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ROADS OF/TO FREEDOM: THE IMAGES OF  
A FOLK MUSICAL GENIUS IN GEORGE SAND'S  
*LES MAÎTRES SONNEURS* AND JÓZEF IGNACY  
KRASZEWSKI' *HISTORIA KOŁKA W PŁOCIE*

[...] je te confesse, Tiennet, que si mes deux enfants étaient établis heureusement [...], je quitterais cette tâche pesante de lever le fer et de fendre le bois, et m'en irais, content et rajeuni, vivre à ma guise et chercher la compagnie des anges.

(G. Sand)<sup>1</sup>

Biedak grajek skołał, mówiąc o muzyce aniołów, śniło mu się, że kieruje chórem przed tronem bożym, brylantową laską trzymając w dłoni... z uśmiechu na bladym licu znać było, że mu na drugim świecie lepiej będzie.

(J.I. Kraszewski)<sup>2</sup>

**Folk tales by Sand and Kraszewski: research state-of-play  
and further comparative potential**

Most of George Sand's works on peasant topics were written in 1846–53, though her first folk (and fantastic) short story *Mouny-Robin* was published in the

<sup>1</sup> G. Sand, *Les Maîtres sonneurs* [*The Master Pipers*], ed. by M.-C. Banquart, Paris 1979, p. 391 (hereinafter: LMS): "I confess to you, Tiennet, that if my two children were established happily [...], I would leave this heavy task of lifting iron and splitting wood, and would go away, content and rejuvenated, to live as I wish and seek the company of angels.»

<sup>2</sup> J.I. Kraszewski, *Historia kołka w płocie według wiarygodnych źródeł zebrana i opisana* [*A story of the peg in the fence, collected and written down according to the reliable sources*], Warszawa 1967, p. 98 (hereinafter, HK): "The wretch fiddler expired as he talked of the music of angels; in his dream he saw himself directing a choir in front of God's throne, holding a brilliant stick in his hand; you could judge from the smile on his pale face that he should be better-off in the otherworld."

*Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1841. The other works include *La mare au diable* (1846), *François le Champi* (1848), and *La Petite Fadette* (1849), collected by the author into a cycle entitled *Les Veillées du chanvreur*; and, *Les Maîtres sonneurs* (1853). Their connection with the idyll tradition is clear; appropriately transformed, an idyll or bucolic turns into the rural tale, associated to an extent with fairy-tale, whilst also assuming traits of youth novel (*La Petite Fadette*, *Les Maîtres sonneurs*) or anthropological novel (ditto).

Taking into account the presence of at least one distinctive folk character, and the thematisation of the relations, including economic ones, between diverse social strata inhabiting the rural area, one can refer to a rural current in G. Sand's output, reaching far beyond the above-enumerated works. In contrast to the said peasant cycle, the current gravitates towards a realistic poetics, with elements of idealisation and tendentious bias. Apart from the social novels from the former half of the 1840s—*Le Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840), *Joanne* (1844), *Le Péché de Monsieur Antoine* (1845) and *Le Meunier d'Angibault* (1845)—it extends to Sand's almost-debut novel *Valentine* (1832, mostly referred to as a novel of manners regarding the women's question), *Simon* (1837), *Mauprat* (1837, basically perceived as a historical Bildungsroman), or the much later novel featuring a peasant character in a rural setting—*Nanon* (1872). The latter is a novel on the French Revolution as seen from the standpoint of the countryside and a rural protagonist, quite an unobvious perspective in the French literature of the time.

Juxtaposed with Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's works dealing with peasant topics, the above list shows that Sand's peaking interest in such topics and her search for an appropriate poetics allowing to express them almost accurately overlapped with a similar period in Kraszewski's writing activity. He namely worked in a cycle of images of the life of Polish and Volhynian countryside in the 1840s and 1850s; the cycle includes *Ułana* (1843), *Ostap Bondarczuk* (1847), *Budnik* (1848), *Jaryna* (1850), *Ładowa pieczara* (1852), *Chata za wsią* (1854–5), and *Jermoła* (1857). His peasant works, gravitating towards a realistic poetics, with elements of idealisation and bias, being psychological portraits of their protagonists, were preceded—much like in Sand—by novels of manners set in a rural community, with an essential peasant thread intertwined into it, as a story within the novel (*Historia Sawki* in *Latarnia czarnoksiężska*, 1843). Of high importance is the Polish novelist's closure of the rural topics, in an extremely complicated form of ironic and parabolic novel—namely, *Historia kołka w płocie według wiarygodnych źródeł zebrana i spisana* (1859).

The temporal overlapping in these two authors of peasant topics and the search for an appropriate form to deal with it, with the regional aspect

of their works (Sand's portrayal of the Berry province; Kraszewski's depiction of Polesia and Volhynia), along with their involvement in the debate on the peasant question, has long been worthy of identification and, perhaps, broader research, since both authors thereby created an original and then-unobvious genre, and an non-obvious peasant protagonist.<sup>3</sup> However, the issue has so far been only addressed by Regina Bochenek-Franczakowa in her *Présences de George Sand en Pologne* (Frankfurt am Main, 2017), the first monograph on the Polish reception of Sand.<sup>4</sup>

As the said scholar observed, the only Polish literary historian who has hitherto devoted his attention to the possible Sandian inspirations in Kraszewski's oeuvre is Adam Bar<sup>5</sup>. Kraszewski, as Bochenek-Franczakowa remarks, was earlier on reluctant toward Sand in his critical statements—though his manifested reluctance to that ‘male genius’<sup>6</sup> (as the Polish novelist otherwise described her) referred, to a large extent, to her ‘scandalous’ lifestyle and to an ‘immoral’ or ‘subversive’ purport of a number of her works. Yet, this same author expressed in 1851 his respectful opinion on the *Les veillées du chanteur* pieces, described by him as “prettily and gracefully drawn countryside scenes”.<sup>7</sup> Bochenek-Franczakowa notices with surprise that Polish literary historians completely ignore what she describes as Sand's folk works as forming a context for Kraszewski's folk novels. Among those scholars, Wincenty Danek sees the latter works as utterly original in the European literature of their time<sup>8</sup>, while Stanisław Burkot neglects the issue by stating that Kraszewski's folk pieces far exceed Sand's “sentimental and sugary” works.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the emergence of peasant novel in Europe, cf. R. Zellweger, *Les débuts du roman rustique. Suisse, Allemagne, France. 1836-1856*, Paris 1941.

<sup>4</sup> R. Bochenek-Franczakowa, *Présences de George Sand en Pologne*, Frankfurt am Main, 2017. On Kraszewski and Sand, cf. *ibidem*, pp. 100-24; specifically on their ‘folk novels’, pp. 107-16. Apart from the convergences in the topics of the pastoral novels noticed by this scholar, her attention has been attracted by certain convergences in the way ‘strong woman’ characters were created, alongside the empathic manner in which Kraszewski took up the motif of female transgressive passion and adultery, which was associated with Sand's output.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. Bar, *Charakterystyka i źródła powieści Kraszewskiego w latach 1830-1850*, Warszawa 1923.

