


Jan Kochanowski's Psalter – a Source of Polish Poetry and Mirror of the Human Mind

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ABSTRACT: The article deals with Jan Kochanowski's *Psalterz Dawidów* [*David's Psalter*], published in 1579. This paraphrase of the biblical Psalter, intensely lyrical in its spirit, was inspired by George Buchanan's Latin poetic paraphrase of the Psalms, which is strongly Horatianising. Kochanowski's work can be seen as a presentation of humanist piety. That is to say that the borders between secular and sacred spaces, or even between Judeo-Christian and Pagan traditions, may seem blurred. The Psalter is also interconfessional (or "doctrinally neutral") and acts as a universal mirror reflecting the human mind. The author analyses three of Kochanowski's Psalms to demonstrate the intellectual and emotional space of his Psalter and its polyphonic structure: 1 (*Beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum*), 19 (*Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei*) and 91 (*Qui habitat in adiutorio Altissimi*), displaying some interplays of ideas and different approaches to paraphrasing applied by the poet.

KEYWORDS: Jan Kochanowski, poetic psalm paraphrase, Polish Renaissance, Bible translation

Jan Kochanowski (1530–1584) was the greatest Polish Renaissance poet, the "founding father" of elegant humanist Polish-language poetry.¹ Some say that "Kochanowski's Psalter did for Polish what Luther's Bible did for German."² Even if it is not fully true for the Polish language in general, it is certainly true for Polish poetry. Other poets drew on Kochanowski's Psalms in their own verse, imitating the vocabulary, imagery and form of stanzas.³ Placed in a new context, these motifs and stylistic forms became poetic commonplaces, structuring not only Polish verse but also the minds of future generations. Deeply embedded

1 Some hints of this view can be found in W. Bruchnalski, "Jan Kochanowski (1530–1584)" [trans. W. Chwalewik], *The Slavonic and East European Review* 9/25 (1930) 56–78. For detailed monography, see J. Pelc, *Jan Kochanowski. Szczyt renesansu w literaturze polskiej* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1980) [in Polish].

2 E.g. N. Davies, *Heart of Europe. A Short History of Poland* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press 1984) 259.

3 See D. Welsh, "Kochanowski's 'Songs of the City of God' (1579)," *The Polish Review* 18/3 (1973) 50. The author mentions Sebastian Grabowiecki and some 17th and 18th century poets, but there were undoubtedly more poets imitating the vocabulary of Kochanowski's Psalter as early as in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, e.g. Stanisław Grochowski and Jan Jurkowski, who borrowed whole phrases and recontextualised them, even in their secular poetry, to express their own thoughts.

in our language, they became, so to speak, “transparent” – in fact, we often do not realise that we are repeating Kochanowski’s words.

David’s Psalter, Kochanowski’s work published in 1579 in Kraków, is undoubtedly a masterpiece. Although written in Polish, it had (along with the poet’s other works) a great influence and charm that worked beyond the borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,

within the lands of its neighbours, where there was a linguistic link with the Polish language. This meant the Muscovy of the early tsars, the linguistically very close Czechs, but also the Germans with the Lusatian Slav enclaves in a German sea, the Hungarians and Rumanians, finally even the Balkan Slavs along the Adriatic coast. Influence was especially facile in all of these areas, where there was both a knowledge of the Polish language and variety of cultural links with Poland.⁴

In terms of its structure and composition, Kochanowski’s *Psalter* is very much a child of its era. It mirrors humanist piety. That is to say that the borders between secular and sacred spaces, or even between Judeo-Christian and Pagan traditions, may seem blurred. Some say that Kochanowski “approached his task as a humanist, not a theologian.”⁵ However, this is true only to a certain extent. Kochanowski, a reader of Erasmus, educated in Kraków and Padua, could not have passed over the concept of *theologia poetica*, often evoked by the humanists (e.g. Coluccio Salutati, Marsilio Ficino, Cristoforo Landino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola) and developed already in early Christian era (Clemens of Alexandria, Lactantius, Hieronymus, Augustine); this approach made it possible to consider King David’s sacred odes on equal terms with the greatest achievements of the ancient poets (either the mythical ones, such as Orpheus and Linus, or the historical ones, such as Pindar, Simonides and Horace).⁶ This resulted in the “sacralisation” of Pagan poetry, because of the belief that it expresses some deep theological truth, and also in the “paganisation” of some biblical poetic paraphrases, which were modelled on Horatian odes or on Roman elegies, not excluding their mythological imagery. There was no blasphemy in this, *Tonans* being a humanist equivalent of God Almighty, and *Olympus* – of Heaven. Kochanowski avoided too many Pagan ornaments in his vernacular verse, but his *Psalter* has also a classical garb.

David’s Psalter is also the offspring of the author’s mind; it reflects not only its author’s classical education and humanist culture, but also his *ingenium* and poetical personality.

4 T. Ulewicz, “The European Significance of Jan Kochanowski: From the Renaissance to the Romantics,” T. Ulewicz, *Kochanowski. Świadomość słowiańska. Oddziaływanie europejskie* (trans. T. Bałuk-Ulewiczowa) (Kraków: Collegium Columbinum 2006) 207.

5 Welsh, “Kochanowski’s ‘Songs of the City of God,’” 46.

6 A. Kapuścińska, “Ad Fontes Fidei et Litterae: In *Psalmum Quinquagesimum Paraphrasis Stanislai Hosii Carmine Conscripta*,” *Pietas Humanistica. Neo-Latin Religious Poetry in Poland in European Context* (ed. P. Urbański) (Frankfurt am Main: Lang 2006) 53. The author reminds it in the context of Stanislaus Hosius’ Neo-Latin poetical paraphrase of Psalm 51(50), composed in dactylic hexameters, extended to 409 lines, so rendered by the poet much larger than in the Vulgate version, and including such motifs as Pluto, King Midas, Talthybius, Sirens or Circe. The paraphrase, inspired by Erasmus’ commentaries on some Psalms, was written in 1528.

