

Romantic Elements in Kołas' *Symon-muzyka*

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Of all Kołas' writings this poem is the one which went through the longest and most dramatic process of completion. The critic M. Muśynski says of it: "There is certainly no other work of Byelorussian literature in which the actual process of creation was so unusual and complex".¹ It is therefore worthwhile to trace this process through the evidence provided by the author's surviving, and largely unpublished, correspondence.

There were three versions of *Symon-muzyka*, all of which differ from each other in both content and form. Kołas began work on the poem during the years he spent in prison (1908-11) and finally completed it in 1925. Several of the letters preserved in the Kołas Museum and the BSSR Academy of Sciences Literary Institute refer directly to the early period of work on the poem. From them it appears that as early as 1912 Kołas clearly intended to finish the whole work. In a letter to A. Vłasau, the editor of *Náša niva*, he wrote: 'I am devoting the whole of my visit to *Symon-muzyka*; if things go well I will share my new work with you first'.²

Nine months later he wrote again to Vłasau, this time expressing dissatisfaction with the poor progress of the poem. The most likely cause of his creative difficulties at the time lay in his difficult personal situation; for some time after prison he had been unable to find a post as a teacher, and had had to make do with whatever occasional jobs he could find:

'Poor Symon is just lying around waiting for better times; it's still exactly as it was when I completed the second part in the autumn. Here I've picked it up only once. Things are going badly.'³

Apart from these two letters we find no reference to work on *Symon-muzyka* in any of Kołas' letters from before 1917. However, the appearance of sections of the poem in the Byelorussian periodical press, and the publication in book form in 1918 of the first version of the whole work⁴ suggest that it was at the centre of the author's attention throughout the whole period.

The next group of letters in which we find references to work on the second version of the poem dates from 1924. In July of that year Kołas went to a sanatorium in Kislovodsk, determined to re-edit and finish *Symon-muzyka*. The surviving letters to his wife illustrate some aspects of this work:

'I'm not doing anything, I simply can't get down to work. And yet I could do some work here. All the same I am thinking of finishing *Symon-muzyka* and will try to write a story as well.'⁵

In subsequent letters he talks of overcoming obstacles and difficulties within himself, of modest optimism that he will be able to finish the poem. Several letters refer to the books he was reading at the time. His choice of

reading material was characteristic, pointing to an interest in romantic types in which he sought an analogy or 'atmosphere' for his own poem:

'I don't go out anywhere and I don't do anything. I did some writing yesterday and today but nothing special, everything will be fine once I finish *Symon*... I am reading a little here, I've read some things by Jack London, I've read Faust, I'm reading the *Kalevala*.'⁶

The mountain scenery of the Caucasus undoubtedly served to intensify his romantic mood during the final stages of working on the poem. In spite of the inhospitability which Kołas attributed to nature in the Caucasus, the majestic panorama of the mountains made a great impression on him. In one letter we find a reference to starting work on the completion of the poem preceded by a description of the scenery:

'Dawn is bright and clear. Small white clouds still hang over Elbrus like incense. They float across the sky, thickening, forming larger clouds. The mountains all round are barely hidden by the finest of blue hazes, like girls wearing Caucasian silk scarves. I have started to write, I am putting into order everything I have written about *Symon the Musician*, so that I can finish the poem and look through it all right from the beginning.'⁷

The second version of the poem was finally completed on 8 June 1924. The laconic reference to this contained in a letter to his wife in no way reflects either the many years of work that the poem had required or the feelings that must have surged through him at that moment. It is in fact typical of Kołas' character — any kind of ostentation or pathos was quite alien to him: 'Marus'ka, I finished *Symon-muzyka* yesterday and I don't think its too bad at all.'⁸

In the final letter of the series under consideration Kołas told his wife how the censor, R. Šukievič-Traćciakoŭ,⁹ had reacted to the newly completed work when it was presented to him. The censor's generally favourable opinion also contained reservations about those episodes in which 'mystical inclinations' were manifest and which were to give rise to savage criticism in the 1930s:

'I took the final version of *Symon-muzyka* to the censor today. Šukievič was extremely delighted and praised the ending very highly. Only a couple of words aroused the censor in him:

"Navat nočka bahamolna čałam źniziłasia ŭ dol.

Raz syšla z niabios viasiołka
Dy stupiła na ziarnielku,
Dy ūraniła tam kudzielku, —
Kudry švietłyja aniołka
Na ziarnlu — paścielku."

These words are part of the text. Well, we'll have to get round the problem somehow.'¹⁰

Kołas wrote the second version of *Symon-muzyka* in a very difficult period of his life (1918-24), and it never did appear in print. It was stolen along with his suitcase on the journey from the Caucasus to Minsk.¹¹ We know little about Kołas' subsequent work on reconstructing the poem, or about the textual differences between the second and third versions. We do however, know that he started on the new version immediately after his return from the Caucasus. A note appeared in *Poŭmnia* informing readers that Kołas had reconstructed three fifths of the poem.¹²

The final piece of correspondence relating to the poem is a letter from Kołas dated 16 June 1925. In it the author, still mindful of all the ups-and-downs and complications connected with his work, jokingly refers to the laziness of *Symon* who had finally managed to get himself to the printers:

'Symon has been with the printers since Friday. It's difficult to say how long he will have to stay there. Probably about two weeks. So what? My Symon is an idle good-for-nothing, he doesn't like getting on with his work.'¹³

Thus it was that halfway through 1925, after travelling a path strewn with truly romantic adventures and complications, *Symon-muzyka* finally appeared in print. But this did not by any means signify the end of trouble for a work recognized as a masterpiece by the critics of the 1920s.

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We should now turn our attention to identifying within the poem itself those elements which can substantiate our view that it is an essentially romantic work.

The most obviously romantic feature of the poem is the hero — Symon himself. He manifests that most typically romantic concept: the cult of the individual. All the aspects of his character and conduct — rejection of his environment, solitude and love of brooding on his own sufferings, his wanderings and mystical view of nature — can be interpreted as Kołas' faithfulness to the tenets of romanticism. Conflict with one's surroundings, inclination to interior monologues, fleeing to the bosom of nature, and the opposition of the altruism of nature to the egoism of humanity all bring Symon close to the romantic heroes of the 19th century.