<sup>6</sup> *Kraszewski o powieściopisarzach i powieściach. Zbiór wypowiedzi teoretycznych i krytycznych*, ed. S. Burkot, Warszawa 1962, p. 111 (first publ. as J.I. Kraszewski, ‘O powieści francuskiej’, *Gazeta Warszawska* 1851, no. 307).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 112.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 114. I refer to W. Danek, *Pisarz wciąż żywy: studia o życiu i twórczości J.I. Kraszewskiego*, Warszawa 1969.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibidem*. The reference is to S. Burkot, ‘Powieści ludowe J.I. Kraszewskiego’, in

These opinions are easy to explain, given the opinions on Sand reinforced over more than a century also in the French history of literature, which were however challenged by scholars in the last decades of the twentieth century. The scholarship that (re)interpreted Sand's works of the peasant cycle is quite extensive (though basically consisting of chapters in monographs and diffuse articles), so it is worthwhile to point to a couple of pioneering studies that synthetically approached the issue. The article by Reinhold R. Grimm *Les Romans champêtres de George Sand: l'échec du renouvellement d'un genre littéraire* not so much proposed a new reading of the peasant cycle as it pointed to the underappreciation and unsatisfactory reading of Sand's rural novels from the 1840s, with their underlying critical project of an egalitarian society.<sup>10</sup> Marylou Gramm's *The Politics of George Sand's Pastoral Novels* demonstrated that in spite of the cliché opinions on the apolitical nature and certain naiveness of the peasant (or pastoral) cycle in question, the latter was founded upon a penetrating insight into the socio-economic and gender relations prevalent in the rural areas of Sand's time, whereas the writer's egalitarian message remains present in these works, though in a much more discrete way than in her earlier social novels.<sup>11</sup> The extensive studies by Béatrice Didier explored the strong relationship between Sand's works and the realistic current, including in the pastoral novels, which denied the stereotypic views of their 'idealistic' purport.<sup>12</sup>

J.I. Kraszewski, *Ułana*, Warszawa 1985, pp. 5-59 (quote after: therein, p. 15). Let me add on my part that one could polemicise, for instance, against this author's opinion regarding Kraszewski's originality in the proposed concept of a socially alienated peasant with a (university-level) educational background (cf. S. Burkot, *Kraszewski*, Warszawa 1988, p. 14). It is precisely the type of character that we come across in Sand's *Valentine* (1832), where the peasant protagonist, returning to the countryside from his completed studies in Paris, is undergoing a peculiar variety of peasant *weltschmerz*; or, in *Le compagnon du Tour de France* (1840), whose central protagonist is a commonly born and artistically gifted artisan, a charismatic and well-educated reformer, who voluntarily denied marriage with a higher-born woman who loves him (quite similarly to what Kraszewski's character of Ostap Bondarczuk does).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. R.R. Grimm, 'Les Romans champêtres de George Sand: l'échec du renouvellement d'un genre littéraire,' *Romantisme* 1977, no. 16 (*Autour de l'âge d'or*), pp. 64-70.

<sup>11</sup> Meaning, lack of a distinct bias and ideological discursive passages. See D.A. Powell (ed.), *George Sand Today. Proceedings of the Eighth International George Sand Conference - Tours 1989*, Lanham 1992, pp. 167-79.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. B. Didier, *George Sand écrivain: «Un grand fleuve d'Amérique»*, Paris 1998, pp. 601-99.

Bochenek-Franczakowa's argument pays attention to the convergences identifiable in the rhetoric employed in the introductions to Sand's and Kraszewski's folk novels, where the focus on peasant issues is justified and grounds are given for making a peasant the protagonist, particularly in Sand's *La mare au diable* and Kraszewski's *Chata za wsią* and *Jermota*.<sup>13</sup> Topics appear convergent as well: a woman's passionate love in *Ulana* arouses an association with an array of Sand's works dealing with similar issues, i.e. *Indiana* and *Valentine*, describable as empathy for the female character who, alienated in her marriage, commits adultery—with an emphasis placed on the truth and strength of her nascent feelings<sup>14</sup>. Convergencies can be seen between *La Petite Fadette* and *Chata za wsią* as regards the representation of a female character excluded from her rural community. The countryside's pagan heritage is shown in *Joanne* and *Ładowa pieczara*. Moreover, Bochenek-Franczakowa highlights the similarities in the rural foundling motif in *François le Champi* and *Jermota*. Yet, she remarks that any influence is difficult to claim in these cases, as such similarities might potentially be explained in terms of both authors' interests, typical as they were of Romanticist literature.

My opinion is that these identified convergences in threads or motifs are worth of more profound analysis, all the more so that they can be complemented with more such similarities. Research of this sort calls for the elaboration of a methodology more interesting than the traditional one, possibly based on affective studies, taking as a point-of-reference the peasant (*subaltern*) empowerment project, resenting him as a thinking, feeling, desiring being, with a sense of self-dignity, capable of selflessness and nobility, as fundamental to both authors. Let me now draft a list of threads/motifs concerned: (the weird situation/alienation of) a peasant with university-level education (*Valentine* and, to a degree, *Le compagnon du Tour de France* vs. *Ostap Bondarczuk* and *Jaryna*); education/upbringing of a village foundling and (a transgressive) love toward him/her (*François le Champi* and, to a degree, *Les Maîtres sonneurs* vs. *Jermota*); the rural other/excluded one (*La Petite Fadette* vs. *Chata za wsią*); countryside nomads (*Les Maîtres sonneurs* vs. *Chata za wsią*); the pagan sources of republicanism and peasant guardians of this heritage (*Joanne* vs. *Ładowa pieczara*); folk mu-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. R. Bochenek-Franczakowa, *op. cit.*, pp. 109, 115.

<sup>14</sup> The name of Sand had earlier on been referred to in the context of *Ulana* also by Stanisław Burkot—as an emancipative and scandalising biographical pattern. This author claimed that if Kraszewski does not sympathise with his female character's attitude, he feels compassion toward her; cf. S. Burkot, *Kraszewski, op. cit.*, pp. 83–4.

sicians of genius and their tragic fate (*Les Maîtres sonneurs vs. Historia kołka w płocie*).

Let us observe that the phrase ‘countryside scene(s)’ used by Kraszewski in his afore-quoted statement on Sand’s works was later used by him as a subtitle of his own two works on rural topics written after 1851. He thereby categorised them under a specific sub-genre recognisable in his time and never discussed separately in literary-theoretical or literary-historical lexicons.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it is apparent that Sand’s peasant/pastoral works enjoyed a markedly broader reception in Polish culture of the 1850s.

Apart from Kraszewski, among those who highly spoke of them were Seweryna Duchyńska and Leonard Rettel. The former generally described the works by the author ‘of genius’, including *Jeanne*, *Le compagnon du tour de France*, *Le Péché de Monsieur Antoine* – along with two stories from her peasant cycle—*La Petite Fadette* and *François le Champi*—as “gorgeous scenes from the peaceful life of simple thorpe-dwellers”. These “pieces full of life and simplicity” are “doubtlessly the most beautiful harbinger for a future”, and they “shimmer with fresh glow of predawn and announce a bright and serene day”.<sup>16</sup> He thus associated, somewhat surprisingly, the bucolic character of peasant works with a clearly utopian message of social works.