Being, as Janina Abramowska calls him, “a poet of concord,”⁷ he also blurred the borders between confessions, making his Psalter “doctrinally neutral”⁸ and “a book truly for every day and everybody, regardless of denominational references, serving Catholics, Protestant, and Orthodox alike.”⁹

Although, as mentioned, *David's Psalter* was published in 1579, there is no information on how many years Kochanowski spent paraphrasing the Psalms. The poet's letter to Stanisław Fogelweder, dated 6th October 1571, may suggest some contexts in which the work was written. The poet explains nothing concerning his biblical studies, the commentaries he was reading, the editions of Bible he made use of. Instead, Kochanowski communicates to Fogelweder (a trusted royal secretary, very close to the King) that he has been translating the Psalms for some time. He mentions the “old” ones, and the new ones, i.e. those he is composing at the time. His intention is to dedicate a collection of about thirty Psalm-poems to Sigismund August. Certainly, he chose an unfortunate moment (and also an inappropriate patron). Already next year, the king's health got much worse. He “relapsed into despair and insomnia. He locked himself into his favourite Castle at Knyszyn near Białystok, and refused to receive his senators. He died on July 1572, surrounded by a motley company of quacks, astrologers and witches.”¹⁰ Kochanowski's Psalter eventually found a new patron in person of Bishop Piotr Myszkowski. His support must have been immense if the poet not only did not give up, but was even able to complete the work in some seven years.

The letter to Fogelweder also sheds some light on Kochanowski's views on the art of translating biblical poetry. As it seems, the addressee had given the poet some guidance and advice on this matter. Kochanowski accepted them, but also created his own principle. He presented himself allegorically, as standing between personified ideas: “on the one hand there is ‘divine’ necessity *clavos trabales et cuneos manu gestans ahena* – on the other, however, stands *poetica, nescio quid blandum spirans*.”¹¹ That means that he hesitated between Muse and Truth – seeking balance between elegance and accuracy, between poetical ecstasy and close translation. The poet had “to navigate the tradeoffs between the necessity of remaining faithful to holy writ and the creative act of the poet-creator.”¹²

Kochanowski was not the first to undertake the creation of a versified Psalter in Polish. His predecessor was Jakub Lubelczyk [Jakub of Lublin], whose Psalm collection,¹³ preced-

7 J. Abramowska, “Poeta zgody – Jan Kochanowski,” *Pisarze staropolscy. Sylwetki* (ed. S. Grzeszczuk) (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna 1997) II, 71–147.

8 B. Sanders, “Towards a Re-evaluation of the Sources of Jan Kochanowski's *Psalterz Dawidów*. The Role of Jean Calvin's *In Librum Psalmorum Commentarius*,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 35/4 (1999) 436.

9 Ulewicz, “The European Significance of Jan Kochanowski,” 207f.

10 N. Davies, *God's Playground. A History of Poland. I. The Origins to 1795* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press 2005) 122.

11 A. Borowski, “General Theory of Translation in Old Polish Literary Culture,” *Traduzione e rielaborazione nelle letterature di Polonia, Ucraina e Russia XVI–XVIII secolo* (eds. G. Brogi Bercoff – M. Di Salvo – L. Marinelli) (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso 1999) 30.

12 A. Karpiński, “Renaissance,” *Ten Centuries of Polish Literature* (trans. D. Sax) (Warszawa: IBL PAN 2004) 56.

13 I am referring here to the collections containing the entire psalter; it also seems worth noting that from the beginning of the 16th century, single psalms of various authors (with musical notes) appeared in print and were

ing Kochanowski's paraphrase by 21 years, was more confessionalised – intended to be sung at Calvinist services. It was printed in Maciej Wirzbięta's printing office (Kraków) in 1558. The paraphraser's approach, as Janusz Gruchała emphasises, was not philological, because

the author's primary objective was to produce a psalter for ordinary, uneducated congregations. The preface warns the reader not to expect "some refined verse or subject matter, which the Holy Church does not need, since it expects from us only that we praise our Lord in the simplicity of our hearts."¹⁴

Since Kochanowski's approach was completely different, he had no sufficient model among the vernacular poets; instead, he read some Latin Psalm-poems. Among them was Eobanus Hessus' *Psalterium Davidis Carmine Redditum* (1537). As we learn from the letter to Fogelweder, Kochanowski criticised Hessus' paraphrases: "Bo to Hessus trzy lata robił, a przedsię źle" ("For Hessus worked on it for three years, but he did it badly"). It is easy to find a verse Psalter which gained his admiration – it was George Buchanan's *Psalmorum Davidis paraphrasis poetica*,¹⁵ the work which, as Roger Green puts it, "more than any" made the author's "reputation as a poet and was one of the greatest gifts to Scottish literary and religious culture."¹⁶ Kochanowski could have already read the first minor collection of Buchanan's 19 Psalms published in 1556 in Henri Estienne's anthology *Davidis psalmi aliquot Latino carmine expressi a quatuor illustribus poetis*,¹⁷ containing also the Psalm-poems by Eobanus Hessus, Jean Salmon Macrin, Marcantonio Flaminio and Rapicius Iovita, beside Buchanan. It is very probable that Kochanowski knew this edition, because his Psalter is polyphonic (a point to which I will return). There is a certain polyphony in the very structure of Buchanan's work, which Kochanowski certainly appreciated. And he also appreciated his incomparable mastery, inventive approach to biblical matter, and elegance of Latin verse. As Philip Ford tells us: "Poetry was central to Buchanan's self-expression. It provided him with a voice, or rather a range of voices, through which he could define his feelings, and give vent to his views of the world."¹⁸ We could repeat (*toute proportion gardée*) the same

most often included in the earlier Protestant cantionals; see R. Pietkiewicz, "Edycje pojedynczych psalmów i ich zbiorów w renesansowej Rzeczypospolitej," *Patrzmy na Jezusa, który nam w wierze przewodzi. Księga pamiątkowa dla Księdza Profesora Jana Łacha w 85. rocznicę urodzin* (eds. W. Chrostowski – B. Strzałkowska) (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Bibliistów Polskich 2012) 512–513.

14 J. Gruchała, "Introduction (The First Edition and Text)," J. Lubelczyk, *Psalterz i kancjonał z melodiami drukowanymi w 1558 roku. Polish Psalter and Hymnbook with Melodies, Printed in 1558* (eds. J. Gruchała – P. Poźniak) (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica 2010) 44–45.