Symon's conflict with the people around him is a constantly recurring theme of the whole poem. This conflict manifests itself at the beginning of the work in Symon's misunderstandings with his family. During the period of his wanderings it takes on the form of altercations with various characters symbolizing the social classes of Byelorussia at that time. The main cause of conflict between Symon and other people is his artistic sensibility and spiritual individualism, neither of which are understood or approved of by those around him:¹⁴

'Tak i praŭda: niepadobny
Byŭ Symonka da druhich:
Heta byŭ chłapčuk asobny.
...Nios vynu za ũsiec na świecie
Vinavaty biez viny
Z im i dzieci nie družyli,
Nie prymali da hulni,
I ũ symocie prachodzili
Viesnavyja jaho dni.'¹⁵

Symon's isolation is the cause of many unpleasant problems, but it does not dishearten him. It serves rather to strengthen his conviction that a solitary existence is superior to life in society:

'Nieprychilny, jak sirotka
Nie pryłaskany nikim,
Viedaŭ chłopčyk, jak soładka
Žyć voš tak, saboj samim.'¹⁶

Symon's egocentricity — also a typical romantic feature — does not mean that he consciously raises his own personality above other people. We see it more in his aspiring to a pre-eminently subjective interpretation of natural phenomena and in the way in which he sets himself in direct opposition to social reality. We see how Symon continually denies the dominant values of society, upholding his belief in the possibility of establishing relationships based on universal justice and right. As he gets to know new

areas of the country and to meet new people he becomes strengthened in his belief in the universality of evil. Hence his heightened awareness of his isolation and bitterness, interrupted by brief moments of hope. Despondency is the predominant mood of the poem.¹⁷

The main conflict of the poem arises because Symon's great musical talent is at variance with his lowly social position. He becomes in turn a shepherd, a wandering minstrel, a musician at the prince's court. He is a social inferior who can for a short while make his music rule the rulers of the world. None of these functions can satisfy Symon's aspirations. They give rise in him to romantic rebelliousness, contradictions and protests. Quite apart from the theme of social injustice, Symon's personal moods are a fundamental element in the poem's essential romanticism.

Symon's wanderings take on the form both of an escape from people and of a return to them. He is disillusioned by his contacts with people; their egoism and indifference to the beauty of art arouse disgust in him. But he cannot live without other people. His search for human contact is the result of the working of the natural instinct which leads the individual towards society. A society that is rotten right through with faults and egoism acts on Symon like an abyss: it repels and attracts at the same time. This is why he is always running away from society, yet continually returning to it. New acquaintances bring him new pain, disillusionment, anger. It is clear that this is essential for Kołas in order to keep Symon within the canons of romantic feeling and experience.

K. Kleczkowski writes: 'If we wish to understand properly the true nature of romanticism, we must first of all come to understand the moods of the man whose passions are easily aroused'.¹⁸

Indeed Symon is an exceptionally sensitive and highly strung individual. A typical feature of his character is his tendency to compare nature and man. Nature is for him the most perfect form of existence, because in contrast to man it is quite unselfish. It is to nature that Symon addresses his tirades, his musical improvisations and his odes. Within himself, however, he can feel the call of society, indeed he feels that he has a mission to society, and it is this aspect of the work which becomes particularly important in the final sections of the poem.

Wanderings and solitary musings on one's fate may also be seen as further evidence of Symon's romantic nature. The critic Ju. Biarozka traces this aspect of the poem back to the German romantic tale:

'Symon's wanderings form the path along which the tale unfolds, the central pivot of the whole work. This device, which may be called "the wandering hero device", was a favourite of the Romantic poets. It recurs frequently, especially in the writings of the German romantics... and was used very widely in the poems of knightly adventures'.¹⁹

The critic Ju. Haŭruk drew a false, one-sided conclusion from Symon's restless urge to keep on the move, maintaining that it stems from Symon's desire to raise himself above social questions and from his indifferent attitude to people who did not properly value his artistic genius.²⁰ Haŭruk completely misses the point that Symon's wanderlust has three underlying motives: escape from egoistical, unjust people, discovery of new areas of the country, the search for new, better people. He possesses the inborn instinct of a wanderer. The mere sight of a road calls up within him an irrepressible urge to be on his way:

Ech, što moža być darožej
Volnai volečki palou?

Hetaj siniaj doli hożaj,
 Nieviadomaj i pryhożaj,
 Biez kanca, biez bierahou?
 Hetych chmarak złotatkanych,
 Vietru pośvistu ũ palach,
 Dumak śvietlych, mar nieznannych
 I nikomu niekazanych
 Kazak lesu i daroh?
 Što cikaviej padarožža,
 Niehadanych z'jaŭ žyćcia?
 Ech ty šyr prastor daloki!
 I ščaslivy budzie toj,
 Chto dušoju adzinoki,
 Volny sercam, jasniavoki
 Zhodna zlučycca z taboj.²¹

To some extent Symon's goliardery serves Kołas as a pretext for bringing him into contact with various people (shepherd, beggar, innkeeper, prince) and for contrasting different moral values: idealism and materialism, altruism and egoism, authentic creativity and philistinism. Symon goes on his wanderings in search of an ideal country in which art and talent are not prostituted to benefit the greed of a materialistic beggar or a vain aristocrat, but in which art is a force for universal good. Symon realizes that great art cannot be coerced, that it cannot serve individuals. The nature of art is determined by the creative powers of the artist, not by the tastes of outside dilettantes. Here lies the explanation for Symon's escape from the beggar who exploits his talent, for his furtive departure from the inn where the innkeeper barter his talent, and finally for his rebellious storming out of the palace of the prince who had fed his own vanity with Symon's music.

One further aspect of Symon's wanderlust is to be found in his desire to visit places connected with pleasant emotional experiences,²² especially in his numerous visits to those places connected with his beloved Hanna.

