ADAM MICKIEWICZ

Polish pilgrim and European migrant

by Jana Mende

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Photo credit: Detail from a postcard (before 1910) with a portrait of Adam Mickiewicz. Herder-Institut/ Sammlung Jaworski, CC BY-SA 4.0

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Adam Mickiewicz, the Polish romantic, poet, translator and journalist, was a migrant for most of his life. He also travelled to Berlin, Rome, Constantinople and other places for pleasure, scientific purposes and on political missions. These frequent changes of location show a mobile and transnational life story.

House in İstanbul where Mickiewicz died in 1855. Today Adam Mickiewicz Müzesi (Adam Mickiewicz Museum), Bostan Mahallesi, Tatlı Badem Sokak, No:10, Tarlabaşı, Beyoğlu, İstanbul, Turkey. Jana-Katharina Mende, CC BY 4.0

After spending his childhood, school and university years in Nowogródek (now Nawahrudak in Belarus) and Vilnius, Mickiewicz was exiled to Russia in 1824 because of his activities in the Philomath

Philomath

The Philomaths ("lovers of knowledge") was a secret student association active in Vilnius from the year 1817 until its ban in 1823. Initially a discussion group focused on their own work, from 1819 they also promoted the Polish-national idea of a struggle for independence. The Philomaths had significant influence on the student scene and also organized offshoots of their association, such as the Philarets or Philadelphists. In 1823, their activities became known to the Russian authorities and 20 Philomats and Philarets were sentenced to death.

Society, a secret student organization at Vilnius University. Thus began his path to emigration, which initially led him into exile in St. Petersburg, from where he traveled to Crimea and Moscow.

Escaping political exile, he embarked on a grand tour

grand tour

The Grand Tour is the name given to an educational journey undertaken by young noblemen and sons of the wealthy bourgeoisie from the time of the Renaissance on. A Grand Tour usually led a young man through continental Europe, sometimes as far as the Orient, and served to equip him with education, life experience and prestige in equal measure.

, which took him to Berlin, Dresden, Prague, Marienbad, Weimar, Switzerland and Italy, where he spent some time in Rome and explored Pompeii. In Rome, Mickiewicz learned of the November Uprising in Poland, but did not leave until April 1831 – first to Paris and then via Dresden to

Greater Poland and back to Dresden, where he wrote the third part of his drama *Dziady*. He was able to avoid participating in the Polish November Uprising because of the long journey. Together with the refugees of the crushed Uprising, he finally arrived in Paris in 1832, where he lived until his death – though he briefly took up a professorship in Lausanne and also traveled to Rome. In 1855, he traveled to Constantinople, ostensibly for research purposes, but, in reality, at the request of Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, for whom he was to establish political connections in Turkey. Mickiewicz died unexpectedly only two months after his arrival in Constantinople. Thus, his place of death was also in a foreign country.

Adam Mickiewicz's biography is not a neutral narrative of facts – its image in Polish literary history depends on the selection of information and how the meaning of his life, his decisions, and the places where he lived may be interpreted. For a long time, his was the story of a national poet who lived, wrote and died for the Polish nation.[1] Another narrative describes the polyglot, educated citizen of the world who lived in Paris, but whose influence spread throughout the whole of Europe.[2] In recent years, a (post-)migrant, multilingual portrayal of his life and work has been added. Here, the focus is especially on the time he spent in Paris.

1 The Cultural Life of the Polish Emigrant Community in Paris

Paris became a destination for many Poles who had to flee from the Russian partition after the crushed November Uprising of 1831. As part of the Great Emigration

Great Emigration

Great Emigration (Wielka Emigracja) refers to the migration movement that saw many people leave divided Poland for political reasons between 1831 and 1862. The refugees were participants in the November Uprising (1830/31) and other uprisings. Among them were numerous nobles and intellectuals.

