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The German Academic World and Polish Romanticism. Philosophers and Poets of the First Part of the 19th Century

The paper illustrates the interdependence of the German higher educational system and the rise of the modern Polish national consciousness in the 1st half of the 19th century. Having started from Kant’s, Schelling’s, and W. v. Humboldt’s ideas of autonomous, uniform, and unrestrained university in its relation to state and religion, we pass then on to delineate the main values, expectations, and ideals of the Polish cultural world in the transition from Enlightenment to Romanticism as well as in the political situation of the newly lost state independence. Poets, historians, and philosophers of the period could serve us as good examples of the process of creative assimilation, or transposition, of the spiritual heritage of antiquity and Christianity. At this point, it makes also sense to take into account some Polish philosophers and poets who collaborated with the German academic world in this respect. As for philosophers, the cases of Cieszkowski, Trentowski, and Gołuchowski shall shed light, firstly, on the educational possibilities that Poles had as citizens of Prussia or other parts of divided Poland, secondly, on the influence of German thought on the Polish higher culture, and thirdly, on the inevitability of abandoning Hegel’s system in favor of Schelling’s stance. As far as poets are concerned, Mickiewicz is taken into consideration as momentary student and then permanent and radical critic of Hegel, Zan as research assistant of A. v. Humboldt and then geological explorer, and Norwid as participant in academic lectures in Berlin before he went to Brussels, Rome, and finally to Paris. All these cases shall corroborate a thesis on the role that German culture played in the formation of the Polish collective self in its deep dimension of reflectivity. In addition, the intellectual evolution, the interactions, and the impact of the aforementioned Polish philosophers may show us a type of mutuality between Polish and German thought.