Nature and music in *Symon-muzyka*

Nature and music are among the most frequently recurring themes of the poem. They are evident right at the beginning of the work and do not leave its pages until the very end. Kołas stresses the harmony of nature and contrasts it to the chaos of the human world. He frequently resorts to the device of animating the plant world and natural objects. The descriptions of nature in *Symon-muzyka*, by contrast to those in *Novaja ziarnla*, do not contain specific references to features of the Byelorussian landscape; they are of a more general type. Nevertheless several of the landscapes portrayed in the poem have a realistic character. In many instances nature images play an auxiliary role and serve the author to indicate the hero's state of mind. Hence the deep psychological role of landscapes and their dependence on man. Kołas finds in nature an analogy for Symon's willingness to bear suffering and for his isolation, as well as a resemblance to his spontaneous musical creativity. In both nature and society Kołas praises individual, solitary phenomena. This was apparent in the first version of the poem, and was noted by the critic M. Pijatuchovič, who did not however identify it as a specific feature of romanticism:

'Every object, even the very smallest, arouses feelings of affection and tenderness in the poet's heart. He can find kind words of greeting for a flower growing alone in the wilderness and forgotten by everyone else... One lonely ear of corn growing in a field fills the poet's soul with thoughts and emotions. For

Kołas it is the symbol of the orphan, the tragedy of the unhappy heart that needs other people but cannot find its way to them... The poet loves to depict the orphaned soul that can find no tenderness or welcome among people.²³

Indeed we encounter lonely ears of corn, errant sun-rays, single flowers in various parts of the poem, all symbolizing the loneliness and isolation of Symon himself. Kołas opens the poem with an elegiac description of the fates of leaves which fall prematurely from the tree. This image refers directly to Symon's situation within his family, as he faces the incomprehension of those closest to him:

'Na halinie
Pry dalinie

List na dreva marna hinie:
List zialony dy ūmiraje.
Lipa, matuchna staraja,
Oj synočka svajho skinie!

Jon pakiły
Jon niamiły

U siam'i nie maje siły,
Tym nialuby, što admietny,
I braty z im niepryvietny...²⁴

Nature images often occur in extremely romantic situations.²⁵ Descriptions of storms alternate with idyllic images of peace and calm, moonlight nights follow after dark, gloomy days. In his descriptions Kołas endows nature with conscious life. In this respect the poem continues the traditions of the prose *Tales of Life (Kazki żyćcia)*, with the difference that by no means all the nature images in *Symon-muzyka* have allegorical significance. Many of them can be seen as an end in themselves.

The idea of giving conscious life to nature is something that we find right at the beginning of the poem in the naive faith of the young Symon in the existence of a spiritual element in natural objects and plants:

'I zdavałasia jamu,
Što jon znaže jak travinka
Svaju dumaje dumu,
Što havoryć žytni kołas,
I ab čym šumić jačmień
I čaho špiavaje ū hołas
Muška, konik, abiedzień.²⁶

In subsequent sections of the poem nature is animated not in the naive imagination of a child but in the perception of mature adults, and also in the author's manner of presentation. Kołas often ascribes human attributes such as thought, perception, emotion to natural objects, plants and atmospherical phenomena, thereby rendering them anthropomorphic. Nevertheless this aspect of *Symon-muzyka*, in contrast to *Kazki żyćcia*, is not symbolic of human characters, neither is it an image of social relations. It is simply a means of diversifying and vitalizing nature by means of ascribing to it certain human characteristics. Exceptions are the lonely ears of corn, leaves and flowers that have already been mentioned.

The following passage will serve as an example of the way in which Kołas anthropomorphizes nature:

'U iskrach źmiarkańnia
Ružovaha rańnia

Dzianiok na spakoj adpłyvaje,
 Dzianiok zamiraje,
 Dzianiok spačyvaje;
 Z uśmiecham jasnym kachańnia
 I vočy Vieniery
 Praz ciomnyja dźviery
 Zirnuli łahodna, pryvietna,
 I noč niezamietna
 By ūdoŭna sušvietna
 U velum adzielasia šery.²⁷

It is interesting that Kołas most frequently ascribes to nature only positive human characteristics, ignoring such emotions as hatred, malice, envy. This most probably arises from his (and Symon's) conviction that nature is a more perfect form of existence than the life of men. When surrounded by the natural world Symon never fails to find once more the spiritual equilibrium that people have disturbed, to return to inner harmony and so again be capable of musical creation. Symon's attitude to nature emphasizes yet again the author's loyalty to the basic tenets of romanticism.

As T. Sierzputowski writes: 'Love of nature is not simply a matter of being entranced by its beauty — it involves understanding nature, coming closer to it, an approach that leads poets to see in nature a friend and comforter in the saddest and most difficult moments of life. This is how all the romantic poets understand and love nature... On occasion the romantics make nature work to man's benefit or disadvantage; it can persecute and torment him or, on the contrary, it can sympathize with and help him.'²⁸ In the most critical moments of his life Symon invariably turns to nature to seek help, and indeed he finds that help. For him nature is not only a peaceful haven but also a source of creative inspiration. When he confides his innermost thoughts to us in the poem, we find notes of complaint and grievance against people as well as praise of nature:

'Ja vyhnany syn vaš, tak: Ja — bradziaha,
 Biez łaski, biez doli,
 Ja — kołas biez nivy
 Maŭklivy

Chaj za adna nas atulić siarmiaha —
 Toj wiecier u poli
 Šumlivy

Ech les ciomnakryły, miły moj lesie
 Udumnyja drevy,
 Zialonyja šaty,
 Moj brat ty!

Tam liściejka duba vysoka ū viersie
 Vykonvaje śpievy
 Zaŭziata.

Tam viesieła-volna, ciš tak łunaje...
 Kraina druhaja,
 I fałšu niama tam
 Jak z bratam

Hutaryć kraska z taboju lasnaja
 I ty darahaja
 Była tam.²⁹

This episode is a significant example of the romantic tendency to contrast the perfection of nature with the shortcomings of society.

Pathos is the hallmark of some nature descriptions:

'Jak pryhoža-pryvabny vy zory!
 Nivy vysypaŭ iniej imhlisty,
 Niby pacierak šnur prymianisty
 Ašviatlaje hłybiny-prastory.
 Ci nie vam čeść-hvału dajuć hory
 I biaskoncyja mory
 Damoŭ sonna-imhlistych?
 ...Być chaceŭ by ja słoncavaj koskaj:
 Zazirnuŭ by ja ũ padzor'je;
 Ja by kaciŭsia z chmarčynaj slozkaj
 Ja b kryničkaj bieh z suzor'ja.'³⁰

Pathos and elevated style characterize not only Symon's story-telling, but also the author's own narration. On several occasions Kołas interrupts his hero in order to give vent to his own views on nature.