15 G. Buchanan, *Psalmorum Davidis Paraphrasis Poetica, nunc primum edita* [...] ([Geneva]: Apud Henricum Stephanum et eius fratrem Robertum 1565/1566).

16 R. Green, "The Heavens are Telling: A Psalm-Paraphrase-Poem Analysed," *George Buchanan. Poet and Dramatist* (eds. P. Ford – R.P.H. Green) (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales 2009) 75.

17 H. Estienne, *Davidis psalmi aliquot Latino carmine expressi a quatuor illustribus poetis* ([Parisiis]: Stephanus 1556).

18 P. Ford, "Poeta sui saeculi facile princeps: George Buchanan's Poetic Achievement," *George Buchanan. Poet and Dramatist* (eds. P. Ford – R.P.H. Green) (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales 2009) 15.

words replacing “Buchanan” with “Kochanowski.” As Wilhelm Bruchnalski gracefully put it, the Polish poet’s work

captured the element of poetry in the Psalms as it has never been captured by Polish translators before or since. The suggestion of ardent faith and of calm security, based on the trust on divine mercy and power; the language of emotions to which all humans hearts respond; the wonderful majesty of the diction, abounding of splendid similes, metaphors or abstractions; the reach variety of the stanzaic forms employed; the purity of its Polish [...],¹⁹ all these merits of the version make it clear why it appealed at once to the whole nation and has not lost its sway over hearts even in our own day.²⁰

The Polish poet expressed great admiration for Buchanan’s Psalm paraphrases in his epigram *Ad Buchananum* (*Foricinium* 68):

Solvisti cura et longo, Buchananane, labore
 Omnes qui vatum nomen habere student,
 Ne incassum certent Solymaei carmina regis
 Aptare ad Latiae fila canora lyrae;
 Nam quicumque opus hoc aggressi aliquando fuerunt,
 Tanto intervallo tu, Bucanane, praeis
 Omnibus, ut veniens aetas quoque non videatur
 Ereptura tuis hoc decus e manibus.²¹

Buchanan, you disembarassed everyone who aims to be a poet – you saved them from long labour. They may be spared the vain effort of modulating the songs of the King of Jerusalem to the songful Latin lyre – whoever undertook it, you surpass them all so far, Buchanan, that even the future era, it seems, is not able to tear this honour from your hands (trans. E.B.).

For Kochanowski, the Book of Psalms, filled with intimate *dialogues of the soul with God*, was obviously a kind of prayer-book, as it still is today. But it was also a collection of poems which are purely lyrical, expressing the full spectrum of human emotions encoded in the songs of David: from sin and rebellion, through penitence and supplication, to trust and praise of God,²² from euphoria to faintness, fear, almost desperation.²³ For that reason, the Psalter was so important to John Calvin, who wrote the following in the preface to his Commentary on the Book of Psalms:

Librum hunc non abs re vocare soleo ἀνατομῆν omnium animae partium, quando nullum in se affectum quisquam reperiet, cuius in hoc speculo non reluceat imago. Immo omnes hic dolores, tristitias, metus,

19 The author mentions also “the freedom from any classical reminiscences,” but it is not true.

20 Bruchnalski, “Jan Kochanowski,” 69.

21 I. Cochranovius, *Elegiarum libri IV, eiusdem Foricoenia sive Epigrammatum libellus* (Kraków: Drukarnia Łazarzowa 1584) 152–153.

22 Pelc, *Jan Kochanowski*, 407.

23 E. Buszewicz, “Psalterz Dawidów,” *Lektury polonistyczne. Jan Kochanowski* (ed. A. Gorzkowski) (Kraków: Universitas 2001) 34.

dubitationes, spes, curas, anxietates, turbulentos denique motus quibus iactari solent humanae mentes, Spiritus Sanctus ad vivum repraesentavit²⁴

I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, “An Anatomy of all Parts of the Soul”; for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short: all the distracting emotions with which human minds are wont to be agitated.²⁵

Although some suppose that Kochanowski followed Calvin’s commentary when translating the Psalms,²⁶ in my opinion, he rather found a similar approach in Buchanan, whose “David,” as reflected in his Psalm paraphrases, was not only a perfect poet, but also an Everyman. This is because Buchanan does not ignore the historical sense, but creates poems “applicable to contemporary Christians, and, indeed, a comfort to himself.”²⁷ In my opinion, Buchanan’s paraphrase permitted Kochanowski to consider the Psalm-poems as a universal mirror of the human mind, with a tendency towards high stylistic diction, comparable to Horatian odes, but more religiously oriented. The possibility of expressing so many various “movements of the soul,” so many nuances of feelings, seems particularly important to the humanist poet, ascribing great importance to the maxim “Know thyself.” The Renaissance poets, while imitating the Psalms, followed David as a wise man who explored the order of the world, and could be represented as a 16th century mature man with a long beard – as he actually is depicted on the frontispiece of the David’s Psalter, sitting in his chamber face to face with God and playing the harp.²⁸ But sometimes the lyrical “I” seems closer to a neo-stoic *homo honestus*, dealing rather with the conflicts between virtues and vices than between good deeds and sins.

This paper will try to demonstrate the intellectual and emotional space of Kochanowski’s Psalter and its polyphonic structure through an analysis of three Psalm-poems, namely Psalm 1 (*Beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum*), 19 (*Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei*) and 91 (*Qui habitat in adiutorio Altissimi*). Each of them represents a different way of translating. The first owes some solutions to Buchanan, but not many, while the second, on the contrary, is evidently inspired by his work. I am aware that the prose translation does not show Kochanowski’s lyrical mastery.²⁹ Psalm 91, however, thanks to the incomparable

24 I. Calvinus, *In Librum Psalmorum Commentarius* (Geneva: Estienne 1557) f.2r.

25 J. Calvin, *Writings of Pastoral Piety* (ed., trans. E.A. McKee) (New York – Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press 2001) 56.

26 Sanders, “Towards a Re-evaluation,” 436–445.

27 R. Green, “George Buchanan’s Psalm Paraphrases in European Context,” *Scotland in Europe* (eds. R.D.S. Jack – T. Hubbard) (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2006) 36.

