

Maria Edelson

THE VEHICLE OF ALLEGORY IN "THE DYET OF POLAND"
BY DANIEL DEFOE

"The Dyet of Poland" is certainly not a masterpiece and few people read it to-day. However, readers interested in history and the theory of genres will find the poem an important example of satiric allegory with topical references to historical events, persons and facts.

The Polish aspect of the historical material used by Daniel Defoe in his satire has been given a great deal of attention by Wanda Krajewska in her interesting article "Daniela Defoe «The Dyet of Poland»", which, as the author herself explains, "seeks to ascertain how far the description of the Dyet in the poem was true to its prototype, why Defoe chose it for his satire and what he knew about Poland"¹. The present paper will deal with this aspect only in view of its relevance to the literary construction of Defoe's satire; the focus of interest will be on the role and position of Poland as a vehicle of allegory which may be conducive to a better understanding of the nature of topical allegory in general.

"The Dyet od Poland" was published under the name of "Anglipoloski of Lithuania" in 1705 and, according to its title page, it was printed "at Dantzick". The very preface of this satire, however, contains some hints which allow the reader to guess that the real name of the author was "Defoe" and the place of publication - London. Defoe says:

¹ W. K r a j e w s k a, Daniela Defoe "The Dyet of Poland", "Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny" 1965, nr 1, p. 17-30.

Nor do I apprehend the World Will be less Solicitous about who is the Author of this. Some perhaps will guess one, some another - and Hawkers, they tell me, will according to Custom, cry about the Street in the famous name of Daniell de Foe².

Direct evidence of the authorship of "The Dyet" will be found in the writer's letters to Robert Harley. In one of them, dated June 1704, Defoe makes plans for publishing his poem:

The Poem Sir of The Diet of P - d I Omitted to Mention to you last Night but Certainly Twill be Very Necessary to Carry in the Country with me, and As I am Sure of its being Very Usefull, I Can not but Importune you to Let me Perfect it and Turn it abroad into the World³.

Copies of three early editions of "The Dyet" are available to-day, all printed in 1705. Apart from the first edition there is the corrected one and one with the critical commentary by an anonymous author hostile to Defoe. Its title introduces it in the following way: "The Dyet of Poland; A Satyr considr'd Paragraph by Paragraph, To which is added A Key to the Whole, with Names of the Author, and the Nobility and Gentry, that are Scandalously Poined at, in it". The comments provide a useful source of information which helps to identify personages represented by characters in "The Dyet".

That the satire "is merely English politics in Polish guise"⁴, that "the Dyet of Poland is the Houses of Parliament"⁵ and that "under the thinnest of disguises Poland is simply England"⁶ has become the central idea of the interpretation generally accepted by British critics of Daniel Defoe. This kind of interpretation almost completely ignores the picture of Poland that emerges from

² [D. Defoe], Preface [in:] *The Dyet of Poland*, by Anglipoloski of Lithuania, Dantzick, MDCCV, p. un.

³ *The Letters of Daniel Defoe*, ed. G. H. Healey, Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1955, p. 19.

⁴ Th. Wright, *The Life of Daniel Defoe*, Farncombe and Sons Ltd, London 1931, p. 117.

⁵ J. R. Moore, *A Checklist of the Writings of Daniel Defoe*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1960, p. 40.

⁶ J. Sutherland, *Defoe*, Barnes and Noble, Inc., New York, Methuen and Co, Ltd, London 1971, p. 134.

the poem and, by doing so, dismisses the vehicle of its allegory as of no importance and concentrates solely on its message. When "anglipoloski" says in the perface that he "expects to be understood in the following Poem as he Speaks not as every prejudic'd Man may imagine he meant"⁷, he does not want his satire to be read only literally and yet his words remind us of the possibility of an approach to the allegory rather different from the translational one.

An analysis of the translation from the history of Poland into an English political scene reveals a number of discrepancies, some of which are due to gaps in Defoe's knowledge of facts and others to his intent. The discrepancies which change facts from Polish history to fit it to the English situation may seem to imply that it is indeed only the message of the poem that matters.

The Polish situation to which the poem refers, has as its background the Swedish war during the reign of king Augustus II and a recollection of Jan III Sobieski. Sobieski of the poem stands for William III, whom Defoe greatly respected and admired; Augustus represents Queen Anne; the Livonian plot is a reference to the Scottish rebellion; Moldavia is Ireland; the Swedish army typifies the French power; in the Cossacks Defoe depicts the Dissenters, and the Dyet of Poland (of 1701-1702 probably) is an indirect presentation of English Parliament.