The pantheistic trend of the poem is frequently transformed into mystical moods which were particularly intense in the first version of the poem. Under pressure from certain quarters Kołas attempted to remove these mystical elements in the second and third versions. Šukievic-Traćciakoŭ writes: 'Under the influence of Marxist criticism Kołas revised his *Symon-muzyka*, changed the ending and swept away the religious cobwebs that had previously entangled it'.³¹ These 'cobwebs of religion' form only one part of the poem's mystical elements. Mystical feeling is manifest in Symon's belief that there is a spiritual essence in natural objects, it is present in the eradication of any boundary between rational and irrational sensations, and finally in the conviction that there exists a link between living people and the world inhabited by the dead. This metaphysical approach to the world was borrowed by Kołas from folk beliefs and the fantasy of folklore. Several decades after the poem was first begun Kołas attempted to defend the pantheistic elements in it by saying that they had nothing to do with religious feeling. Referring to Symon's prayers Kołas maintained that for him God was no more than a synonym for nature:

'His prayers are addressed not to God but to the world, to nature, and above all to those forces within nature which never tire of creation. For Symon all those forces join together in one which bears the mysterious name of God. If the boy had been able to express his feelings he would have said: God is the name of everything that man wishes to understand. Symon possessed a primitive rustic pantheism.'³²

Kołas' ideas underwent a process of evolution in the Soviet period, and it is likely that the nature of this evolution played a prominent part in this declaration. It cannot be disputed that the first version of the poem contains a very obvious strain of religious mysticism. The following lines will bear this out:

'Bože praŭdy, Bože siły!
 Ty nie kidaješ mianie,
 Daj mnie moc i daj mnie kryły
 Palacieć u vyšynie,
 Ahladzieć tvaje stvareńnie
 Radašć švietłuju spryniać,
 Švieta dziŭnaha istnieńnie
 I tajemnaści paznać.
 ..Boży duch viŭaŭ u vysy;
 Šviety dziŭnyja prad im
 U bahnach tajnaści niašlisia;
 Pieśni aniołaŭ lilisia

U prastory viekavym.
 ...Chvała Bohu vialikamu chvała!
 ...Chvała i Duchu Bożamu chvała!
 ...Chvała i synu Bożamu chvała!
 ...Radaśc Bożuju "Śviety paznajcie!"
 ...Prytučajsia ziamla "Bożym Choram"
 — I bliskučymi kryłami
 Cicha Duch śviaty Źmachnuŭ
 Usio mahutnymi vusnami, —
 Pastuchmianymi viatrami
 U bok ziamli jon dychanuŭ
 ..I skazaŭ vietram Duch Boży:
 Żyvatvorčaści Moj Duch
 Vy niesicie ŭ padnożža
 Trona Źłady Śviatoŭ Bożych...'³³

In the first version of the poem the treatment of the religious theme corresponds exactly to the precepts of romanticism as defined by S. Kolbuszewski: "The romantics were deeply convinced that man stands at the centre of the Universe, that he is the natural link between nature and God, Earth and Heaven. Moreover they saw in the human soul a reflection of the absolute ego. i.e., God, and in nature a reflection of their own ego".³⁴

Music pervades the poem to no less an extent than nature. Making a natural born musician the hero of a poem has precedents in Byelorussian folklore and in the romantic literary tradition.³⁵ S. Wasylewski writes: "If romanticism was at all capable of soothing pain and allowing it to be forgotten even if only for a moment, then this ability was probably due to music. Music is the highest form of art not only because Hegel said it was but because thanks to it romanticism became a "pathetic symphony" which succeeded for a long time in holding the soul in chains".³⁶

'Słuchaŭ chłopczyk toje hrańnie
 Pad saboj nie čuŭ ziamli
 Bo ŭ tych zykach čaravańnie
 Śpievy Źłasnyja pŭyli
 Struny serca ŭ im dryżali
 Jak dryżyć bliskańnie zor...'³⁷

Later sections of the poem portray the elemental development of Symon's musical talent. His playing enchants not only simple people, it not only fascinates fastidious aristocrats — it also compels the birds to be still and restores the demented Hanna to health. This is of course a romantic convention which ought not to be confused with reality. No-one would wish to treat the following passage in a strictly literal sense:

'Chłopiec zhłoku zadryżeŭ
 I Źziaŭ skrypku pastuchmiana;
 Struny zvonkija pahładziŭ,
 Raz druhi smyčkom praviou
 I addaŭsia Źvieś abładzie,
 Čaram strunnym hałasou.
 Ljucca huki ŭ lasnoj cišy
 Srebrapłynnym ručajkom,
 Les zamior staić, nie dyša,
 Nie varušačy listkom,
 Prypynili śpievy ptuški,
 Skrypcy im nie Źziać u ton,
 Tolki pčółki, čmiel i muški
 Dałučajuć siudy zvon...'³⁸

Symon's music is the expression of the highest rapture of the soul of a man who, under the guise of a shepherd and beggar, has the heart of a creator holding his talents in stewardship for Art. His music is the expression of the great truth of his beliefs, of his altruism and faith in the final victory of good over evil. For this reason we can accept and believe Symon's power to heal Hanna, who symbolizes Byelorussia in the poem, by his music. That which in a realistic work would be unacceptable, can be accepted unreservedly in the romantic *Symon-muzyka*.

Love in *Symon-muzyka*

Love as portrayed in the poem also corresponds entirely to romantic prototypes. The love scenes are among those which are at the furthest remove from reality. In these episodes the author's fantasy found a major outlet.

I. Chrzanowski asks: 'How does it (romantic love) differ from ordinary love? It was not romanticism which revealed the truth that love is a life force, but it certainly raised that force to unprecedented heights and, what is more, extended its sphere of activity to a previously unseen extent.'³⁹

The romantic nature of love in *Symon-muzyka* finds its expression in emotional exaltation bordering on madness, in the unnaturally exalted style of speech used by the lovers, and finally in the miracle-working powers ascribed to love.