28 K. Meller, “Wstęp [Introduction],” J. Kochanowski, *Psalterz Dawidów* (Kraków: Universitas 1997) 30.

29 Kochanowski’s influence on Polish poetry should also be considered in the context of versification. He made invaluable contributions to the development of regular syllabic verse. As Mieczysław Giergielewicz (*Introduction to Polish Versification* [Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press 1970] 21) puts it, “the enriched rhythmic polyphony of syllabic verse required more extensive consideration of all elements concerned and prevented a mechanical repetition of uniform verse patterns.” The richness of versification manifests itself most strongly in the *David’s Psalter*. One can see here the influence of Buchanan, whose lyricised (i.e. characterised by strophic variety) psalter was valued by the poet incomparably higher than the monotonous elegiac couplets

translation by Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa, will (hopefully) be more instructive for non-Polish readers.

Psalm 1, as an introductory one, is the key to the entire Book of Psalms. It presents two ways: of a blessed, righteous man and of a wicked one. Treated as a didactic poem, it contains a parenetic encouragement to be virtuous and wise. This is clearly demonstrated by the allegory of the path. In the Vulgate, it is written:

Beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum, et in via peccatorum non stetit, et in cathedra pestilentiae non sedit; ²sed in lege Domini voluntas eius, et in lege eius meditabitur die ac nocte. ³Et erit tamquam lignum quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum, quod fructum suum dabit in tempore suo: et folium eius non defluet; et omnia quaecumque faciet prosperabuntur. ⁴Non sic impii, non sic; sed tamquam pulvis quem proicit ventus a facie terrae. ⁵Ideo non resurgent impii in iudicio, neque peccatores in concilio iustorum: ⁶quoniam novit Dominus viam iustorum, et iter impiorum peribit.

Happy is the man who has not departed in the counsel of the wicked, has not taken a position in the way of sinners, and has not sat in the pestilence; but his will is in the law of the Lord, and he will meditate day and night. And he will be like a tree which has been planted near waters, which will give its fruit in season; and its leaves will not fall away; things that it does will be prosperous. Not so, not so are the wicked; but dust which the wind blows from the face of the earth. Therefore the wicked will not rise in the judgement, nor sinners in the council of the just. Because the Lord knows the way of the just; and the way of the wicked will perish.³⁰

If compared with some Latin and vernacular paraphrases of the Renaissance, the Vulgate version seems relatively brief. In Buchanan, the rendering of Psalm 1 is majestic, composed in hexameter which (as Green suggests) constitutes a “programmatic” dignified opening, intended to communicate that his Psalter was to contain a variety of metres, including untypical ones.³¹ Kochanowski, whose Psalm paraphrases are also composed in various lyrical metres, in a way follows this dignified opening of the whole collection, because he chooses an “epic” 13-syllable verse rhyming aabb, which is however broken into five four-line stanzas. Like Buchanan, Kochanowski begins his poem with an equivalent of *felix* instead of *beatus*. Both poets have in mind an image of a virtuous man guided and mastered by reason. Both expose the sensual imagery of the Psalm. Both underline that a human’s ethical decisions depend on discerning possibilities and following certain paths. Kochanowski amplifies the sacred text more harmoniously – almost always one stanza renders one Bible verse, while Buchanan follows the biblical account, but there is no regularity in the length of amplifications. The Psalm starts with a description of *beatus vir* which uses negative expressions. A “man who has not departed in the counsel of the wicked” does not accept (in his mind) any advice of the ungodly, that may make him *abire*, i.e. deviate from the right path.

of Hesus. However, these matters are difficult to explain to a reader who is not familiar with the Polish language. Thus, when analysing Kochanowski’s paraphrases, the article focuses mainly on an interplay of ideas and rhetorical figures.

30 R. Green, “Classical Voices in Buchanan’s Hexameter Psalm Paraphrases,” *Renaissance Studies* 18/1 [Special Issue: The Renaissance in the Celtic Countries] (2004) 85.

31 Green, “Classical Voices,” 87.

This allegory builds a climax: the righteous man does not *swerve* from his path of good and, consequently, does not *stay* on the path of evil, much less does it *sit* there, occupying a place devoted to the impious and sacrilegious.

In Buchanan, the image fills four hexameters:

Felix ille animi, quem non de tramite recto
impia sacrilegae flexit contagio turbae;
non iter erroris tenuit, sessorve cathedrae
pestiferae facilem dedit irrisoribus aurem.³²

Happy is he in mind, whom the wicked contagion of the sacrilegious crowd has not turned away from the right path; (who) has not held (to) the path of error, or, a sitter in the pestilent seat, given a ready ear to scoffers.³³

Kochanowski describes it in four lines as well:

Szcześliwy, który nie był między złymi w radzie,
Ani stóp swoich torem grzesznych ludzi kładzie,
Ani siadł na stolicy, gdzie tacy siadają,
Co sie z nauki zdrowej radzi naśmiewają³⁴

Happy the one, who did not remain in the council among the evil/ nor put his feet in the track of the sinners/ nor sat in the seat, where sit those/ who gladly mock the sane doctrine (trans. E.B.).

Buchanan reflects the climax *deviate – stood – sat* more consequentially. In Kochanowski, the allegory of the path seems obliterated at the beginning, but it is made much more concrete in the second line, where the sinners “map out” a track on which the virtuous man should not step. Kochanowski’s climax evokes, in fact, the same image: a wicked suggestion, walking on the path of evil and remaining on it. Contrarily, a righteous man does not listen to any wicked advice, and if by chance he has *set his foot* on the path of evil, he no longer walks it, and if he has nevertheless taken a few steps on it, he does not *sit* in this area. Both Buchanan and Kochanowski use the term *seat* of the wicked that can be correlated with the episcopal chair, which is more suggestive in Buchanan, who openly sympathised with the Reformation.³⁵ In Kochanowski, it is not as evident, because the same word (*stolica*) was used in the Catholic translation known as *Leopolda’s Bible* (1561). But in Buchanan it is also the same as in the Vulgate (*cathedra*).