Rettel admired *La mare au diable*, in particular; as he wrote: “Who has read that excellent work by George Sand, redolent with unspeakable peace, diving with no idealisation so deeply into the thoughts, sentiments and mores of the common folk, he shall not omit to count it among the finest pieces in French literature, where the style, images and characters have merged into a most consonant harmony.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The phrase began to appear in Polish books, in singular or plural (*obrazek wiejski/ obrazki wiejskie*) as a title or subtitle after 1850—for the first time, as the title of Jan Kanty Gregorowicz four-volume work published in 1852. It then reappeared in the works of Positivist authors and novelists (H. Sienkiewicz, E. Orzeszkowa, B. Prus, W. Marrené-Morzowska) and later on as well, as synonymous to short-story or novella addressing rural topics. The word *obrazek* in Polish literature can also be associated with the genre of *powiastka* (tale/ fiction/novel—e.g., folk, moral, or children’s); cf. J. Ryba, ‘Powiastka’ [dictionary entry] in J. Bachórz, G. Borkowska, T. Kostkiewiczowa, M. Rudkowska, M. Strzyżewski (eds.), *Słownik polskiej krytyki literackiej 1764–1918. Pojęcia – terminy – zjawiska – przekroje*, Warszawa-Toruń 2016, vol. 2, pp. 318–23.

<sup>16</sup> See Jarosza [S. Duchyńska], ‘Nowy zwrot literatury francuskiej,’ *Biblioteka Warszawska* 1854, vol. I, pp. 30–1.

<sup>17</sup> See J. Zam [L. Rettel], ‘Korespondencja Gazety Warszawskiej. Paryż 20 kwietnia 1859,’ *Gazeta Warszawska* 1859, no. 129, p. 5.

Cyprian Kamil Norwid, known by his interest in folk culture as well as from his declared reluctance to reading the overproduced novels of his time, made an exception for Sand's last peasant piece, mentioning its title in a postscript to a 1853 letter to Maria Trębicka. The poet namely asks Maria whether she reads novels by Eugène Sue and George Sand, adding, "les dernières de ces choses sont un peu intéressantes"—*Les Maîtres sonneurs...*<sup>18</sup> Since the letter substantially deals with the issue of the truth of feelings and their connection with corporeality, as well as the concepts and ideas of woman in Polish literature, it would be interesting to think on the (very unobvious) representation of the folk female protagonist in that particular work by Sand, for its title might have purposefully been mentioned in Norwid's letter, as a peculiar punchline.

*La mare au diable* and *La Petite Fadette*, two of Sand's pastoral novels, were also translated into Polish already in the early 1850s, shortly after their original publication.<sup>19</sup> Of interest is the real name of the translator of the latter work: Zofia Węgierska was a writer, literary critic, journalist, Paris correspondent for Polish newspapers; she was close to the female 'Enthusiasts' circle. Her original biography, with elements of social and moral scandal (divorce, casual relationship) once encouraged Tadeusz Żeleński to jokingly describe her as 'Mrs. Sand, pocket-sized'.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, however, the Polish edition (in fact, adaptation) of *La Petite Fadette* does not specify the name of G. Sand on the cover and title pages, its title being heavily altered. It might have been a game with the reader based on a decision not to use the 'frightening' name of the author, who was deemed immoral—all the more so that Węgierska moreover replaced the introduction originally penned by Sand—which, like her other forewords to peasant works, problematised the chosen poetics—with one of her own, and altered the work's character to an extent, clearly projecting it as an edifying tale from the commoners' life, targeted at the common reader.

As Paul Vernois points out, George Sand's peasant works rendered the subject-matter prestigious in France in the 1850s, thus contributing to the development of literature addressing rural/countryside and regional topics

<sup>18</sup> See C. Norwid, *Pisma wybrane*, ed. by J.W. Gomulicki, vol. 5: *Listy*, Warszawa 1986, p. 223. In the next letter to Trębicka, Norwid clearly confirms his interest in that work by Sand (see *ibid.*, p. 228). I thank Ewangelina Skalińska, PhD, for drawing my attention to this quote and to its context (by means of a paper presented at a 2021 conference).

<sup>19</sup> See *Diabla kałuża*, trans. S. Mikułowski, Warszawa 1851; *Marynka Czarownica. Opowiadanie mojej piastunki* przez Bronisławę Kamińską, Warszawa 1852.

<sup>20</sup> N. Żmichowska, *Poganka*, ed. by T. Żeleński, Wrocław 1950, p. 84.

(including works that attempted to imitate Sand's poetics). Yet, he observes, the really interesting examples of the current appeared only with Ferdinand Fabre, in the sixties.<sup>21</sup> The resonance triggered by Sand's pastoral works in that period clearly pointed to the need for developing an appropriate form for rural/countryside, peasant and regional topics; it is worth taking into consideration as a context for Polish rural-oriented prose works from the period concerned.

In this section, I will try to compare the last of the above-indicated similar motifs in the works by G. Sand and J.I. Kraszewski—namely, folk musicians of genius and their tragic fate.

***Les Maîtres sonneurs* versus *Historia kołka w płocie*:  
Characters, constituents of their fate, manner of presentation**

In the last piece in the cycle of Sand's peasant tales, the linguistic mimesis, in terms of imitation of the peasant's speech—and his way of thinking, of which Sand was already aware—is at its utmost.<sup>22</sup> Based on the author's declarations, it is an attempt made by the narrator, representing a favoured sector of the society, at reproducing a story he has heard from a peasant, who is one of the main characters. This marks a difference from the cycle's earlier pieces where a rural raconteur told other people's stories. From a considerable time distance, he recounts the history of his youth years (in the 1770s), in line with the educative story or even initiation story pattern, hitherto reserved for the advantaged social circles. The story's plot is much more complicated compared to Sand's earlier peasant works; thus, the story is multithread and, consequently, much more extensive.

*Historia kołka w płocie* is J.I. Kraszewski's last peasant novel. Its sophisticated poetics leads one to recognise the references to genres, forms of expression and stylistic means such as fable (fantasy), parable, allegory, exemplum, irony, digression, self-referentialism, satire, or grotesque. Owing to its tragic and ironic purport, it can be described as post-tendentious: it

<sup>21</sup> Cf. P. Vernois, *Le roman rustique de George Sand à Ramuz: ses tendances et son évolution, 1860–1925*, Paris 1962, pp. 41–3.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. F. Vanoosthuyse, *L'écriture des "Maîtres sonneurs". Le patois, la musique, le français. Lectures des "Maîtres sonneurs" de George Sand*, [http://seebacher.lac.univ-paris-diderot.fr/sites/default/files/triangle2018\\_vanoosthuyse.pdf](http://seebacher.lac.univ-paris-diderot.fr/sites/default/files/triangle2018_vanoosthuyse.pdf) (acc. 2023–09–09). Sand refers to the awareness of the association between language and mentality in her foreword to the work. Her rural tales are obviously stylisations, rather than attempts at accurate rendering, of peasant speech, which followed from the need to make them readable. *Les Maîtres sonneurs* offer the most complex and original form of such stylisation.



is an ideological polemic written without much hope for improvement of the situation that caused its writing; an argument for the empowerment of peasants, leading to the point of absurdity the discourse that denied them humanness. Ewa Owczarz described this piece (in 1982) as “one of Kraszewski’s ‘best-made’ novels”.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of enormous formal differences, in the case of these two works, we can identify, on the most general level, a similar type of protagonist (not necessarily being the central character).<sup>24</sup> It is, namely, a folk artist—to be more specific, a folk musician gifted with such a unique talent that the phrase ‘musical genius’ comes to one’s mind.