Symon's love for Hanna is entirely devoid of eroticism; his emotions grow exclusively in a world of images completely without sensuality. Kołas places before Symon a number of obstacles for him to overcome. His struggle with these obstacles becomes the chief task of his life. In this instance too Kołas is loyal to romantic precepts:

'Struggle is what makes romantic love rapturous. If there is nothing against which to struggle, because everything is going smoothly, then difficulties must be created, if necessary by force. In the Age of Enlightenment the ideal was the minimum of difficulty; by contrast the maximum of difficulty became the ideal of the Romantic Era. Disharmony must, always and everywhere, divide the world and us, separating Us from Them. The romantic becomes intoxicated with conflicts and, like a drunkard, hankers after them, invents them himself, seeks them out, starts them up and provokes others. For the rest he can find conflict enough without looking. In the conventions of life, in women, and most of all in the soul of Romantic Man himself, fettered and apathetic, raising hereditary neurasthenia and hysteria to the height of dogma. For this reason things often went very wrong. Romantic love is a child of abstract notions and as such is subject to all their laws.'⁴⁰

The chief cause of the lovers' unhappiness in *Symon-muzyka* is their separation; this in turn is one of the reasons for Hanna's hallucinations and madness. Her madness intensifies Symon's love, and his efforts finally restore her to health.

We find features typical of romantic poetry in the descriptions of scenes in which Symon and Hanna meet or part. The chief ingredients of these scenes are: nooks of a garden, the faint glimmer of a moonlit night, a fire dying in the darkness. The following lines will serve as an example:

Dryżyc ahoń, jak śmiech kryvavy,
 Dryżyc ahoń u ćmie hustoj,
 U ćmie varožaj i pustoj,
 ...Dryżyc ahoń jak pieśnia żalu,
 Dryżyc ahoń u ćmie naćnoj

Pad adzinokaju sasnoj
 — I ūsio vakoŭ u čmu spavita:
 Hareŭ ahoń, pahas ahoń.⁴¹

Rhetorical repetition, emotionally charged epithets, the symbolism of the dying embers all intensify the drama of this scene of separation.

The landscapes which form the background to love scenes are always subordinated to the human emotions being experienced. The heroes' moods and emotions are transferred to nature which then seems to become involved in the fate of human beings by either aiding or thwarting them. The gloomy images of nature which accompany the moments of separation for Symon and Hanna stand in direct contrast to the moments when they meet again; on these occasions the landscapes are verdant, calm and sunny. Nature assumes human shape to hasten the lovers' meeting:

'Ustań, luby! — tenča sonca
 — Ustavaj — šumić dubok
 — Abudzisia haľubok, —
 kažuć travak vaľakoncy.⁴²

and

'...I tak dobra stała u lesie
 Jon biare jaje ruku
 A ziaziulka na suku
 U żyvoj zialonaj stresie
 Im varożyć štoś — ku-ku!
 Jon hladzić dziaučynie ū vočy
 Jon malicca joj hatoŭ.⁴³

There are certain inconsistencies in the love scenes: unwarranted leaps from day to night, the cuckoo's call in the middle of summer. However, all this can be seen as part of the poem's romantic spontaneity, in much the same way as Mickiewicz placed ripe marrows alongside flowering poppies in *Pan Tadeusz*.

Romantic features are quite clearly evident in the style of the heroes' declarations of love for each other. The language is highly metaphorical, flowery and extravagant, the dialogues strikingly unnatural:

'— Zaľatyja tvaje sloŭki —
 Maja pieśnia ū čas vandroŭki,
 Ty jak by dała mnie krylla,
 Mnoha radaści dała.⁴⁴

Symon addresses this grandiloquent oration to his beloved, and she replies in a similar vein:

'Havary Ź mnie, budź sa mnoj.
 Čuć chaću ja hoľas tvoj,
 Bo tvoj hoľas — pieśnia kvietak.⁴⁵

This stylistic exaggeration at one time provoked ironical comments from critics who did not understand the style of romanticism and who without reason placed Symon among the comic figures of literature: 'Koľas compels him (Symon) to take his leave once more, so that he may, like the famous knight Don Quixote de la Mancha, prove his nobility and make himself worthy of Dulcinea, the lady of his heart.'⁴⁶ The comparison is meaningless. When writing his anguished poem *Symon-muzyka* Koľas was a long way from Cervantes' sarcastic amusement; he was instead under the influence of the romantics for whom the bliss of love must be bought with real suffering.⁴⁷

Love, as it is depicted in this poem, has one further characteristic — it has

a beneficent, ennobling effect on man. Under the influence of their love for each other Symon and Hanna experience powerful upsurges of altruism, great affection for nature and their native country. Music and love can work miracles, they possess tremendous power. It is not surprising, therefore, that Hanna's dread sickness, her madness, retreats before them.

A. Navina writes: 'Symon finds her unconscious. The strength of his love and his faith in his own powers do not allow him to despair. Symon speaks to his beloved through the sounds of his violin, and these sounds arouse her slumbering memory.'⁴⁸

These images are without doubt taken from romantic convention; they should not be forced into a rationalistic mould for understanding the world.

National and social questions in *Symon-muzyka*

Symon-muzyka is one of Kołas' most non-realistic works. Nevertheless it clearly shows his deep involvement in the life of Byelorussia at the time. All the main characters are allegorical, personifications of a particular social or class group, or of ideological attitudes. The poem contains certain elements of historical fact, but this aspect of the work is really very insignificant, serving only as a pretext. The past serves the author only to reveal the present. The poem is a metaphor, a dream of freeing Byelorussia from slavery.⁴⁹

The national origins of Kołas' poetry are more clearly displayed in this poem than in any other of his works. The whole question of national regeneration is particularly strong in those sections of the poem which were written between 1917 and 1921. In the third section, written at the time of the October Revolution, Kołas makes his attitude to the past and present of his native country quite clear. This is the only instance when the author involves himself directly in the action of the poem. What he says amounts at times almost to political statements, and this is undoubtedly at variance with the otherwise allegorical tone of the work. His direct involvement does however demonstrate Kołas' desire to bring the poem as close as possible to reality. There are three thematic currents in the story: praise of the beauty of Byelorussia, elegiac meditation on the misery of Byelorussians, condemnation of rapacious neighbours (Czuzyncy). Certain aspects of the author's invocation in the third section aroused misgivings on the part of those critics who sought in the poem the accuracy of a historical document.

Ja. Losik wrote: 'Unfortunately there are several instances when the author shows that his historical knowledge is insufficient. There is no other way to explain, for example, the passage where Kołas says "Cossack horses mercilessly rode into Byelorussia, and their hooves trampled our grain and vegetables" and "Poland fought with Lithuania on our land". History tells us that Cossack horses never trampled Byelorussian soil, and that historical Lithuania is in fact Byelorussia itself.'⁵⁰

The literary fiction of the poem is actually closer to historical truth than Losik's view which contradicts the facts relating to the activities of tsarist troops stationed in Byelorussia.