The next Psalm verse describes the righteous man using positive expressions. Buchanan does it briefly in two hexameters:

32 Green, “Classical Voices,” 85.

33 Green, “Classical Voices,” 85.

34 J. Kochanowski, *Psalterz Dawidów* (Warszawa: PAX 1985) 3.

35 R. Green, “Poetic Psalm Paraphrases: Two Versions of Psalm 1 Compared,” *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Budapestinensis. Proceedings of the Thirteenth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies, Budapest, 6–12 August 2006* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies 2010) 226.

sed vitae rimatur iter melioris, et alta
mente dei leges noctesque diesque revolvit.³⁶

but he explores the path of the better life, and with profound mind ponders the laws of God day and night.³⁷

Kochanowski expands the description into a whole stanza. The last lines of it are devoted to a classical ornament:

Ale to jego umysł, to jego staranie,
Aby na wszystkim pełnił Pańskie przykazanie;
Dzień li po niebie wiedzie, noc li swoje konie,
On ustawicznie w Pańskim rozmyśla zakonie.

But his intention, his solicitation is/ to fulfill entirely Lord's Commandment./ Either day or night leads its horses in the sky,/ he meditates constantly on the Lord's Law (trans. E.B.).

The Polish poet evokes the chariots of the solar god Apollo or Aurora, representing the dawn (horses of the day), and of Diana, considered as the lunar goddess (horses of the night). He knew the analogical Latin images from some ancient Latin poets, e.g. from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (I 748–II 400), where the narrator tells the story of Phaeton who attempted to draw the chariot of his father Sun (Helios), or from Statius' *Thebaid* (II, 129: "lucis equi"); the "horses of the night" are mentioned in Ovid's *Amores* (I 13,40: "lente currite, noctis equi") and *Tristia* (I 3,28: "Lunaque nocturnos alta regebat equos"). Kochanowski himself used similar expressions in his Latin-language poetry, for example in the *Elegies* ("Surgunt occiduo cardine noctis equi," El III 11, 30).³⁸ The delicately classically imaged prepares the ground for the next description of the good man, which takes the form of a comparison. The Psalmist compares the righteous person to a tree planted by the water. Buchanan renders the comparison in almost four hexameters:

ille velut riguae quae margine consita ripae est
arbor erit; quam non violento Sirius aestu
exurit, non torret hiems; sed prodiga laeto
proventu beat agricolam;³⁹

He will be like a tree which has been planted on the edge of a well-watered bank; which the Dog-star with its violent heat does not parch, which winter does not wither; but prolific with its healthy produce it makes happy the farmer.⁴⁰

36 Green, "Classical Voices," 85f.

37 Green, "Classical Voices," 86.

38 Ioannes Cochanovius, *Elegiarum libri IV*, 85.

39 Green, "Classical Voices," 86.

40 Green, "Classical Voices," 86.

The Scottish humanist transformed the biblical imagery into a classical one. Comparing a man to a tree sounds here much more Horatian. A strong tree, not sensitive to either heat or cold, brings to mind a kind of Stoic *apatheia*. A religious perspective, however, is introduced by the metaphor *Deus Agricola* – God is viewed as a farmer “planting” humans. While the Vulgate version does not mention the owner of the tree, Buchanan seems to emphasise the teleology of human existence. Kochanowski adopts the teleological orientation, but reduces the Stoic metaphor and returns to the Vulgate version:

Taki podobien będzie drzewu porzecznemu,
Które przynosi co rok owoc panu swemu,
Liście nigdy nie tracąc, choć zła chwila przydzie;
Temu wszystko, co pocznie, na dobre wynidzie.

This one will be like a riverside tree,/ which bears fruit for the master every year,/ never losing leaves, even if a bad time comes;/ all he undertakes will produce good effects (trans. E.B.).

The Stoic character of the image is inscribed in the metaphor of the wind, understood as passion or an attack of the Fortune. The wind blows, the tree stands straight and its leaves do not fall. When a bad time comes, the righteous man does not lose his hope and is able to persevere under these conditions. Both Buchanan and Kochanowski construct an equivalent antithetic image (concerning the wicked man) in the next sections of their poems. Buchanan at first continues his allegory of the tree, presenting a fruitless one, and then creates an elaborate vision of a hurricane of passions, by which the sinners are swept like dust not only during a storm, but even a light blow:

[...] nec, flore caduco
arridens, blanda dominum spe lactat inanem.
non ita divini gens nescia foederis, exlex,
contemptrixque poli; subito sed turbine rapti
pulveris instar erunt, volucris quem concita gyro
aura levis torquet vacuo ludibria caelo.⁴¹

nor does it, smiling with (only) flowers that will die, cheat its unsuspecting master with flattering hopes. Not so the race ignorant of the divine covenant, (who are) lawless, despisers of heaven: but they will be like the dust caught in a sudden swirl, which the light breeze raised by a passing eddy whirls about like a plaything, in the empty sky.⁴²

Kochanowski concentrates on the abjectness and fruitlessness of the evil men who are not compared to the dust, like in the Vulgate and in Buchanan, but (according to the sense of the Hebrew original) to the chaff that lies on the ground, which is absolutely sterile and, as it weighs little, is easily carried away by the wind.

41 Green, “Classical Voices,” 86.

42 Green, “Classical Voices,” 86.

Ale źli, którzy Boga i wstydu nie znają,
Tego szczęścia, tej nigdy zapłaty nie mają:
Równi plewom, które się walają przy ziemi,
A wiatry, gdzie jedno chcą, wszędzie władną jemi.

But the evil, who do not know God nor decency/ never have such luck, such reward,/ equal to the chaff scattered on the ground,/ while the winds have power over them, as they please (trans. E.B.).

This stanza may testify that Kochanowski was also an attentive reader of Hessus' paraphrase, albeit he criticised it so eagerly. Hessus renders this verse:

Tam bona non capiet, non impius ista videbit
praemia: non tales talia dona decent,
Sed velut a terra paleae sparguntur inanes,
Quas quocunque volet quaelibet aura rapit⁴³

The impious one will not receive these goods, will not see these rewards; such gifts are not suitable for people like them. But they are spread as the sterile chaff, which any light wind sweeps away where it likes. (trans. E.B.).