The poem begins with a general description of Poland and Poles, praises the reign of Sobieski and his victory over the Turks, introduces some important public figures and presents a number of speakers who take part in the debate of the Dyet. After demonstrating most speakers' selfishness, stupidity, corruption, lack of patriotic sentiment or a desire to improve the state of things, Defoe ends the poem on a more hopeful note by expressing the belief that there are, after all, some wise and noble statesmen who will help the King and the country in overcoming the difficulties and getting rid of the Swedes.

The points at which the Polish and the English levels of the satire do not meet are not numerous and they have little effect

⁷ [D e f o e], Preface..., p. un.

on the general framework of the poem. One such point occurs when Defoe says:

Great Sobieski had their Crown obtain'd,
With steady Glory thirteen Years he Reign'd⁸

Thirteen years is the period of the reign of William III; Sobieski's lasted from 1674 to 1696.

On the next page we find the following lines:

The Valiant Sobieski had bestow'd
Moldavian Lands he conquer'd by his Sword⁹.

The lines give an accurate description of King William's handling of the Irish problem, but do not correspond with Sobieski's failure to submit Moldavia to his rule.

There are some omissions and alterations in Defoe's presentation of the mechanism and structure of the Polish Sejm (the "liberum veto" is never mentioned; the number of bishops in the real diet was 15, not 13; the Marshal was not appointed by the king as is suggested by Defoe etc.). A detailed discussion of Defoe's depiction of the Sejm will be found in the article by Wanda Krawewska.

The hostile editor and commentator of Defoe's satiric allegory blames the writer for forgetting that Poland is a Christian country. And, indeed, although Defoe often speaks of Christian Poles and mentions their bishops, he has the following rather puzzling lines in the poem:

That Native Fierceness which in Christian Lands
Makes Heroes, and their Poets Praise commands,
Here 'this a Vice [...]'¹⁰

And elsewhere he speaks of "The mighty «Captain Bassa» of the Poles"¹¹ which makes the antagonistic editor of Defoe remark:

⁸ Defoe, *The Dyet of Poland...*, p. 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

He will make the Polanders Infidels do what we can, notwithstanding he has been told over and over, that Poland is a Christian Country¹².

These and other objections made by the sometimes too pedantic editor prove that the accuracy of the picture of Poland may be of some importance also to readers other than Poles. The discrepancies between Poland as presented by Defoe and the real state of things do not destroy the validity of the comparison that the writer makes between Poland and England, however exaggerated the comparison may be; the general picture of Poland is faithful to reality. Józef Andrzej Gierowski, the author of "The History of Poland, 1505-1764" writes of the "unheard-of demoralization of Polish society" during the reign of Augustus II marked by internal conflicts, intrigues of different political factions, selfish interests of the aristocracy and gentry. Defoe's description of the situation shows his knowledgeability on the subject:

Pride, Plenty's Hand-maid, deeply taints their Blood,
And Seeds of Faction mix the Crimson Flood.
Eternal Discords brood upon the Soil,
And universal Strifes the State embroil!¹³

Daniel Defoe, like many other Englishmen of his time, took a lively interest in the Polish affairs of the period. He had not visited Poland, although, as John Robert Moore reminds us, "he saw almost every nook of England, Wales, and Scotland, besides many regions on the Continent [...] He had exceptional information about some parts of Russia, probably at second hand"¹⁴. His information about Poland is second hand, too; he learnt about it from people he met during his travels, from what was printed on Poland then, sometimes from Poles themselves. In an issue of his "Review of the Affairs of France" he mentioned one of them,

¹² Anonymous edition of the Dyet of Poland. A Satyr considr'd Paragraph by Paragraph to which is added a Key to the Whole with the Names of the Author and the Nobility and Gentry, that are Scandaleously Pointed at, in it, Ben, Bragg, London 1705, p. 23.

¹³ [D e f o e], The Dyet of Poland..., p. 3.

¹⁴ J. R. M o o r e, Daniel Defoe; Citizen of the Modern World, The University of Chicago Press, Illinois 1958, p. 275.

"a Polander with Christian names as long as your arm" whose surname was "Oblikarinosky"¹⁵...