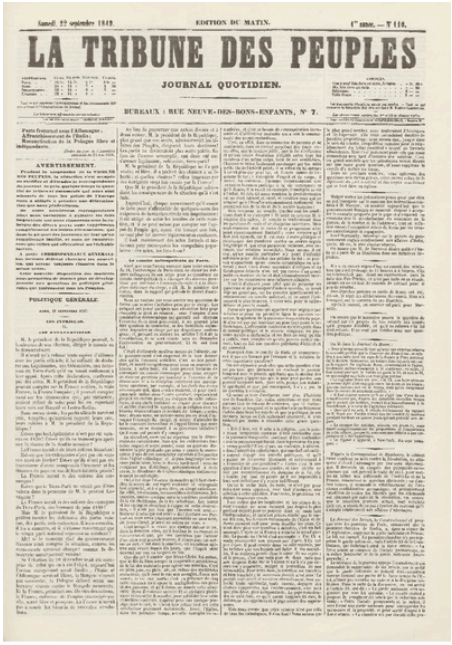
they travelled to France via Saxony and southern Germany.[3] In addition to the soldiers who fought in the Uprising were numerous nobles, intellectuals, and writers.[4] The most important authors of Polish Romanticism, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński belonged to the emigrant community.

The Polish veterans of the Uprising were more affected by the political measures of the French government than the Polish Romantics, intellectuals, and nobility in Paris. Acting as "terre d'accueil" (country of welcome)[5], France accepted them as “réfugiés étrangers” (*foreign refugees*), but a life of poverty with many restrictions awaited them.[6] The category of réfugiés étrangers was created in response to the emigration movement and allowed the French government to determine the emigrants' place of residence and thus also to provide them with assistance and residents’ rights. However, it was unclear who could be considered a réfugié étranger.

The term *réfugiés/refugees* is, however, not to be understood in the modern sense. Colloquially as well as politically and legally, it is an unclear category that could refer to religious refugees, people without passports and foreigners in general.[7] In this sense, Polish refugees were Poles without a passport in France, who, although financially supported, were also subject to state control.[8]

Mickiewicz monument by Antoine Bour in Paris, erected in 1929 at Place d'Alm Cours Albert-Ier. Siren-Com / https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/inde curid=15247436, CC BY-NC-SA 3.0

Polish nobles and intellectuals who had good relations with Paris were able to settle there and felt little of the political restrictions.[9] Mickiewicz belonged to the privileged, educated upper class that formed a political and cultural center for the Polish emigrant community in France.[10] This group was by no means uniform:[11] Politically, there were at least two groups with opposing political positions. The residence of Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, the Hôtel Lambert on the Île Saint-Louis, became a meeting place for the politically conservative, while those with progressive and revolutionary political leanings gathered at the Towarzystwo Demokratyczne Polskie, the Polish Democratic Society, which was also active in England.[12] Cultural life was promoted by numerous Polish institutions in Paris. In 1832, the Towarzystwo Literackie Polskie (Polish Literary Society) was founded. Central to this was the Bibliothèque Polonaise à Paris, which still exists today and in which the books and writings of the society as well as other collections were and are kept.[13] From the mid-19th century, the children of emigrants were able to attend a Polish school, l'École des Batignolles, in Paris.[14]


LA TRIBUNE DES PEUPLES

JOURNAL QUOTIDIEN.

Cover of the journal 'La Tribune Des Peuples'. Domena publiczna (public domain), CC0 1.0

The emigrants

emigrants

What do you call people in the 19th century who had to leave their place of origin for political or other reasons? Historical dictionaries show that the word émigrants is often used in French. In Polish, too, the words emigracya and emigrant are predominantly used, as a glance at Linde's Słownik języka polskiego reveals: "Emigracya [...] wywędrowanie, wynoszenie się z kraiu, emigration, emigrating [...] emigrant, [...] emigrancik, [...] który się z kraiu wynosi," (Linde 1807, 617).

wrote and published a lot. As early as the 1830s, Aleksander Jełowicki opened a Polish print shop and bookstore (Drukarnia i Księgarnia Polska), where numerous works dealing with and resulting from emigration were published, including *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* (Books of the Polish People and Polish Pilgrimage, 1832) and Pan Tadeusz (1834) by Adam

Mickiewicz. The Polish Library Catalogue for the year 1838 contains a long list of books by numerous emigrants such as Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Leonard Chodźko and Feliks Wrotnowski.[15] In addition to publications in Polish, many emigrant writers and journalists also published in French. The French publisher Pinard also published Polish works.[16] Numerous periodicals such as *Le Polonais* (1833-1838) or *La Pologne Pittoresque* (1835, 1836) reached a Polish, French, and international audience.[17] Adam Mickiewicz began publishing the journal *La Tribune des Peuples* in 1849. Despite the restrictions they faced as foreigners in France, Polish emigrants took part in cultural and political life, which was characterized by multilingualism, interculturalism, and cultural transfer. These aspects of emigrant life can be clearly seen in the example of Mickiewicz, who lived and worked as an immigrant in Paris.