In this case, Kochanowski takes the whole image from Hessus, adding a new tune to his polyphonic work. It is possible that he also drew inspiration from Hessus in the next stanza where, like the German poet,⁴⁴ he abandons the allegory of the path of life (which is not abandoned, on the contrary, by Buchanan):

Dla czego przed sądem być muszą pohańbieni
Ani w liczbie z dobrymi będą policzeni;
Pan bowiem sprawiedliwych na wszelki czas broni,
A przewrotne, złe ludzi cicha pomsta goni.

That is why they should be dishonoured in the judgement/ and should not be counted with the good,/ since the Lord defends the just every time,/ and the perverse, evil people are pursued by a silent vengeance (trans. E.B.).

As we can see, Kochanowski, when creating his vernacular Psalter, was inspired by Buchanan's elegant Latin, but was not slavishly following his solutions. His Psalm-poems contain many voices and express his own individuality. Yet in some Psalms, he is much closer to Buchanan, as evidenced in his Psalm 19. Of course, the poems differ metrically, since Buchanan has chosen the Alcaic stanza which can hardly have an equivalent in Polish.

43 E. Hessus, *Psalterium Davidis Carmine Redditum* (Leipzig: Steinman 1571) 2.

44 See Hessus, *Psalterium Davidis*, 2: "Ergo salutiferae nec stabit ordine turbae / Cum iusto reprobis nec sociandus erit. Novit enim Dominus iustos et vota piorum, / Quorum avida iustas percipit aure preces./ Sed cadet et poenas dabit impius omnis et horum / Omne quod instituent dissoluetur opus" ["Therefore he will not stay in line with the just people: the wicked one will be not associated with the righteous, because the Lord knows the righteous and the wishes of the pious, whose prayers He catches with eager ear. But every impious man will fall, and every work undertaken by them will fail"] (trans. E.B.).

Kochanowski has used the 11-syllable verse rhyming aabb, divided into 13 four-line stanzas. It begins as follows:

Głupia mądrości, rozumie szalony,
Gdyś na umyśle tak jest zaślepiony,
Że Boga nie znasz, tym cielesnym okiem,
Pojrzyż przynamniej po niebie szerokiem!

Jest kto, krom Boga, o kim byś rozumiał,
Żeby albo mógł, albo więc i umiał
Ten sklep zawiesić nieustanowiony,
Złotymi zewsząd gwiazdami natkniony?⁴⁵

O stupid wisdom, reason crazy!/ If you are so blind in your mind,/ that you do not know God, use your carnal eye/ at least, and look at the wide sky!/ Is there anyone, apart from God, who, according to your understanding,/ could have been able or have known/ to suspend this inconstant firmament/ interweaved everywhere with golden stars? (trans. E.B.).

As is well known, the incipit of this Psalm reads: *Coeli enarrant gloriam Dei*. Many English versions of it begin with “The heavens are telling the glory of God.”⁴⁶ However, Kochanowski’s opening of the same psalm is different and may seem confusing. But Buchanan had provided his Psalm with a similar “preface”:

Insanientis gens sapientiae,
addicta mentem erroribus impiis,
tot luce flammaram coruscum
cerne oculis animoque caelum:
hinc discite prudens quam fuit artifex,
qui templa olympi fornice flammeo
suspendit et terrae capacem
et pelagi sinuavit arcum⁴⁷

Look, you race of crazy wisdom, your minds in thrall to unholy error, behold with your eyes and minds the sky that glitters with the light of so many stars; and learn from this how intelligent was the creator who suspended the temples of Olympus in a fiery arch and shaped a circle which could contain the land and sea.⁴⁸

Buchanan’s opening oxymoron is taken from Horatian ode (*Carmina* I 34),⁴⁹ where the poet describes himself as a person who “used to worship the gods grudgingly and not often, a wanderer expert in crazy wisdom”/ “*parcus deorum cultor et infrequens*,” “*insanientis [...] sapientiae consultus*.”⁵⁰ Kochanowski follows Buchanan, but does not walk

⁴⁵ Kochanowski, *Psalterz Dawidów*, 26.

⁴⁶ Green, “The Heavens are Telling,” 81.

⁴⁷ Green, “The Heavens are Telling,” 76f.

⁴⁸ Green, “The Heavens are Telling,” 78.

⁴⁹ See detailed discussion in Green, “The Heavens are Telling.”

⁵⁰ Horace, *Odes I. Carpe diem. Text, Translation and Commentary* (ed., trans. D. West) (Oxford: Clarendon 1995) 160f.

in his footsteps and does not emphasise his Horatian allusions. Moreover, he seems to have created his poem as if in dialogue with the Scottish humanist (or even trying to surpass him). For instance, at the very beginning, instead of Buchanan's Horatian oxymoron, he employs two oxymorons combined in a chiasmic pattern: "O stupid wisdom, reason crazy!" Sometimes he follows some of Buchanan's sentences and logical constructions, and sometimes he does not. It is particularly visible when we compare Kochanowski's paraphrase of this Psalm to another, written by Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński – here the latter imitates many of Buchanan's constructions, evoking the "race of stupid wisdom," declaring that the world did not come into being by chance,⁵¹ arguing similarly that "not even is a barbarian race that inhabits faraway lands in remote places,"⁵² unaware of the constant law ruling the world⁵³ etc. Kochanowski omits many similar details. Sometimes he abandons Buchanan's way and returns to the Vulgate imagery.⁵⁴ However, there are some places in his Psalm-poem where he follows Buchanan step by step, charmed with the extraordinary harmony of his verse. Where Buchanan's paraphrase runs:

Dies tenebras, et tenebrae diem
Semper prementes perpetua vice⁵⁵

The day which presses hard on night, and the night which presses hard on day, in an unbroken succession,⁵⁶

Kochanowski composes a less Horatian but equally harmonious and symmetrical expression:

Dzień ustawicznie nocy naśladować,
Noc także dniowi wzajem ustępując [...] ⁵⁷

The day constantly following night, / The night mutually yielding to day [...] (trans. E.B.).

Continuing the same stanza, Buchanan states that by the vicissitude of night and day, the heavens "teach" us to acknowledge or "admonish" (*moment*) us for acknowledging God's existence,⁵⁸ while Kochanowski prefers to say that:

51 Buchanan: "tells us that the transitory world moves through space with a motion that is not random" (Green, "The Heavens are Telling," 78).