"The "Review" has numerous references to Polish affairs. On August 1, 1704 Defoe wrote in it:

Were it not for the War in Poland, the French Power would find it a difficult Task to have pierc'd the Provinces of Swaben and Friezland and show themselves on the Banks of the Danube¹⁶.

He deplores the situation in Poland (in "A Review", No. 46, for example):

To proceed to Poland; What Miseries, what Blood, what Plunder of Friends and robbing of Enemies, do the Divided Poeples suffer? If would be endless to repeat their Miseries, Ravag'd by Foreign Armies and torn in pieces by Intestine Feuds among themselves¹⁷.

Seeing Poland used as a battlefield for the Russian and the Swedish armies he suggests a way out:

Were the Poles in their Senses, they would, as one Man, rise in Arms, and thrust them both out of their Country [...] Unhappy Poland! if thou wer't wise, thou wouldst rise at once¹⁸.

"The Dyet of Poland" echoes many of the remarks Defoe makes in his "Review". The sentiment of the lines:

And if the Poles in their Plagues delight,
Wise Heaven's too just to let them thrive in Spight¹⁹

is the same as in his criticism of the Polish passivity and lack of resistance in the "Review", and the exclamation "Unhappy Poland!" appears both in the "Review" and the poem.

¹⁵ Cf. D. D e f o e, A Weekly Review of the Affairs of France. Purg'd from the Errors and Partiality of News-Writers and Petty Statesmen of all, Saturday, March 18, 1704, p. 5.

¹⁶ D e f o e, A Weekley Review..., Tuesday, August 1, 1704 p. un.

¹⁷ D e f o e, A Weekley Review..., No. 46, p. 183.

¹⁸ D. D e f o e, A Review of the State of the British Nation, Saturday, March 8, 1707.

¹⁹ [D e f o e], Preface..., p. 4.

The picture of Poland in the satire is, then, based on the facts known to Defoe and on his propagandist aim which was to persuade the English to support Augustus II and thus to diminish the power of France then at war with England. This aim is one of the reasons why Defoe wanted his readers to take interest in Poland as such and not only in its allegorical meaning.

As has been suggested above, the situation in Poland had rather larger dimensions than the analogous situation in England. In a sense then, the way in which "The Dyet" depicts the extent of corruption and discord is more faithful to the Polish reality than to that of England. There are some other examples of faithfulness to Polish rather than English facts. One such example will be found in the difference in sex between the Polish and the English Royalties: Queen Anne is represented by Augustus II. The anonymous editor of "The Dyet" points to another inconsistency in choosing the Turk to represent James II. He responds to the lines:

Not all the conquer'd Lands the Turk resign'd
Not all the World [...] ²⁰

with an indignant exclamation: "What a respectful Title he gives to Her Majesty's Royal Father?"²¹ He also reminds us that the Polish Diet was indeed called during the reign of Augustus II, while in England "The Parliament was then sitting when Queen Anne succeeded to the throne"²².

The faithful presentation of so many aspects of Polish affairs strengthens the position of the allegorical vehicle in the poem while the inaccuracies on both the Polish and the English levels of allegory (which do not alter the overall character of analogy) draw the reader's attention to the core of the poem, to what really matters to Defoe, who wishes to warn his English readers against risking the dangers that Poland was in. The warning is an important motivation of the poem and Defoe purposefully exaggerated the gravity of the situation of England when he spoke

²⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

²¹ Anonymous edition of *The Dyet of Poland*..., p. 8.

²² Ibid., p. 10.

of it in terms of Polish affairs. Thus the emphatic warning helps to keep the vehicle of allegory - Poland - in the focus of attention of the reader.

The general description of Poland serves as a background for presentation of individual characters. The body of the satire consists in their portraits most of which are caricatures. Defoe gives vent to his hostility towards his adversaries by adopting a tone of lashing satire. Nearly all of the characters have no equivalents in Polish history: they are in fact thinly disguised English public figures. Of the long list of the caricatures and some flattering portraits appearing in the poem few, apart from Sobieski and Augustus II, may be connected with real Poles (such as Bishop of Cujavia and possibly Pacski). On the level of surface narrative most of the characters are totally fictitious. They are described as people that could have existed but did not in fact. Their Polishness lies solely in the "-sky"/"-ski" endings of their surnames, which usually contain some syllables of the real names of persons indirectly portrayed in "The Dyet". Here is a sample of the surnames: Taguski, Ruski, Rigatski, Lawrensky, Seymsky, Caversky, Rokosky, Towerowsky, Bursky, Bromsky, Gransky, Wardsky, Anneslesky, Finsky, and Whartsky.