In the case of both characters in question, the constituents of their fates as musicians are quite similar: their home village dwellers cannot possibly understand them, if not outright stigmatise them, owing to their otherness; they both have an inborn musical talent which is developed in secrecy—be-

<sup>23</sup> Cf. E. Owczarz, ‘Z powodu kołka historia o... bezwzględności historii: próba ponownego odczytania *Historii kołka w płocie*,’ *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1982, fasc. 1-2, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> Sand’s Joset is part of a group set up together with four other teen characters; yet, since he organises their major meetings, he fulfils the important role of a facilitator. At the end, he is excluded from the confines of marriages established in this way and funded upon mediatisation of the opposition between the settled civilians and rural nomads.

In Kraszewski, the central protagonist—on the narrator’s declaration level—is the ‘peg in the fence’, which can be read as an irony targeted at the nobility’s ideology that denied humanity of peasants. According to the initial narrator’s declaration, the peg is to be an interesting, though non-obvious, protagonist, in contrast to a peasant, who would be of interest to nobody. This also marks an ironic reference to the poetics of novel introductions employed—also by G. Sand—in order to explain and excuse to the reader the choice of a rural character. The concept moreover enables to weave an allegorical parallel between the lot of a peg in the fence and Sachar. (The Polish idiom *tkwić jak kotek w płocie* [lit., ‘stick/reside like a peg in the fence’] means clinging on to a place or a life situation, a stagnation caused by circumstances preventing mobility or by internal inertia.) The most recent readings of this novel suggest however that it is possible to go beyond its irony (thus understood) and parallelism, and follow the post-anthropocentric or ecological track: the title can be treated literally and the tree perceived as the full-fledged central protagonist. Thus, apart from parallelism, the peg’s lot intertwined with the fortunes of the individuals can be traced, along with the entanglement of plants’ and humans’ voices in the narrative. Cf. M. Lul, ‘Drzewo, człowiek i drobnoustroje w powieściowym laboratorium. O *Historii kołka w płocie* Józefa Ignacego Kraszewskiego,’ *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Poetica* 2020 (8), pp. 141-71.

ing, clearly, a gift for composition; they both leave their home villages and get educated by a master; they both undergo a life crisis related to impossibility of, or dislike for, continued education or career; they both enter into a supportive (love) relationship with women; both are rejected by these women as would-be partners for life; and, both finally make a tragic choice of music as the only reality of importance for them. For each of these protagonists, these constituents are apparent in different ways and they are differently conditioned by their social contexts.

The otherness of these characters is connoted in a different way, in the first place. Whereas Joset physically and psychically lags behind his peers, which is described by adjectives such as “*épaisse*” (referring to his mind) or “*distrain*”, the sobriquet “*Joset l'ébervigé*” (cf. LMS, p. 65), “*lunatique*” (LMS, p. 148), “*fou*”, or even “*imbécile*” (LMS, p. 118), for Sachar, the words like “*gluptaszek*” (‘simpleton’, HK, p. 50–1) or outright connoting a folly (cf. HK, pp. 77 or 114) actually relate to his apparent superiority in a number of respects, not to be understood by the co-villagers.

Joset is frail, pale, and sickly; nervous, susceptible, and has mood swings. He is portrayed as mostly sad, characteristically indifferent, excluded from his peer’s talks and plays, keeping himself to himself, taciturn, and distraint. Doomed due to poverty to wage labour (and appearing almost completely incapable of doing it, owing to his absentmindedness and clumsiness), Joset suffers because of the need to leave his home and part with his mother. However, he is incapable of verbally expressing his feelings, which exposes him, in some situations, to accusation of their scarcity.

Sachar is extremely comely, given his peasant background. He is strong, skilful and agile, and easily performs any work, as long as he is willing to; however, he is incapable of being subordinated. It is this anarchistic trait of his personality—laziness, wandering around alone, wistfulness and languor, and refusal to acknowledge that his peasant background condemns him to lowliness and dependence on the manor, that the village locals describe him as a madman.

Joset is ridiculed and mostly disliked in his village, and can only count on support from his closest relatives, including his very caring mother; Sachar, for a change, is commonly liked and treated with indulgence, and even pampered, particularly by his mother.

A gift for music appears in the two boys in quite a similar way. Ever-abstracted and immersed in himself, Joset whose exceptional sensitivity is connoted by the villagers’ description of him as one of those who “see the wind” („voient le vent”, LMS, p. 67) likes to spend his time, especially in the evening, in solitude, in desolate or reclusive places. It is music, as Ma-

rie-Paule Rambeau notices in her interpretation of this character, proposed in her *Chopin dans la vie et l'œuvre de George Sand*—the monograph I will henceforth follow—that isolates him from his environment, and it is an almost pathological isolation.<sup>25</sup> The scene where the narrator is admitted to Joset's and his foster sister Brulette's shared secret, he realises for the first time how unique the boy, becharming them with his flute playing, is.

This scene shows, moreover, the extraordinary character of the relationship between Joset and Brulette. Gifted with a nice voice and a good memory for country songs, the girl helps him in his musical experiments. Joset is clearly dependent on her attention, encouragement and admiration. In the scene in question, he becomes enthusiastic about the fact that Brulette is capable of translating his playing into words and images. Joset feels understood by her, which imbues him with belief in his music—and therefore he can describe it as containing the truth (cf. LMS, p. 118), that is, rendering certain moods and recalling childhood recollections shared by him and Brulette. Joset remarks with relief that music enables him to communicate with people. As Rambeau concludes based on this scene, his music is primarily of a wistful, elegiac character; it “recounts and thinks”.<sup>26</sup>

Sachar also initially develops his musical talent as he wanders all alone across the neighbourhood. Pasturing cattle, he is longing for a broader world, singing and “attentively listen[ing] to the songs sung by forests” (HK, p. 51). He whittles pipes for himself and, at some point, “he has even whittled himself a fiddle and taught himself how to play it, without anybody's help” (HK, p. 55). Thus, similarly to Joset, Sachar is self-taught, his instrument being associable basically with classical music. What we learn about his compositions is, primarily, that they are “fiery”, “not merry”, yearning and mawkishness are audible in it, if not mourning tones which fill the listeners with reverie, cause them to cry, and even to shiver. Initially mellow, beautiful and strange (cf. HK, pp. 75–6), they turn “wild” (cf. HK, p. 97), and then, “wrench, complaint, and groan” can be heard in them (cf. HK, p. 110).