The allegorical nature of *Symon-muzyka* was acknowledged by all the critics of the twenties; this view was confirmed in the thirties, with the difference that in the 'cult of personality' period mystical or nationalist meaning was attributed to the poem's symbolism. In the post-war period the view has predominated in Byelorussian criticism that only the first version was allegorical, whereas the third version is a realistic portrayal of the life of a talented youth in bourgeois society.

Ja. Mazalkoŭ writes: "The first version of *Symon-muzyka* was subtitled "A Story of Life". In many ways the poem recalls Kołas' great cycle *Stories of Life (Kazki żyćcia)*. It is quite clear in the first version of the poem that Kołas intended to make it allegorical. This is particularly true of the love between Symon and Hanna. For Symon Hanna was the personification of Byelorussia. Together with a powerful realistic element the poem contains much that could be described as conventional fairy-tale or romanticism".⁵¹

The tendency to make *Symon-muzyka* into a realistic poem is especially marked in the articles of A. Kučar. In 1931 he condemned the poem as an example of 'nationalist, reactionary symbolism'.⁵² After the war he came to regard all the allegorical images of the poem as natural phenomena (Symon's meeting the soul of the dead Kuryła, the mysterious felling of the prince's trees, Hanna's unexpected recovery of her senses):

'Symon possesses the gift of understanding the speech of grass and plants, but the author emphasizes that there is nothing supernatural in this, it is simply the fantasy of a lad who is sensitive to nature. At the grave of old Kuryła he hears a violin playing, but this is nothing extraordinary — the lad had gone to sleep and dreamt it; indeed when he awoke a string was broken on his violin. In the prince's park Symon and Daniła hear someone on the path to the prince's palace — that "someone" did indeed reach the palace and then set light to it. Hanna does indeed recover her wits because of Symon's violin playing, but since she lost them when she lost him, she could regain them when she meets him again'.⁵³

Rejection of the poem's allegorical nature freed critics from the need for a detailed study of the symbols which it contains. It ignored the author's real intentions and destroyed the true value of the poem by reducing it to the level of a sentimental little story. Kołas witnessed the triumph of a new and false interpretation of his poem but never once attempted to defend it. It was not until the appearance of Łužanin's book *Ja. Kołas raskazvaje pra siabie* that the author's voice was heard in defence of the poem's allegorical purpose. Of all the critics who had made a study of the work Kołas singled out only one, Adam Babareka, as having properly interpreted its symbolism:

'There was one man, but he perished somewhere out there where a lot of snow falls. He realized that *Symon-muzyka* is divided into several circles, and in general he wrote very well about the poem. It was he who said that an artist is a reflection of all the things around him ("rodnyja z'javy"). Do you remember Babareka?... He didn't simply regurgitate other peoples' thoughts, he had his own'.⁵⁴

Babareka's work can indeed provide a key to deciphering the poem's allegorical riddles:

'Symon the Musician is an image of the poet of the Byelorussian national renaissance, who devotes his lyrical energies first and foremost to the struggle to raise the national and social consciousness of the Byelorussian working people... The poem depicts the riches that flow from the "fresh springs" of the Byelorussian village'.⁵⁵

Babareka's observations are undoubtedly correct; one could go so far as to say that Symon represents the truly messianic creator. He was an expression of Kołas' belief in the messianic role of talented individuals capable of renewing the nation and its culture. The links between Symon and the Byelorussian poets of the *Naša niva* period, including Kołas himself, are be-

yond all doubt.⁵⁶ When talking about how he first conceived the poem Kołas pointed to his own life: 'My fate stood in front of me'.⁵⁷

Babareka interpreted Hanna, the second main figure of the poem, as 'the symbolic image of young Byelorussia'.⁵⁸ Later critics all adopted this view without, however, referring to their source.⁵⁹ Babareka devoted only a few sentences to the other characters in the poem, regarding them as essentially episodic: 'All these figures are sketchily drawn, as if not quite complete'.⁶⁰

Another discerning critic, Biarozka, put forward the view that some of the characters in the poem do not have symbolic significance, but play as it were auxiliary roles, serving as foils to the main characters.⁶¹ This view is in fact the result of an incorrect reading of the poem, of not understanding that all the characters are allegorical, that they personify particular social forces in the Byelorussia of that time. Some of them represent real forces, other imaginary ones. Hanna is an example of an imaginary personification. She is the symbol of an abstract Byelorussia, an ideal for which Kołas was striving together with other writers like his Symon. On the other hand the three old men — the shepherd, the beggar and the prince's farm-hand all represent the reality of Byelorussia. The first of them, Kuryła the shepherd, is the only one to recognize and understand Symon's musical genius. The old man is himself a musician, a spokesman for the folk tradition. He blesses Symon and presents him with a violin which Symon accepts as a gift from the older generation to the new. It symbolizes the immortality of the nation, which all writers of *Naša niva* acknowledged as the greatest good. Kuryła is therefore symbolic of that part of old Byelorussia which had not become indifferent to beauty, and which could aid the young in their attempt to regenerate their country. It is not surprising that Symon should turn to Kuryła not only during the latter's lifetime but also after his death — a sure sign of the immortality of the national spirit.

The second old man, the beggar, exploits Symon's musical talent for a time, turning it into cash. He symbolizes the Byelorussia of paupers, reviled, robbed of material goods and spiritual values. He stands for venality, indifference to society, and materialism. He lives for himself, but serves the strong. Those weaker than himself he rules according to the principle *lupus est homo homini*. He is an opportunist and an egoist, completely indifferent to any kind of beauty. He raises falsehood and hypocrisy to the level of moral principles. He is a symbol of the degeneration of a nation, a mortal danger for all those fighting for the rebirth of their country. Symon is instinctively aware of the man's pernicious nature and flees from him.

Finally, the third old man, Daniła, is a servant of the prince, a symbol of the critical spiritual attitudes but practical passivity of the Byelorussians. His life has always been connected with the landowning class; he can glimpse signs that this ruling class is in decay, and is convinced that the collapse of the old system is approaching. He possesses a lively intuition, prophesying an historic upheaval in which he will play no part. He imparts these observations to Symon, strengthening in him his conviction of the need for radical social change.