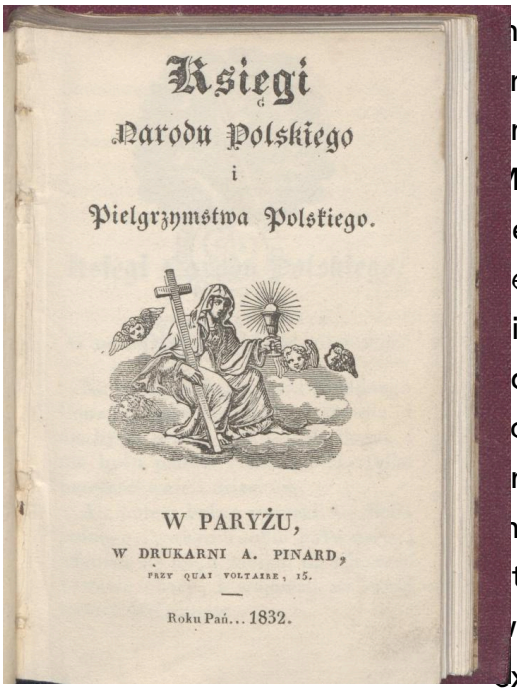
2 Mickiewicz as a migrant, Mickiewicz as a self-appointed pilgrim

In Paris Adam Mickiewicz wrote as an emigrant, for emigrants and about emigration in Polish and in French. In his writings he explored various representations of a migrant identity for himself and others. In recent years, his multilingualism has increasingly become a focus of research.[18] Mickiewicz's language biography shows that he was a polyglot, a cosmopolitically educated man who spoke Polish and French, mastered Latin and Greek, and learned German, English, Italian and Russian.[19] He probably also understood Belarusian and Czech.[20] At the end of his life, he even learned Turkish.[21] In Paris, French became his second language in his day to day life and his writing.[22]

For Mickiewicz, French is the language of everyday life, the language of correspondence as well as the working language for lectures, translating his own works and writing.[23] The use of French has numerous functions for the emigrant Mickiewicz: It allowed him to earn a living for his family as a professor, first in Lausanne and then at the Collège de France. It also enabled him to integrate into French cultural and political life. Furthermore, it enabled a broader reception and reading of his works in translation. At the same time, it was a bridge to the integration of Polish language, literature and migrants into French society.

Mickiewicz spoke French to a French speaking audience in his lectures on Slavic language and literature at the Collège de France (1840-44). He wrote literary works – the dramas Les

Confédérés de Bar and Jacques Jasinski (1836) – and journalistic texts in French for numerous newspapers. In these texts he also deals with emigration, but in a European context. In the program of the Tribune des Peuples, he characterized the migrated foreigners as spokespersons for the freedom of the people of Europe – he himself falls into this category.[24] Mickiewicz's French writings reveal a universal and European understanding of migration.


Księgi
Narodu Polskiego
i
Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego.
W PARYŻU,
W DRUKARNI A. PINARD,
PRZY QUAI VOLTAIRE, 15.
Roku Pań... 1832.

Titelbild der Erstausgabe Księgi polskiego narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego, Paris 1832. Biblioteka Narodowa, Public domain, https://polona.pl/item/ksiegi-narodu-polskiego-i-pielgrzymstwa-polskiego,Nzc4MDE1OTc/8/#info:metadata, CC0 1.0

n addition to the figure of the European migrant, Mickiewicz reates the Polish pilgrim as a figure of identification for the migrant; the pilgrim becomes a self-designation for Mickiewicz and Polish emigrants, in contrast to the foreign esignation émigrant or étranger. In the *Books of the Polish eople and Polish Pilgrimage* (Księgi narodu polskiego i ielgrzymstwa polskiego) – published in Paris in 1832 – he ddresses the Polish emigrant community and gives them a ommon goal of exile. The book is published anonymously, nd its form is reminiscent of a prayer booklet.[25] The genre ixes political writing with moral and religious literature. tylistically, the language is based on the Bible and religious ritings.[26] The books deal with the divisions of Poland, the xpulsion of Polish emigrants from their homeland, and the Messianic tasks and duties arising from the pilgrimage.