While Sachar seems to satisfy himself with music as such, as he does not strive for listeners or gain, Joset's music clearly pushes him into a wider world, and this is a dual sense: he loves music and is willing to devote himself to it, whilst he also wants to learn it, in order to become a noted *maître sonneur*. He moreover realises that for him, music might become a way of attaining a high position in his community, and his ambition in this respect is evident. Sachar might never have left his native village for

<sup>25</sup> M.-P. Rambeau, *Chopin dans la vie et l'œuvre de George Sand*, Paris 1985, p. 267.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 303.

good, had he not decided to escape from recruitment to the army, into which he was supposed to be conscripted as he was useless to serve his time in the Rogala family's demesne, though we are otherwise told that he often dreamed of leaving his village and go into the world, cognise it, and "trying his luck" (cf. HK, s. 80). In his will to develop, Joset, in turn, deliberately enters interactions with "aliens", the ill-famed countryside nomads. A young muleteer named Huriel, becomes one day a go-between for Joset and the world beyond the village: first, he provides him with his dreamed-of instrument, from a faraway place, and then advises him to travel all the way to Bourbonnais, the region famous for its bagpipers.

With an ease that astonishes his local acquaintances, Joset easily resolves to leave his village, not even definitely bidding farewell to anyone or explaining where he is going to, and for how long. As we learn much later, he dwelled in a mountain forest, with a woodcutters' encampment—a milieu led by Huriel's father, an extremely gifted bagpiper who had once neglected his vocation as a musician, prioritising his family responsibilities instead of his music. Joset consciously looks for a master for himself, in whom he might find enormous life support. Having recognised Joset's unique talent, the old Huriel becomes one more individual willing to extend his care to him. At an appropriate moment, he decides to leave his children, now grown up and on the verge of setting up their own families, in order to move up in the world together with Joset and fulfil his own once-dream of living a wandering musician's life.

Never looking for any master for himself, shortly after his flight from the village, Sachar meets on the road a wandering musician who is evidently more skilful than he is, including in terms of social skills. Taken by Sachar's talent and misfortunate position, the elder musician offers him his company and so for several years they would share a common fate in the town, earning a living by playing their instruments. Sachar will learn a lot from his friend, but we would not learn much about the details of that musical education or the two men's lifestyle. The narrator would basically tell us that Sachar acquired at that time some urban refinement; he was presentable, his playing was increasingly better, and somewhat successful ("once an indigent peasant boy, this fugitive has turned into Mister Zacharewicz. [...] he's begun to prosper" (HK, p. 97), but has never ceased to long for his home village.

After his friend dies, Sachar finds himself in a crisis situation and finally resolves to return to the village. In this dangerous situation, his family succeeds in amicably resolving his affair: appreciating his extraordinary apparition (given his being a peasant), refinement, and impressive fiddle-

playing skills, Mr. Rogala hires Sachar as his butler. This next peculiar promotion deepened Sachar's inner crisis, as in his role of a servant he has to subordinate himself completely to somebody else's will, which, since his childhood days, meant for him the most severe psychical torture. In this period of his life, the narrator emphasises, Sachar seems internally broken, his apparition resembling a Byronic character (cf. HK, p. 109) or a 'revenant' (HK, p. 122).

After some time spent with the forest campers, Joset undergoes a different crisis as he contracts a chronic disease, with not-too-promising prospects for improvement, which resulted from overburdening his lungs while playing the wind instrument. The disease comes as a moment of psychical crisis: Joset falls into despair as he feels that he will never become a genuine and acknowledged bagpiper, due to his physical weakness. He drowns in apathy and dislike for life, which, in turn, hinders his recovery. The care of his loved ones – his mother or Brulette – seems to be the only rescue or relief in his misfortune.

As we have already seen, his relationship with Brulette is pretty unconventional: first, music has been the binding factor between the two since their childhood, which they had partly spent under one roof; second, the girl herself is somewhat remarkable and unusual. As Marie-Paule Rambeau observes,

What the girl likes about Joset is his singularity which makes him an alien to the world he inhabits; she likes his weakness which excuses the need to provide him with maternal care. Yet, the originality of their relationship stems from the fact that the interest and indulgence she shows to him essentially stem from his musical genius. Although he cannot properly evaluate his potential, she can intuitively understand that the oddities of his character and the face he tends to make—his looks seeming absent and constantly absorbed by something—are an outer manifestation of a “musical fancy” he carries in his mind.<sup>27</sup>

It is through her instinctive respect and disinterested amity for the boy who is neglected by his peers, and is not overly kind or nice (even Brulette herself comes at one point to the conclusion that egoism is his actual problem; cf. LMS, p. 90), that her spiritual superiority and artistic nature is revealed.

Not only is Brulette extremely pretty and coquettish but she also has a unique social talent and likes having fun, so she has a circle of admirers in the neighbourhood. Otherwise, she displays considerable inner balance: at age nineteen, she admits she does not yet know what love is, is not (yet)

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 302.

willing to get married, is attached to her freedom and has no desire (as yet) of having a baby. Apart from her need to be independent, she manifests a considerable self-esteem and self-respect, notably in her ambition to earn her own dowry, so as to prevent her husband-to-be and her family from ever reproaching her that her beauty was her only dower. She can also read.

As she has repeatedly emphasised, Brulette is not enamoured with Joset but feels responsible for him as well as before his mother, who was once her guardian. Before she finally chooses her partner for life, she is all at sea—not only because she is sincerely attached to Joset and cares for one's amorous suffering, especially that she has nilly-willy become the reason, but also because, as Rambeau notices, Joset's music strongly appeals to her, enchanting or, at times, outright subordinating her, almost forcing her to obey.<sup>28</sup>

However, she eventually rejects Joset as she feels repelled by his character. In the course of the plot, the better a bagpiper he becomes and the more self-assured he grows (and even more beautiful, which the other characters notice with astonishment), the more does he reveal his unattractive character (initially marked with subordinating the relatives under the pretext of ailment) of an ambitious, despotic, jealous, and unpredictable man.

Rejecting Joset's love, not at once and not without inner dilemmas, Brulette will demonstrate her inner autonomy as she can prove capable of resisting the emotional blackmail from a man who is aware of her fancy for him—let alone reasonable, since she has recognised just in time that Joset's character is not quite promising a trait and that the young man does not essentially respect her.<sup>29</sup> Hence, Brulette's emancipation from traditional models of femininity consists in her refusal to sacrifice herself, as an adult woman, for a quasi-maternal love for a narcissistic man—even if that man deserves (her) support because of his uniqueness.

Brulette's complicated personality makes her a rural suffragette *avant la lettre*. This protagonist is a blend of apparently mutually contradicting traits typical of emancipatory and conservative discourses: the need of autonomy/independence and a considerable doze of 'sound' narcissism, on the one hand, and altruism and responsibility, on the other. Given this background, Sachar's relationship with Natalia in Kraszewski's work is sketched in a much cruder, and almost thoroughly conventional, manner. Natalie is akin to Brulette in her extraordinary beauty and a trait of coquetry. Her su-

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 303.

<sup>29</sup> He readily believes the gossip that the child she has decided to foster is her own illegitimate child.

periority over the other peasant women is primarily rooted in the fact that, a pulchritudinous little orphan, she was once taken in to be raised by a squire's daughter and from then on, "not even a hint of a peasant was visible in her anymore" (HK, p. 125). Sachar falls in love with her – initially, at a distance – due to her beauty. Natalia will let herself come emotionally closer to him when he is a lackey with the Rogalas, despite the other girls' fears of his eeriness in that period of his life, which might possibly testify to her above-average sensitivity. It may also testify that, similarly to Sand's Brulette, she is simultaneously attracted by Sachar's misfortune and talent, not just his beauty, and that she is willing to support him (cf. HK, p. 133). Natalia remains devoted and sincerely supportive toward Sachar for a long time, but finally her coltishness, a trait traditionally ascribed to women, appears fateful for them. The girl becomes persuaded by the Rogalas (for a short time, though) that she deserves a better and more affluent husband.