The central issue debated by the Diet, apart from the problems of the Livonian plot, the Swedish war and the question of reform is the position of the rebel Cossacks (read: Dissenters). Defoe attacks those who attack the dissenters. The tone used to draw characters of high Tories, members of the High Church is that of contempt and invective and the presentation of his arch enemy Daniel Finch, Earl of Nottingham, as Finsky is mercilessly sarcastic:

Finsky, an Upright Lithuanian Peer,
 Sets up for sinking Poland's Prime Visier;
 For Application and Impertinence
 No Man has half so much with half his Sense;
 With formal Step, and his Majestic Grain,
 Is Polander without, and Swede within.
 Envy and awkward Spleen sit on his Face,
 In Speech precise, but always thinks apace;
 In Earnest Nonsense does his Hours divide,

Always to little Purpose, much employ'd,
 Strong in Opinion, in his judgement weak,
 And thinks himself exceeding Politick²³.

He describes Sir Edward Seymour (former speaker of the Commons) in equally scathing terms:

Old Seymsky was of this intriguing Band,
 A Polack born, on Neiper's Golden Strand;
 Antient in Crimes bred up to Fraud and Feud,

[...]

Detects ill Practices with eager Vote
 And rails at Bribes with mercenary Throat;
 That he should be Ungrateful and Unjust,
 Dispise the Grace, as he betray'd the Trust;
 Be Proud, be Peevish, Insolent, and Base,
 Nature has painted that upon his Face²⁴.

It is quite clear from the descriptions such as the ones quoted above that in spite of the Polish forms of the surnames accompanied by some mentions of Polish geographical places (Warsaw, Dantzick) which serve as reminders of the Polish background, Defoe's thoughts are, in this part of "The Dyet", completely with the English political scene.

The suggestiveness of the surnames leaves no doubt as to the identity of the real people behind them; the disguise is not meant to conceal actually and it may be considered a mere convention of masking the message present in satiric and in allegorical works. The transparency of character drawing of this part of "The Dyet" only adds ridicule to the portraits of the real personages. The Poland of these fictitious characters (modelled on real English ones) has little to do with historical Poland.

The introductory part of "The Dyet" contains one more image of Poland. The country in this part of the poem appears to be a remote and strange place which has acquired a somewhat fantastic, fabulous character of an imaginary land.

²³ [D e f o e], The Dyet of Poland..., p. 8.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

The distancing effect of the lines:

In Northern Climes where furious Tempests blow,
 And Men more furious raise worse Storms below,
 At Nature's Elbow, distant and remote,
 Happy for Europe had She been forgot,
 The World's Proboscis, near the Globe's Extremes,
 For barb'rous Men renown'd, and barb'rous Names,
 There Poland Lies [...] ²⁵

emphasizes the fact that Poland is a country which ostensibly has nothing in common with the real world of the English reader. Poles are depicted as barbarous creatures alien to civilized English people:

A mighty Nation throngs the groaning Land,
 Rude as the Climate, num'rous as the Sand:
 Uncommon monstrous Vertues they possess,
 Strange odd preposterous Polish Qualities ²⁶.

Some of the Polish qualities enumerated by Defoe remind one of the style of the popular tales of impossibilities with fantastic countries where snow is hot and water - dry. Contradictions of similar nature are employed by Defoe in his portrait of the Polish:

Mysterious Contraries they reconcile,
 The Pleasing Frown and the Destroying Smile;
 Precisely gay, and most absurdly grave,
 Most humbly high, and barbarously brave;
Debauch'dly Civil and Prophanely Good,
 And fill'd with Gen'rous brave Ingratitude ²⁷.

In spite of some interest taken in her political affairs, Poland was not a country well known to an average Englishman. It remained "distant and remote" and that fact made it possible for

²⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Defoe to use it in the role of an imaginary exotic country of the kind which was often described by 18 century topical satires and allegories as disguises for the real English society.