52 Green, "The Heavens are Telling," 78.

53 M. Sęp-Szarzyński, *Rytmu albo Wiersze polskie* (ed. P. Buchwald-Pelcowa) (Warszawa: Czytelnik 1978 [reprinted from 1601 Kraków edition]) A3r.-A4v.

54 See detailed study in J. Ziomek, "Wstęp [Introduction]," J. Kochanowski, *Psalterz Dawidów* (Wrocław: Ossolineum 1960) LIX-LXI.

55 Green, "The Heavens are Telling," 77.

56 Green, "The Heavens are Telling," 78.

57 Kochanowski, *Psalterz Dawidów*, 26.

58 "Non fortuito res caducas / Ire moment per inane lapsi" (Green, "The Heavens are Telling," 77); see translation above (n. 51).

Opatrzność Pańską jawnie wyznawają,
Toż i porządne nieba powiadają [...] ⁵⁹

Openly confess the Lord's Providence/ and the orderly heavens tell the same thing. (trans. E.B.).

In this way he evokes the Vulgate formula *caeli enarrant*. He draws on the Vulgate text also in the next stanza, where he focuses, like the Psalmist, on the absence of sound in the heavens' "speech," while Buchanan emphasises that God's voice is more efficient than human communication. ⁶⁰

One may notice that Psalm 19 is split into two sections: the first concerns the order and harmony of the world, and the second praises God's Law. Kochanowski's transition from one section to the other is an imitation of Buchanan's solution. While the latter says:

Sed ordo rerum et conspicuus decor
Non sic tumentum lumina detinent,
Divina ut arcanis habenis
Lex animos ad honesta flectit ⁶¹

But the good order and conspicuous beauty of the universe do not engross watching eyes so powerfully as the divine law steers minds with the guidance of its secret reins to what is honourable, ⁶²

Kochanowski echoes him in a slightly simplified way:

Ale porządek i ozdoba rzeczy
Nie tak za sobą ciągną wzrok człowieczy,
Jako pobożny zakon Pański snadnie
Duszę nawraca i myślami władnie.

But the good order and beauty of the universe/ are not so eye-catching to the human eye/ as the Lord's religious law easily/ converts the soul and rules the mind (trans. E.B.).

It is not difficult to notice a particular richness of this Psalm, which, rendered in verse form, creates some new possibilities of a poetic language that becomes hermeneutic; it helps generations of readers gain a broader and deeper vision of macrocosm and microcosm.

The last Psalm (91) to be examined here is still sung in Polish churches (although with some slight changes). It will be presented here in full, followed by Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa's English version. As the translator applies archaisms in her translation of Kochanowski's poetry, the English-speaking readers may have a similar experience to Polish people reading Kochanowski today. It will not, of course, be the same experience. But the translator's

⁵⁹ Kochanowski, *Psalterz Dawidów*, 26.

⁶⁰ Cf. Green, "The Heavens are Telling," 85.

⁶¹ Green, "The Heavens are Telling," 77.

⁶² Green, "The Heavens are Telling," 78.

intention is to convey to her recipients “an illusion similar to the one the recipients of original are able to draw in the original language.”⁶³ Kochanowski paraphrases the Psalm as follows:

Kto się w opiekę poda Panu swemu
A całym prawie sercem ufa Jemu,
Śmieie rzec może: „Mam obrońcę Boga,
Nie będzie u mnie straszna żadna trwoga.”

Ciebie on z łowczych obierzy wyzuje
I w zaraźliwym powietrzu ratuje;
W cieniu swych skrzydeł zachowa cię wiecznie,
Pod Jego pióry ulęziesz bezpiecznie.

Stateczność Jego tarcz i puklerz mocny,
Za którym stojąc na żaden strach nocny,
Na żadną trwogę ani dbaj na strzały,
Którymi sieje przygoda w dzień biały.

Stąd wedla ciebie tysiąc głów polęże,
Stąd drugi tysiąc; ciebie nie dosięże
Miecz nieuchronny, a ty przedsię swymi
Oczyrna ujźrzesz pomstę nad grzesznymi.

Iżes rzekł Panu: „Tyś nadzieja moja”,
Iż Bóg nawyszy jest ucieczka twoja –
Nie dostąpi cię żadna zła przygoda
Ani się najdzie w domu twoim szkoda.

Aniołom swoim każe cię pilnować,
Gdziekolwiek stąpisz, którzy cię piastować
Na rękę będą, abys idąc drogą
Na ostry krzemień nie ugodził nogą.

Będziesz po żmijach bezpiecznie gniewliwych
I po padalcach deptał niecierpliwych;
Na lwa srogiego bez obrazy wsiędzisz
I na ogromnym smoku jeździć będziesz.

Śluchaj, co mówi Pan: „Iż mię miłuje,
A przeciwko mnie szczerze postępuje –
Ja go też także w jego każdą trwogę
Nie zapamiętam i owszem wspomogę.

Głos jego u mnie nie będzie wzgardzony,
Ja z nim w przygodzie; ode mnie obrony
Niech pewien będzie, pewien i zacności,

63 T. Bałuk-Ulewiczowa, “A Brief Essay on Translation (To Those Who Do Not Believe in the Art of Archaism in Translation),” J. Kochanowski, *Kto mi dał skrzydła. Who Hath Bewinged Me* (trans. T. Bałuk-Ulewiczowa) (Kraków: Collegium Columbinum 2000) 109.

I lat szedziwych, i mej życzliwości!”⁶⁴

Whoso to the safety shall of his Lord retire,
And in Him putteth all his trust entire,
Boldly may say, “God be my defender,
“To no great peril shall I my soul surrender.”

He shall thee rescue from the hunter’s snare
And surely spare thee from the plaguèd air;
In His wings’ shadow He shall keep thee ever
Securely nestled in His sacred feathers.

Thy shield be His constance, and thy buckler mighty,
Guarding thee safely ‘gainst all terror nightly;
The venomèd arrows need thou never fear
Wherewith ill fortune the bland air doth shear.

Thus, when around thee lie thousand heads a-severed
And yet more tumble, then shalt thou never
Fall to the sword which shall justly let thee
Look on the vengeance wreaked upon the guilty.