Thus, both young men get rejected by the women they love. This is crucial in their fortunes, yet one would not tell that their respective misfortunes have simply been caused by the amorous rejection.

The ill fate experienced by Joset is basically caused by his personal character. His untypical looks, especially his strange eyes, tell the superstitious peasants to recognise him as an individual stigmatised by innate balefulness, possibly associated with devilshine (when he becomes a butler, owing to his glance and the character of his music, Sachar will earn the description, "This a devil, not a man!"; cf. HK, p. 113). Prior to Joset's being (non-deliberately) excluded from his community, he excludes himself from it: due to his love for music and thirst for fame, it is him who appears to be ready to leave any place, without bidding farewell to those attached to him—be it his mother, Brulette, or even master Huriel and his daughter, who cared about him when he was ill and initially fell in love with him. Furthermore, Joset repeatedly behaves arrogantly towards the musicians of the brotherhood he aspires to join, and so arouses a strong resentment among them. He would not make a good comate, either, thus declining the other condition of joining the group.

The reluctant attitude from the other musicians, ensuing not only out of their jealousy of his talent and thus the bogey of competition but also from the animosity, will most probably presage his death. He almost lost his life during the initiation rite, which proved cruel in his case; by insulting another company of rural music-makers, elsewhere, he probably contracts a death sentence upon himself. Perhaps, however, Joset's provocative behaviour has to do, to an extent, with his subconscious will to die. Leaving behind himself four of his friends who have formed young couples (Brulette-Huriel and Therence-Tiennet) and, in a sense, losing even his moth-

er<sup>30</sup>, he most probably feels, deep inside, solitude and seclusion to which his love for music has doomed him.

The death of Joset, who has alienated himself from the community of ordinary peasants and that of musicians, has a symbolic dimension. Of the circumstances of his death, the fact that he freezes up in a wayside trench is significant as ice connotes Joset's inner solitude and isolation, emotional coolness in spite of his definite sensitivity; it can trigger associations with the Dantean image of the last circle of hell. The broken instrument found lying by his dead body alludes to folk beliefs as well as to the rules of the fraternity of musicians who, as the narrator suggests, sometimes take advantage of the peasant gullibility in settling old scores among themselves. In line with the beliefs described in the novel, the musicians sell one another's souls to the devil who would arrive someday to grab it, but what he does first is take off the instrument from the victim musician and destroy it, which is meant to drive the man mad and drive him to suicide.

When betrayed, Sachar does not seek physical death; instead, he completely encloses himself in his inner world, in the music that overfills him. He apparently completely breaks off with the world and as if deliberately immerses himself in madness, which becomes his only refuge from the cruelties and nonsensicalities of (social) life. Evidently enough, his misfortune is rooted in the unfair social relations—the forms of secondary feudalism which still around the middle of the nineteenth century deny his right to manage himself, turning him almost into a slave. Rejected in his humanity, Sachar finally cuts himself off from the world of people, while at the same time fully manifesting, in his madness, his sense of superiority over them, pride, or even 'lordliness' (cf. HK, 135–6). He needs nobody anymore, for in himself does he find a source of unceasing joy—beyond any and all conditions and determinants of human existence. The fact that after Natalia's betrayal he can only play a merry music and is in a peculiar ecstasy, as if his soul was now dwelling in a different world, whereas before then he only could play sorrowfully, is of unusual purport. Living among people, Sachar behaves ever since like a noctambulist: he uses his family home to sleep and eat in it, otherwise wandering around fields and forests, and playing, all day long.

Identifying *Les Maîtres sonneurs* as part of the cycle of Sand's works most powerfully inspired (as she convincingly demonstrates) by Frédéric Chopin the man and artist, Rambeau describes Joset as one of the most convincing, "flesh-and-blood" characters<sup>31</sup>; about the way he is presented, she remarks,

<sup>30</sup> She remarries and has another baby.

<sup>31</sup> M.-P. Rambeau, *op. cit.*, pp. 300, 327.



Animated by the reminiscence of Chopin is also the struggle the artist was to wage with the musical language which offered him resistance and dodged. Doubt, attacks of anger, and torment were all known to Joset, once he discovered in himself the ability to play the recorder. His is a rare case among Sandian artists as he painfully experiences the burden of genius in the course of his short life. Predestined to suffering and solitude because of that demanding art, which excludes him from the carefree joy shared by others, he appears to be a novelistic incarnation of the “extreme type of artist” [*le type extrême de l’artiste*], which George Sand recognised in Chopin—an important analogy between the two.<sup>32</sup>

This author describes the relationship between Joset and Brulette as “the richest [alongside that of Consuelo and Albert Rudolstadt] analysis of the bond created between two human beings by the same musical sensitivity”<sup>33</sup>, observing that, similarly to the earlier-written pieces of *Lucrezia Floriani* and *La Petite Fadette*, this novel is about a “jealous and possessive man that is hurting the others as well as himself”.<sup>34</sup> She finds these works as ones where Sand attains mastery in analysing the feeling of jealousy as a pathology of human character; thereby, these works are part of the “great classical tradition of psychological novel.”<sup>35</sup>

Set against the expressive characters of Joset and Brulette, the mostly vaguely drawn character of Sachar in Kraszewski’s novel appears as an exemplum, if not a symbol. Not only the fate of the oak peg is a parable of the fortune of the serf who is prevented by external circumstances from growing; also Sachar himself seems primarily to be an allegory of the commoners whose humanity and talents have been denied owing to the unfair social system. The description of his music can also be symbolically interpreted as an expression of ‘peasant soul’. The (savage) melancholy of this music primarily expresses the longing for freedom, regret (and anger) related to the impossibility of living an unrestricted life. Suspected of madness, Sachar appears to be a human being more than the other peasants, as his desire for freedom is coupled with his sensing, and letting himself express, his own misery and that of the social class he is part of.

### **Protagonists’ musical journeys in the novels’ social world: A utopia versus a retro-utopia?**

Sachar’s distinctness among the boys is one of an artist. However, Kraszewski’s narrative shows this particular trait in so general a way that it basi-

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 267.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 300.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 316.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 318.

cally denies an association with the analyses of the condition of artists representing privileged classes, as portrayed in his other works.<sup>36</sup> Also as a folk artist does Sachar appear to be a type rather than an individuality; of folk music itself, we can learn very little from the novel; we are basically told that gay music accompanies the dances at village fun events and this is what the local peasants would expect from Sachar's talent; and, that in spite of his enormous gift, the elder musician encountered on the road has a not quite successful wanderer's life. Kraszewski offers no clear differentiation between folk and urban music, apart from the emphasis on the authenticity of the music produced by Sachar out of his heart. It is not music and its aspects that apparently comes to the fore, as opposed to the author's polemic with the discourse that denies peasants their humanity.