The Cambridge catalogue of eighteen-century British books²⁸ lists an abundance of topical satires which fall into the categories of epistles, dream visions, confessions, "scourges", secret histories, descriptions of mock heroic battles etc. Satires presenting imaginary, fantastic countries form a large group among these works. Their imaginary countries such as Frivola, Oceana, Slaveonia, New Atlantis or Caramania are not very different in character from seemingly real places chosen by satirists such as, for example, Tobias Smollett's Japan in "The History and Adventures of an Atom" (1769) which narrates a story that took place, as the narrator assures us, in the Japanese empire one thousand years ago. Needless to say the tale is about England of Smollett's times and Japan created in the book is a grotesque country inhabited by strange people. Defoe's Poland of the introductory part of his poem is as unreal as Smollett's Japan.

The purpose of creating such worlds is first to hide a truth in order to reveal it more effectively by leading the reader to the discovery that the follies and absurdities of the imaginary world are, in fact, those of the real one. Defoe does not keep the link with reality hidden from the reader for very long; as early as the opening lines of the poem he says that Poland lies

Just as far from Heav'n as we are here²⁹

and thus contradicts its "distant and remote" position mentioned elsewhere. The geographical proximity draws the reader's attention to other possible similarities suggested by various parallels and analogies.

There is not, then, one single Poland in Defoe's satiric allegory, but, in a sense, three Polands: one shaped by facts, another by fiction, and yet another by fantasy. The three differ-

²⁸ G. A v e r l e y, e.a., Eighteenth-Century British Books. A Subject Catalogue, Vol. III, Language, Literature. Extracted from British Museum General Catalogue of Printed Books, Dawson and Son Ltd, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1979.

²⁹ [D e f o e], Preface..., p. 2.

ent portraits of Poland have different functions to fulfil in the topical satiric allegory. These functions are related to the aims of the poem as a warning, as propaganda, as a study of political analogies, as a satire and as a story of a "strange, preposterous" country.

The multiplicity of functions of the allegorical vehicle in "The Dyet" may cause certain inconsistencies in the structure and the tone of the poem, but, at the same time, it emphasizes the importance of the vehicle of the allegory. In Daniel Defoe's poem the importance of the vehicle is greater than in most other topical allegories and it serves as a forcible proof of the validity of interpretation which takes into consideration both the tenor (message) and the vehicle of allegory.

There is no doubt about Defoe being concerned with English affairs primarily but, as we have seen, their presentation is largely determined by the "Polish" level. The role of the vehicle in "The Dyet" exposes the inadequacies of the translational approach which depends, in the words of C. S. Lewis, on "the pernicious habit of reading allegory as if it were a cryptogram to be translated; as if having grasped what an image (as we say) 'means', we threw the image away and thought of the ingredient in real life it represents"³⁰.

The significant role of the vehicle in "The Dyet" (and in all allegory) is proved, in a very special way, by responses of Polish readers to Defoe's poem: to them the vehicle, which is Poland, has perhaps more importance than the message itself.

Institute of English Studies
University of Łódź

³⁰ C. S. L e w i s, *The Vision of Bunyan*, [in:] *Selected Literary Essays*, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 149.

María Edelson

PRZEKAŹNIK TREŚCI ALEGORYCZNYCH W "THE DYET OF POLAND"

DANIELA DEFOE

Rzadko dziś czytany utwór Daniela Defoe "The Dyet of Poland" just alegoryczną satyrą, w której historyczna sytuacja Polski z początku XVIII w. jest użyta jako przebranie dla przedstawienia życia publicznego Anglii czasów autora.

Odmalowanie położenia Polski służy propagandowym celom Daniela Defoe i stanowi ostrzeżenie przed politycznymi tarapatami, w jakie uwikłała się wówczas Polska.

Oprócz Polski historycznej utwór zawiera obraz Polski fikcyjnej z rzeczywistością nie mający nic wspólnego, chociaż utrzymany w granicach prawdopodobieństwa, a także obraz Polski nieprawdopodobnej, wręcz bajkowej, odmalowany zgodnie z konwencją umieszczania fabuły utworu z topicznymi aluzjami w tle egzotycznym lub fantastycznym.

Wszystkie te funkcje obrazu Polski jako przekaźnika treści alegorycznych wykazują jak bardzo niesłuszne jest pomniejszanie znaczenia warstwy alegorii określanej jako powierzchowna, przez interpretatorów koncentrujących się wyłącznie na treściach alegorycznych.

Dodatkowym dowodem wagi alegorycznego przekaźnika w "The Dyet of Poland" jest fakt, że polski czytelnik często bardziej interesuje się tą właśnie płaszczyzną utworu niż jego ukrytymi treściami.