Mickiewicz's Polish interpretation of emigration as pilgrimage offers a national, religious reading of the exile situation, which is only one phase in the struggle for political freedom and national independence. This idea is continued in the journal *Pielgrzym*, which Mickiewicz edited.[27] Here, however, the Polish pilgrims' struggle for freedom already turns into a universal idea.[28]

Polish pilgrims also take a European path: the Księgi in their French translation by Charles de Montalembert as Livre des pèlerins polonais (1833) were well received by a French and European audience and were quickly translated into other languages.[29] Finally, the translation also reveals the modernity of the pilgrim migrant in a European rather than just a national context. In the preface of Montalembert's translation it says that there are perhaps more exiled people in modern society, more such pilgrims striving into a dark future.[30] The homelessness of the modern subject is hinted at here.

Mickiewicz was certainly one of the most visible Polish migrants in Paris. Because of his writings and his political work, the public became increasingly interested in the 'silent majority' of political refugees after the November Uprising. As Polish pilgrims, they are integrated into a French and European vision of the future.

Memorial plaque for Adam Mickiewicz in Paris. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

4 Conclusion: Migrant national writer, European migrant

Mickiewicz as a migrant, refugee, pilgrim, and stranger can be read as an interpretative narrative of his life, not in today's sense, but as a historical discourse. As a national author, Adam Mickiewicz is usually seen as a representative of a unified, national, Polish literature, which is ascribed to him, but which did not even exist during his lifetime. Mickiewicz spent his life in exile, travelling and as an emigrant. These circumstances affected his life and writing, which can only be told in the tension between nation and migration in a transcultural biography. Mickiewicz is – in life and in death – a European poet and global migrant at least as much as a 'national' writer.

English translation: William Connor ↗

Footnotes

1. See, for example, Miązek 1998. ↥
2. See, for example, Koropeckyj 2008. ↥
3. Cf. Strobel 1969, pp. 32-33. ↥
4. Cf. Borejsza 2007, p. 886. ↥
5. Cf. Mondonico-Torri 2000, p. 731. ↥
6. Cf. ibid. ↥
7. Cf. Mondonico-Torri 2000, p. 734. ↥
8. Cf. Mondonico-Torri 2000, p. 737. ↥
9. See Ponty 2008, p. 45. ↥
10. See Ponty 2008, p. 47. ↥
11. Cf. Witkowska 2002, p. 1001. ↥
12. Cf. Witkowska 2002, p. 1000. ↥
13. Cf. Witkowska 2002, p. 1009. ↥
14. Cf. Ponty 2008, p. 49. ↥
15. See Catalogue de la Librairie Polonaise de A. Jełowicki et cie 1838, pp. 1-7. ↥
16. See Straszewska 1970, p. 158. ↥
17. Cf. Straszewska 1970, p. 287. ↥
18. See Mickiewicz and Pietrzak-Thébault 2013, Ligara 2010, see Pietrzak-Thébault 2018. ↥
19. Cf. Mende 2019, p. 22. ↥
20. See Piechota 2016, p. 83. ↥
21. See ibid. ↥
22. See Pietrzak-Thébault 2013, p. 37. ↥
23. Cf. ibid., 38-39. ↥
24. Cf. Mickiewicz 1949. ↥
25. See Witkowska, Alina, Przybylski, Ryszard 2007, p. 289. ↥
26. Cf. ibid. ↥
27. Cf. Witkowska, Alina, Przybylski, Ryszard 2007, p. 292. ↥
28. Cf. ibid. 294, see also Mickiewicz 1833b. ↥
29. See Pietrzak-Thébault 2013, p. 38. ↥
30. Mickiewicz 1833a, p. X. ↥

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