The Sand novel, in contrast, highlights the motif of rural musical tradition.<sup>37</sup> True, Joset is an unusual man, but his unusual status is reconfirmed by his peasant milieu—in specific, by the local experts. The commoners appear to be aware of the fact that apart from rank-and-file fiddlers or buskers, their community may from time to time yield musicians of genius, as if out of nowhere. The fatalism inherent in the figure of Joset is not related to the condition of the artist in general, or the folk artist in particular, but rather, to the description of a specific individual case. Every single musician character—Huriel senior and junior, Carnat senior and junior—is described in a way that points to the differences between their characters, skills, talents, and life choices they have made. Moreover, they are portrayed against the background of the differing musical traditions of their regions. What is more, Sand indirectly describes the traditions and institutions related to folk music—not only village parties and folk dances (notably, the *bourrée*) but also musicians' fraternities with their mysterious codices and rites, the institution of master and his teachings, or an educational journey of young entrants.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> For more on the figure of artist in Kraszewski, cf., for example, M. Lul, „Tragikomedia życia poety”: artysta i świat w twórczości Józefa Ignacego Kraszewskiego, a PhD thesis written under Professor Jarosław Ławski, University of Białystok, 2009 (unpublished).

<sup>37</sup> M.-P. Rambeau notices an association between the novels *Les Maîtres sonneurs* and *La mare au diable* and Berry's musical traditions, in which Sand took interest in the 1840s under Chopin's influence (cf. M.-P. Rambeau, *op. cit.*, pp. 187–8). Rambeau reminds us of Sand's lasting conviction, as expressed (inter alia) in *Consuelo*, regarding the exceptional value of folk music: it namely renders the (creative) artist's individuality as well as “the soul of all the earth” (cf. *ibidem*, p. 265).

<sup>38</sup> More on the representation of folk music and folk beliefs related to music in

Whereas the urban area in Kraszewski provides an asylum to the runaway peasants, which allows them a somewhat unrestrained lifestyle and provides opportunities to make a living and earning money, and even some social advancement,<sup>39</sup> but not really for a genuine development of their talents, in Sand such space is depicted as a path open for Joset, in spite of his destitute status, toward the learned music. The old Huriel does not recommend him to follow this path, though, offering him a vision of lost peasant identity—the latter being clearly associated with the folk music tradition, different from that of urban music but no less valuable, which he endeavours to pass on to him (cf. LMS, p. 292).

What we moreover find in Sand is the peasants' convictions concerning musicians: admiration for their skills (if genuinely earned), along with the belief that they are mostly spoiled due to their professional ambitions and jaundices. Distrust is aroused in the Nohant peasants, attached as they are to their abodes and lifestyles, because of the musicians' 'growing-bourgeois' status (they are portrayed as a privileged stratum of the rural population, as they earn relatively good money and get associated into corporations that care about their interests and support nepotic relations); the other reason is the musicians' nomadic lifestyle, perceived by the peasant community as character-spoiling as it helps them in avoiding responsibility. In Sand's rural universe, music is also shown as a field of rivalry between ambitious individuals, in which not necessarily those most gifted are leading the way. In Kraszewski's story, only the music institution related to the privileged classes is depicted in a like fashion. As the narrator observes, Sachar's master would have never made a career in a town even if he played like Paganini, as he never enjoyed support from adequate institutions that could have recognised his talent, help him make a career out of his passion, and attain a prestige (cf. HK, p. 95).

In Sand's novel, the meeting between the characters who have only known the world of Berry and the rural nomads—the musicians, muleteers, and lumberjacks—is another thread of relevance. Joset, the artist who by means of his interests, far exceeding agricultural horizon, initiates a series of meetings with otherness and alienness, is evidently afforded the role of a facilitator, since his unconventional moves enable certain reconfigurations with the community, and propel the wanderings or journeys of some other characters. Leaving their countryside area allows them to confront

this novel by Sand – cf. M.-C. Bancquart, 'Préface,' in G. Sand, *Les Maîtres sonneurs*, pp. 33–52.

<sup>39</sup> This is evidenced by the words quoted earlier regarding Sachar's success as a musician in the city.

against strangeness, acquaint with it and tame it, even if it really appears dangerous in some respects. These wanderings/journeys lead to a mediation of the reciprocally distrustful and biased communities: two mixed marriages get formed out of the old-established Berry people and the nomads of Bourbonnais.

Whilst ignoring the oppressive social background and the differences in financial standing between the characters,<sup>40</sup> Sand focuses on mentality differences between the two types of rural population, evidently preferring certain traits characteristic of the nomads to the mentality of ordinary peasants.<sup>41</sup> This fact can be read in the perspective of her other education-oriented and utopian projects, as well as in a post-dependence perspective, since the settled status as a trait of peasant mentality can be approached as a distant heritage of feudal service.

Sand's nomadic project, based on detaching a peasant from the land, does not present a migration of peasantry in view of its advancement within the third estate, which was a possible option at the time (by turning bourgeois, for instance), but as a way to get educated, have a more interesting life, transgress one's own prejudices and fears, and broaden one's horizons. The wanderers dream of the world in its extensiveness and diversity. Sand's descriptions of rural nomads can be treated as a project of modern free people. They function beyond the restrictions imposed on the ordinary farmer/peasant, attached to his land out of habit rather than under the law. Although this freedom carries some risks, they clearly are worthy people, having their own pride (as testified by the codices of the muleteers' or musicians' fraternities) and merit-based hierarchies, which is a sort of nobleness (as testified by these fraternities' traditions and customs).

Sand's novel outright transfers the institutions of feudalism (a system still existent at the time) and ostentatiously consigns them to the past. The lady residing in a nearby castle is mentioned only once, and the protagonists are completely indifferent to her; she has nothing to do with their fate. The nether regions of the residence of former feudal lords are filled with the bones of their victims and a well-furnished torture room, thus re-

<sup>40</sup> They are outlined, but do not play a significant role in the plot.

<sup>41</sup> The young Huriel, clearly the author's *porte-parole* at this point, criticises the mentality of settled peasants who are overly attached to their village, lifestyle and property, showing no curiosity of the world, invention, initiative in life (cf. LMS, pp. 140–1). At the same time, they are described in the work as small owners, which – as Bancquart claims – was consistent with the rather unique condition of the peasantry at that period in this region (cf. M.-C. Bancquart, *op. cit.*, p. 26).

minding the horrors of history. This space is nonetheless turning into a sort of museum, theatrical prop room, or club space for rent: it is there that the musicians' fraternity celebrate their initiation rites, with the permission of the key-holder. This is not to say that evil has completely disappeared from the diegetic world, together with the evil of history: on the contrary, the novel's plot is saturated with violence,<sup>42</sup> and even the Gothic convention has a certain role in it. The (excessive) peasant aggression is thematised, but the postulate to work it through comes to the fore all the same.