Daniła has certain features in common with Kuryła in that both of them represent positive values. There are however significant differences between them. Kuryła was a creative man of the people, an idealist a long way from political issues. Daniła is a realist, a sceptic who denies the value of existing reality. From Kuryła Symon acquired his faith in the purpose of creativity, whereas Daniła instilled into him the need for positive action.

Both of them are in league with Symon, although they can no longer be his comrades.

Jachim, the innkeeper's young labourer, is another of the symbolic figures which deserve our attention. His statements are full of allusions, hints, mystery. He is the very model of an impetuous rebel, always ready for action. He likens himself to a wolf. His lowly social status is something which can change at any moment into its direct opposite. In conversation with Symon Jachim shows aspects of his character that reveal his emotionality and impetuosity. Jachim is like one of Pugačev's warriors. He symbolizes the unruly rebellious spirits that are to be found in every nation, but perhaps least of all among Byelorussians. He is not a typical figure of the Byelorussian landscape, but he does represent a real type of desperado who over the centuries spread from Byelorussia to the Ukrainian steppe, to the Zaporozhian Cossacks or to the Volga in order to join the great social movements there.

The critic Haŭruk saw Jachim as a conscious revolutionary who was to clear the path to liberty for idealists like Symon:

'Jachim is a hireling. He consciously sells his labour... He is a model of the true proletarian. He was granted no talent and received no violin, all he has are his bare hands and his class-consciousness. If the Symons of his world can make art, then the Jachims will make revolution. Jachim has not yet attained full realization — for that he needs learning and a collective in which to act — but his desires are right. He will be the first to reach the goal, and the Symons will come crawling or running after him, because only under the guidance of the Jachims who are so close to them in upbringing can their talents develop fully.'⁶²

Symon's parents are among the marginal characters of the poem. It is they who throw him out of the house because he is 'different', useless and unnecessary on the farm. They represent a society indifferent to beauty, hostile to anything out of the ordinary, capable of bringing a genius into the world but incapable of understanding him.

All the characters discussed so far symbolize various aspects of Byelorussian society. The poem also contains representations of other nationalities: Słoma the innkeeper, a good Jew ('żyd charośy'); the Prince, owner of the castle, a Pole; and Damianik, a figure who is difficult to interpret. All these characters are presented in a negative light; Kołas accuses them of materialism, vanity, indifference to the fate of the country in which they live. Kołas' unfavourable attitude to these characters is apparent, even though there is some sympathy in his portrayal of the innkeeper.

* * * * *

The structure of *Symon-muzyka* clearly shows romantic features. It consists of five sections depicting various stages of the hero's life and adventures. His life goes through several changes of fortune: in his parents' home, then the contact with Kuryła the self-taught musician and the growing passion for music which leads to conflict and a break with his family. He sets out on his wanderings, meets Hanna and 'works' for a beggar. When he eventually escapes from the beggar he takes a job as a musician in an inn, meets Jachim and subsequently abandons the job as an act of protest. Then he meets a prince and spends three years in his castle as a musician; here he has many conversations with old Daniła and finally leaves the castle in rebellious and defiant mood. His wanderings begin again, once more he

meets Hanna who by this time has lost her senses. Finally she is restored to health. This structure enabled Kołas to portray his hero's romantic traits: his solitude and suffering, his life as a wandering musician, his closeness to nature and his conflicts in the world of men. The romantic nature of the poem is clearly shown by the bold way in which the author combines various different poetic genres: allegorical verse novel, fairy story, ode, elegy and folk verse.

Notes

1. M. Mušynski, 'Tvorčaja historyja paemy Ja. Kołasa *Symon-muzyka*', *Bielaruskaja litaratura*, IV, Minsk, 1961, p.45.
2. Ja. Kołas, letter to A. Ułasau dated 21 March 1912, Fond rukapisau Muzieja Ja. Kołasa ũ Minsku. The letter was written several months after coming out of prison and just before visiting a school colleague at whose house Kołas intended to work on the poem.
3. Kołas, letter to A. Ułasau dated 10 November 1912, *ibid.*
4. Kołas, *Symon-muzyka* (Kazka žyćcia), 'Volnaja Bielaruś', Minsk, 1918.
5. Kołas, letter to his wife dated 18 June 1924, reprinted in *Potymia*, 10, 1957, p.181.
6. Kołas, *Aŭtabijahrafičnyja materyjały*, letter to his wife dated 21 June 1924, AN BSSR, Instytut litaratury im. Ja. Kupały, Fond rukapisau, p.638.
7. Kołas, letter to his wife dated 22 June 1924, *ibid.*, p.650.
8. Kołas, letter to his wife dated 9 July 1924, *ibid.*, p.600.
9. In the 1920s R. Šukievič-Traćciakou was the editor of the journal *Bielaruskaja wioska*; he also carried out the duties of censor. He spent the summer of 1924 with Kołas in the spa town of Kislovodsk. In 1926 he wrote an article on Kołas' work called 'Z "Cichaj vady" na "Prastory žyćcia"'. See *Ja. Kołas u litaraturnaj krytycy*, Minsk, 1926.
10. Kołas, *Aŭtabijahrafičnyja materyjały*, letter to his wife dated 10 July 1924, p.619.
11. See 'Listy Jakuba Kołasa, kamentaryi', *Potymia*, 100, 1957, p.178.
12. 'Infarmacyja', *ibid.*, 3-4, 1925, p.182. The information given here is in error in saying that the poem was lost while Kołas was on his way to the Caucasus. In fact it was stolen on his return journey to Byelorussia.
13. Kołas, *Aŭtabijahrafičnyja materyjały*, letter to his wife dated 3 June 1925, p.663.
14. Symon's character possesses all the features identified by Jan Bronisław Richter as truly romantic: 'A lone individual, always dissatisfied with reality, despising the outside world and at the same time gifted with excessive sensibility and imaginative powers, flees from the brutality of the real world to which he cannot relate and buries himself within his own internal world'. (*Pierwiastki indywidualistyczne w twórczości A. Mickiewicza*, Lvov, 1927, p.5).
15. Kołas, *Symon-muzyka*, in *Zbor tvoraŭ*, IV, Minsk, 1952, pp.295-7.
16. *loc. cit.*
17. This feature of romantic literature was characterized by Z. Szwejkowski as follows: 'The predominance of negation over the assertion of positive values is striking and disquieting. It is typical for the atmosphere of the romantic poem which takes pleasure in the depiction of despondent moods and the harsh contrasts which reflect the bright and dark sides of life.' (*Pan Tadeusz - poemat humorystyczny*, Poznan, 1949, p.26).
18. K. Kleczkowski, *Romantyzm (studium estetyczne)*, Warsaw, 1892, p.8.
19. Ju. Biarozka, 'Symon-muzyka, (marfałahičny analiz)', *Litaraturnaja tvorčać K. M. Mickiewiča*, Moscow, 1927, pp.32-3.
20. Ju. Haŭruk, 'Pralema talentu', *Aršanski maładniak*, 6, 1927, p.39.
21. Kołas, *Symon-muzyka*, in *Zbor tvoraŭ*, IV, pp.331-2.
22. Returning to places associated with deep emotional experiences is defined by H. Schnipper as a typical feature of sentimentalism as well as romanticism. See his *Sentymentalizm w twórczości A. Mickiewicza*, Lvov-Warsaw-Cracow, 1926.
23. M. Pijatuchovič, 'Ja. Kołas jak nacyjanalny bielaruški paet', *Adradžeńnie*, 1, 1922, p.224.
24. Kołas, *Symon-muzyka*, in *Zbor tvoraŭ*, IV, p.293.
25. S. Kolbuszewski wrote: 'The romantics saw the beauty of nature as something which existed in its own right; they were fascinated by nature that was out of the ordinary — wild mountains or steppe scenery, the enchantment of a moonlit night, trees as the backdrop to a lake, the sun's rays falling on a window and breaking up in the panes, they loved the countryside enshrouded in mist and the dusk at evening' (*Romantyzm*, Warsaw, 1948, p.27).
26. Kołas, *Symon-muzyka*, in *Zbor tvoraŭ*, IV, p.295.
27. *ibid.*, p.465.