“The Lord is my hope,” hast thou pledged rightly,
Thine only refuge be in God Almighty.
Thus shalt thou live then, safe from misadventure,
Over thy threshold no harm shall ever enter.

He shall send angels wherever thou shalt stray
To watch thee over and guide thee on thy way,
And as thou walkest, in their arms they’ll bear thee,
Lest thou perchance on sharp stone tread unwary.

Thou shalt walk safely through the viper’s nest
And vicious serpents⁶⁵ with thy foot shalt press;
The fierce lion for thy patient steed,
Thy mount the dragon,⁶⁶ who thy word shall heed.

List to the Lord: “He who Me loveth,
“And in all things My commandments doeth,
“Him shall I ever, in’s most anguished need
“Protect in danger, with assistance speed.”

“When he cries out, I shall always hear,
“Be by his side, in danger ever near.
“Him shall I safety and noble name accord,
“To reach old age, in the favour of his Lord.”⁶⁷

64 J. Kochanowski, *Kto mi dał skrzydła. Who Hath Bewinged Me* (trans. T. Bałuk-Ulewiczowa) (Kraków: Collegium Columbinum 2000) 64–67.

65 Although the Vulgate version has a *basilisk*, in Kochanowski we find the slowworm, which is a kind of lizard that is often mistaken for a venomous snake; the Polish word for it, *padalec*, derived probably from “podlec” (a wicked one).

66 The literal meaning of the Polish text is “a huge dragon.”

67 Kochanowski, *Kto mi dał skrzydła. Who Hath Bewinged Me*, 64–67.

Kochanowski does not make this Psalm-poem “Horatian” nor “Buchananian,” nor clothed in any classical garb. It is possible to find a few sentences in it which do reflect Buchanan’s solutions to some extent. The Scottish poet begins with “Si protegendam praesidio Dei / credas salutem, rem, sobolem, domum/ [...] securus tumultum/ despicias creperi duelli”⁶⁸ – “If you entrust your safety, your property, your progeny and your home to God’s protection, you may securely contempt any muddle of uncertain war” (trans. E.B.). Kochanowski employs the second-person address later than Buchanan does, and his strategy is more generalising: *whoever* entrusts *himself* to the Lord may be free from *every* fear. Kochanowski’s Psalm owes some expressions to Hesus’ paraphrase, for instance: “Śmieie rzec może” [“Boldly may say”], “całym prawie sercem ufa Jemu” [“in Him putteth all his trust entire”],⁶⁹ while others come directly from the Vulgate: “Ja z nim w przygodzie” [“Be by his side, in danger ever near”]. But the poet, following the sacred text, provides it with a very suggestive rhetorical repertoire. Although all the dangers which may await the Psalmist (e.g. a fowler’s snare, pestilence, enemies, vipers, basilisks, lions, dragons) are to be understood allegorically (according to the Hebrew commentators as well as the Church Fathers), Kochanowski materialises them.

A God’s man represented in his Psalm-poem seems similar to a fearless and invincible knight-hero of medieval romances (although he became one by taking refuge, as a little bird, under the shadow of the Almighty’s wings). This perhaps evoked knightly traditions of the Polish gentry and sounded pleasant to their ears. While the Psalmist says: “You shall tread upon the asp and basilisk, you shall trample underfoot the lion and the dragon,”⁷⁰ Kochanowski’s hero not only steps on the snakes, but also mounts a *fierce* lion and *huge* dragon. Hyperbolic as it was, the battle image (“when around thee lie thousand heads a-severed/ And yet more tumble”) evoked the reality that was familiar to the Polish gentry. The poet intensifies the heroic tone by enriching the poem with many epithets. The vipers are irascible, the slowworms – impatient, the stone – sharp, the air – bright. In this Psalm, it is the only way of subtle “classicismation.” As David Welsh points out, Kochanowski used many forms of epithets in his Psalter: he uses a far wider range of them than anywhere else in his poems.⁷¹ He supplies his own epithets, as demonstrated in connection with Psalm 91, and also creates some new forms, especially compound epithets, such as “great-eyed fear” (*strach wielkooki*), “wind-legged horse” (*koń wiatronogi*); he also uses negative epithets, mostly applied to God, who is “infinite,” “immeasurable,” “unconquered,” “immortal,” “uncreated” etc.⁷² This way of expression enriches knowledge of divine and human things.

68 G. Buchanan, *Paraphrasis Psalmorum Davidis Poetica* (Glasgow: Gillies 1790) 155.

69 Cf. Hesus, *Psalterium Davidis*, 253. We find “Śmieie rzec może” (“Boldly may say”) also in Jakub Lubelczyk (*Psalterz i kancjonal z melodiami drukowany w 1558 roku. Polish Psalter and Hymnbook with Melodies, Printed in 1558* [eds. J. Gruchała – P. Poźniak] [Kraków: Musica Iagellonica 2010] 246), which may mean that Kochanowski could have known this paraphrase, given that during his studies abroad and sometime after he showed sympathy for the reform, one of his patrons was Mikołaj Radziwiłł the Black, a protector of reformed faith.

70 Vulgata: “Super aspidem et basiliscum ambulabis, et conculcabis leonem et draconem.”

71 Welsh, “Kochanowski’s ‘Songs of the City of God’” 49.

72 Cf. Welsh, “Kochanowski’s ‘Songs of the City of God,’” 47–48.

Now it seems obvious that “The task of today’s historian of literature must above all be to portray the Psalter as a work of huge significance for Polish Renaissance poetry, a pioneering work for the development of Polish lyrical language, a model that shaped Renaissance Classicism. We should accept without question the view that the Psalter is the most outstanding work of Renaissance lyric poetry in the Polish language. No other work can compare with it in terms of its multiplicity of poetic personae, the scale of the emotions and emotional tonalities it expresses.”⁷³ Therefore, it does not seem to be an exaggeration to say that Kochanowski’s Psalter is more than a religious and pious work. Not only was it sung in Roman Catholic and Reformed churches, but it also made (in certain sense) Polish poetic language more capable of expressing the most varied and deepest human feelings, and thereby opened the minds of readers to new ways of understanding the world and became a milestone in the history of Polish poetry.

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⁷³ Karpiński, “Renaissance,” 57.

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