Whereas Sand shows stagnation in a peasant's life as a matter of his (problematic) mentality, Kraszewski depicts it still as an expression of his legal situation. The protagonist's escape from his countryside environment and his wanderings are not shown, however, as an opportunity to transgress this established condition, though Sachar, on his setting off, starts dreaming of liberty, happiness and of exploring the world. Leaving the birthplace primarily appears as a loss and threat; such is his own fate and also the fate of his master who, before they first met, "was wandering around the world", "dragged himself from one corner to another", not much happier than Sachar, though "the music he loved paid him off for everything" (HK, p. 94). Notable is the use of dendrological metaphors: self-sown pines or willows easily taking root all over the place are shown as a ligneous plebs deserving no respect, as opposed to oaks in particular.<sup>43</sup> At a moment of crisis (loss of a friend), Sachar decides to return to his home village because, despite some success and even social advancement, he feels alienated in the city, as a sensitive individual. Rather than one's being incumbent, the issue addressed by this novel is, therefore, one's scrubby or stunted status, as is the case not only with the erstwhile primeval forest but also the ancestral nobility, the case in point being the Rogala-Kijewski family.

As opposed to the primeval forest and the peasantry, which have been denied growth by such noblemen, the latter do have an opportunity to grow, and therefore bear the responsibility for destroying the chance of a young oak to grow into a beautiful tree. On the imagination level, inscribed in the logic of Kraszewski's novel is, seemingly, yet another feudal retro-utopia modelled after the one described by the same author a few years earlier in his *Ładowa pieczara*. This author rather dreams about a patriarchal/pat-

<sup>42</sup> To enumerate: two accomplished and two attempted assassinations, serious (group) fights, a failed rape attempt, sexual harassment; persecutory mechanisms and stigmatisation of Joset due to his weakness, and Brulette owing to her force (envies and resentments of the rejected suitors lead at some point to dissemination of gossips about her having mothered a natural child).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. M. Luł, *Drzewo, człowiek*.

ronising ideal where a wise and good lord, appropriately prepared for his fundamental responsibilities, takes a proper care about his forest as well as his rural community, including those of its members who are unique and gifted individuals. The latter's issue also seems to be the fact that they have a soul not of a peasant but of a free human being, "lords."

### Joset and Sachar: Coincidence, or Sandian inspiration?

The foregoing argument sought to juxtapose the representations of a folk musician of genius created almost in parallel in two different literatures, and to determine how they were integrated into their authors' (implicit) understanding of the peasant question: feudal service (*corvée*) or its legacy (including mental legacy). Toward the conclusion of these observations, it is tempting to pose the question whether Kraszewski knew the work by Sand; and, whether—to what extent and in what ways, if so—he might have been inspired by it. Such question cannot be answered conclusively, with not a single trace to testify that the Polish author might ever have read the French novelist's work. Representation of an artist as a weirdo and excluded individual, and of his ill fate, is typical of Romantic(ist) literature—to recall the *Künstlerroman* tradition. The originality of both authors consists in that their stories' motif is associated with the figure of a peasant. An inspiration by Sand cannot be precluded, though, since Kraszewski's appreciation of the *Les veillées du chanvreur* cycle makes it probable that he might have become acquainted with yet another similar work. To round off my comparison argument, I should like to point to two more aspects of mutual congruity of *Les Maîtres sonneurs* and *Historia kołka w płocie*: a certain similarity in the names of the respective protagonists—Joset Picot and Sachar Pakuła; and, the thread of oaks and oakwood, oak logging, and tree speech.

The beauty of old forests is clearly thematized in this novel by Sand. Old Huriel, a woodsman in the Sand story, cuts down trees on commission of court officials, himself not much ecologically caring about saving the old-growth trees—possibly because those loggings are not yet marked by pilaging or overexploitation, as otherwise suggested by the descriptions of the forest management methods applied by the Rogala-Kijewski in Dębin. (Sand would later on protest against such practices, on the occasion of the scandal related to the logging of old oaks in the Fontainebleau forest).<sup>44</sup> Otherwise, in his talk with Joset, an excerpt from which I have quoted as

<sup>44</sup> For more on the artists' protest against the logging of old oaks in 1872–6, see <https://langloishg.fr/documents/la-querelle-des-deux-puissances-de-la-foret-de-fontainebleau-1872-1876> (acc. 2023–09–09).

the motto, the old Huriel, this folk patriarch, sage and artist, reveals his love for trees and wishes that he might someday abandon the job, which he does see as a crime against nature and life (his dream comes finally true, at the story's end). His wish is also to be able to attentively listen to the speech of trees, which he considers to be living beings:

Et puis je me lasse de couper des arbres. Sais-tu Tiennet, que je les aime, ces beaux compagnons de ma vie, qui m'ont raconté tant de choses [...]! Et moi, [...] je les en ai remerciés en leur plantant la hache dans le cœur et en les couchant à mes pieds, comme autant de cadavres mis en pièce. [...] Il me tarde de me promener sous des ombrages qui ne me repousseront plus comme un ingrat, et qui me diront enfin des secrets dont je n'étais pas digne.<sup>45</sup>

Tree speech and stories told by trees is a rare motif in literature, unless one takes fables or fairy-tales into account (and, if so, not the best-known ones).<sup>46</sup> Yet, if one should follow up the logic of Sand's parallel between a beautiful forest tree and a peasant protagonist, s/he would be referred, in the epical spirit, to Huriel—old and young, and to Tiennet: vital yet righteous men, fully embracing the challenges of their harsh and busy peasant life, rather than to Joset — a sickly figure, stigmatised by the fatalism of fortune, who dies a tragic and premature death. In Kraszewski's story, the lot of a beautiful young oak which has been turned into a peg in the fence form a clear parallel to the fate of Sachar—an outstanding individual condemned by the social system to failure. The difference is, the peg's lot appears much luckier than that of Sachar, given the former's much unexpected career as an elegant object of daily use—a walking stick crowned with a head of a smiling satyr intricately carved by Sachar.



<sup>45</sup> LMS, p. 391: "And then I get tired of cutting down trees. Do you know Tiennet, that I love them, these beautiful companions of my life, who have told me so many things [...]! And I, [...] I thanked them by planting the ax in their hearts and laying them at my feet, like so many corpses torn to pieces. [...] I long to walk under shades which will no longer reject me as an ungrateful person, and which will finally tell me secrets of which I was not worthy."

<sup>46</sup> Sand made use of the motif in her 1876 fairy story *Le Chêne parlant*, featuring a countryside orphan finding a dwelling in a hollow of an oak tree deemed cursed and growing up in the overstorey. To give a Polish literary example, the concept is prominent in Eliza Orzeszkowa's novella *Gloria victis* (1910).

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ABSTRACT

The article outlines comparative possibilities regarding the Polish rural novel emerging around the mid-19th century. By showing Polish reactions to Sand's series of peasant works, as well as her social novels from the 1840s, the author suggests that they constitute an interesting context for the analysis of the first Polish prose works with peasant heroes, the so-called « rural pictures ». In particular, it proposes a look through the Sandian prism at the rural works of J.I. Kraszewski, developing the first comments on this subject formulated by Regina Bochenek-Franczakowa (2017). The article is the first attempt to take a closer look at certain similarities in the construction of peasant heroes by Sand and Kraszewski. She juxtaposes Jo-set Picot from *Les Maîtres sonneurs* (1853) and Sachar Pakuła from Kraszewski's *The Story of a Peg in a Fence* (*Historia kołka w płocie* (1859), as characters of brilliant and alienated rural musicians. The context for considering the (dis)similarity of these characters is the problem of feudalism and its legacy in the novel by Sand and Kraszewski.

KEYWORDS

George Sand, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, pastoral novel, folk musician,  
comparative literature