28. T. Sierżputowski, *Romantyzm polski (jego fazy, istota, skutki)*, Lvov, 1905, p.220.
29. Kołas, *Symon-muzyka*, in *Zbor tvoraŭ*, IV, pp.452-3.
30. *ibid.*, p.357.
31. Šukievič-Traćciakou, *op. cit.*, p.144.
32. M. Łużanin, *Ja. Kołas raskazvaje pra siabie*, Minsk, 1965, p.166.
33. The fragments quoted here are taken from the first version of the poem published by 'Volnaja Bielaruś' in Minsk, 1918, p.149.
34. Kolbuszewski, *op. cit.*, p.23.
35. Byelorussian literature of the *Naša niva* period has many examples of musicians from the people fighting for social justice, e.g. Kupala's poem *Kurhan* and Bahdanovič's story *Muzyka*. It is not impossible that Sienkiewicz's *Janka Muzykanta* and Korolenko's *Slepoj muzykant* also had an influence on Kołas.
36. S. Wasylewski, *O miłości romantycznej*, Cracow, 1958, p.32.
37. Kołas, *Symon-muzyka*, in *Zbor tvoraŭ*, IV, p.302.
38. *ibid.*, pp.407-8.
39. I. Chrzanowski, *Z epoki romantyzmu*, Cracow, 1918, p.52.
40. Wasylewski, *op. cit.*, p.19.
41. Kołas, *Symon-muzyka*, in *Zbor tvoraŭ*, IV, pp.402-3.
42. *ibid.*, p.396.
43. *ibid.*, p.398.
44. *loc. cit.*
45. *ibid.*, p.483.
46. Haŭruk, *op. cit.*, p.50.
47. 'Romantic love devises the sweetest, most terrifying torments. it allows one to experience the sweetness of tears, the luxury of suffering, the delight of despair... the yearning that can have no satisfaction; it creates a whole new range of completely unexpected agonies' (Wasylewski, *op. cit.*, p.15).
48. A. Navina, *Symon-muzyka*, in *Ja. Kołas u litaraturnaj krytycy*, Minsk, 1926, p.110.
49. 'There is no ground in the whole world more fertile for dreams of power and freedom than powerlessness and slavery. It is perfectly feasible to say that the Polish romantics' dreams of freedom are often wonderful yet sad flowers on the grave of Poland itself' (Chrzanowski, *op. cit.*, p.52).
50. 'Apart from its artistic merits romanticism had a historical aspect, patriotic significance; it united the past and the present, aroused in people's hearts the fire of love for their country and waged a passionate struggle for the purity of the national soul' (Kolbuszewski, *op. cit.*, p.18).
50. Ja. Losik, 'Nacyjanalny element u tvorčaści Ja. Kołasa i Tarasa Huśčy', *Adradžeńnie*, 1, 1922, p.293.
51. Ja Mazalkoŭ, 'Ja. Kołas', *Połymia*, [?], 1952, p.130.
52. L. Bende, A. Kučar, 'Materyjały dla narysaŭ pa historyi bielaruskaj litaratury', *Matadnik*, 6-7, 1931.
53. A. Kučar, 'Ja. Kołas', *Połymia*, 6, 1948, p.188.
54. Łużanin, *op. cit.*, pp.160-1. For many years Łużanin was Kołas' secretary. He noted the poet's recollections and remarks and brought them all together in this book.
55. A. Babareka, 'Paema *Symon-muzyka* Ja. Kołasa', *Uzvyšša*, 3, 1927, p.140.
56. See I.I. Zamocin, 'Paema Ja. Kołasa *Symon-muzyka* jak aŭtacharakterystyka', *Połymia*, 8, 1926; R. Sklut, 'Da tvorčaje historyi *Symona-muzyki*', in Ja. Kołas, *Symon-muzyka*, Munich, 1955, pp.V-XVII.
57. Łużanin, *op. cit.*, p.132.
58. Babareka, *op. cit.*, p.141.
59. Hanna is treated as symbolic of Byelorussia in Ju, Pšyrkoŭ, *Paemy Ja. Kołasa 'Novaja ziarnla' i Symon-muzyka*, Minsk, 1946 and Ja. Mazalkoŭ, *Jakub Kołas*, Minsk, 1953. A. Kavalenka, on p.219 of *Historyja bielaruskaj saviackaj litaratury*, Minsk, 1965, wrongly attributes the origin of this idea to Mazalkoŭ.
60. Babareka, *op. cit.*, p.140.
61. Biarozka, *op. cit.*, p.30.
62. Haŭruk, *op. cit.*, p.49.