caesura after the seventh syllable reminiscent of syllabic verse.

55. *Piesni ziemianina przez Tłómcza Piosnek wieśniaczych z nad Niemna i Dźwiny*, Vilna, 1846.

The fifth book of folksongs⁵⁶ presents little interest since, apart from a few of his own Polish songs and a handful of songs from the Nioman in Polish translation, it consists of Ukrainian⁵⁷ songs taken from the collections of Waclaw Zaleski and Żegota Pauli.⁵⁸ It is interesting to note the amount of unacknowledged borrowing practised by the 19th century collectors of Byelorussian folksongs. Karski observes that Čačot's collections were plagiarised by Kirkor, Koreva, Špilevskij, Dmitrijev, Kračkovskij and Šejn, of whom only the last two acknowledge Čačot as their source.⁵⁹

The sixth and last volume of folksongs which appeared in 1846 is in many ways the most interesting historically since in addition to presenting ninety-nine folksongs and one verse of his own composition (*Da milych mužyczkoŭ*) Čačot offers what are, in effect, the first grammar and dictionary of words and phrases ever to be produced for Byelorussian.⁶⁰ Whilst modestly disclaiming the expertise necessary for a genuine linguistic analysis Čačot feels that the language should be studied since, as he stressed in the volume of 1844, it was until recently used by all classes of society and undoubtedly had a contribution to make to the enrichment of Polish.⁶¹ He anticipates Bahušević by comparing the lack of linguistic attention paid to Byelorussian with the situation in Ukrainian, Croatian and Dalmatian, all of which languages enjoyed grammars and lexicons as early as the 16th and 17th centuries, but it is noteworthy that Čačot considers it unlikely that Byelorussian will ever become a living, literary language. Its interest to future scholars will be similar to that of the 'dead' Celtic and 'Herule' languages. Čačot's characteristic of the contemporary Byelorussian language is remarkably successful for its time, embracing all the main phonological and morphological points that distinguish it from the other East Slavonic languages and even attempting to assess regional differences within both a synchronic and diachronic framework. But just as orthography had been one of the weakest points in his ethnographical collections, so it is in his linguistic analysis where he debates, for the sake of future collectors, whether it should be established on morphological or phonological principles, but invalidates the whole discussion by the tacit assump-

56. (S. n.), *Piosnki wieśniacze z nad Niemna, Dniepra i Dniestra*, Vilna, 1845, 108 pages.

57. Pigoń, *op. cit.*, p. 317, describes them as Russian.

58. Waclaw z Oleska, *Pieśni polskie i ruskie ludu Galicyjskiego*, L'vov, 1833; Żegota Pauli, *Pieśni ludu polskiego w Galicji*, L'vov, 1838; Żegota Pauli, *Pieśni ludu ruskiego w Galicji*, 2 volumes, L'vov, 1839-40.

59. Je. F. Karskij, *Belorussy*, Warsaw, 1903, I, pp. 213-5. A. N. Pypin (*Istorija ruskoj etnografii*, StP, 1892, IV, p. 153) also mentions Nosovič in this connection.

60. Čačot actually uses the terms 'mowa sławiano-krewicka' and 'krewicki dialekt'. See: A. B. McMillin, 'XIXth Century Attitudes to Byelorussian before Karski', *JBS*, I, 2, London, 1966, p. 105. On the origins of these names see: A. N. Pypin, *op. cit.*, p. 54 and A. Nadson, 'Naša Niva', *JBS*, I, 3, London, 1967, p. 185.

61. Čačot supports his argument by referring to the Polish lexicographer Linde's observations on the subject: S. B. Linde, *Słownik języka polskiego*, L'vov, 1860, VI, p. LXXXVII.

tion that in either case it must be based on Polish. In addition there is a short article on the relationship between the Slavonic languages and Sanscrit (pp. 102-5), taken from a booklet by Majewski,⁶² and another *Życzliwa dla etymologów uwaga* (pp. 97-101) which reveals considerable common sense and linguistic perception in Čačot who expresses astonishment at the ideas of those philologists who believed the Slavonic language (i. e. the Slavonic languages) to be the original source of Greek, Latin and, hence, all European languages. After commenting on some of the more bizarre current etymological theories he exclaims: 'My God! If this is etymology then it is a waste of both time and effort.'⁶³

Čačot's own poem *Da miłych mužyczkoŭ* serves as a valediction to the Byelorussian peasants whose culture he had extolled and whose harsh lot he had lamented. If he sometimes seems too sentimental in his approach it is from a generosity of spirit and greatness of heart rather than any desire to shirk the issues of his day.⁶⁴ As an ethnographer his work benefited greatly from a deep emotional involvement with the people and their culture and served as both a foundation and a stimulus for later collectors. No less significant is his role as a writer where he was one of the first to demonstrate practically that Byelorussian literature could enjoy a genuine independent existence. A man of conscience and good will he achieved much in both the scholarly and the personal sphere. As the philomaths used to sing:

'Jeśli hołdów godna cnota
Któż cnotliwszy nad Czeczota?'⁶⁵

62. W. S. Majewski, *O Sławianach i ich pabratimach. Część pierwsza, obejmująca Rozprawy o języku Samskryckim, tudzież o literaturze Indian*, Warsaw, 1816.

63. Jan Czeczot, *Piosnki...*, 1846, p. 101.

64. According to Adam Chmielowski (*Adam Mickiewicz*, Cracow and Warsaw, 1886, I, p. 94) Čačot was good natured and kind to the point of occasionally aggravating his friends. I. Domeyko, recalling him from philomath days, gives the following description of his friend: 'Lively, affectionate, gay, affable, equally at ease with the very young and the very learned, musical, responsive to sensations of all kinds, of a truly rural nature, and a good and pious Catholic withall.' (Quoted in St. Pigoń, *op. cit.*, p. 316.)

65. Z. Librowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 88. A slightly different version is found in D. C. Chodźko, *op. cit.*, p. 193:

'Jeśli wielbień godna cnota
Któż poczciwszy od Czeczota?'