

# PATRIOTYZM A LITERATURA

IWONA MACIEJEWSKA

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8165-502X>

Faculty of Humanities, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn

## Wacław Potocki's Understanding of Patriotism

### Wacława Potockiego rozumienie patriotyzmu

**Słowa kluczowe:** Wacław Potocki, patriotyzm, obywatelskość, XVII wiek**Key words:** Wacław Potocki, patriotism, good citizenship, 17<sup>th</sup> century

This year's celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Poland regaining its independence was abundant in a number of events to recall and commemorate the circumstances surrounding the recovery of sovereignty after the long night of the Partitions. Many lofty words were spoken on this occasion, praising the patriotism and heroic deeds of our ancestors. However, this choir of proud voices very rarely engaged with any deeper reflection on the causes of the dramatic fall of the First Republic of Poland, the independence of which was finally annihilated by our neighbours in 1795, taking advantage of the crisis of Polish statehood, which worsened for decades. Thus, the work of destruction, which a century later was anticipated with great concern by the Baroque poet, Wacław Potocki, was finally completed. In the evening of his life (he died in 1796, also the year of the death of King John III Sobieski, whom he greatly admired), the author of *Wojny chocimskiej* [*The Chocim War*] saw the future situation of his homeland as doom and gloom, almost obsessively repeating the same warnings. As Claude Backvis, a Slavonic scholar from Belgium observes, the poet from the village of Łuzna in the Podkarpacie region, "with age, and as his homeland declined, became more and more violent" in his judgements (Backvis 2003a: 348), being at the same aware, like an old dog whose whining was ignored, that he was calling for vigilance and reaction in vain, as is accurately expressed in the lines summarizing the poem *Dokola wszystko chodzi* [*Everything is Going on Around*] included in the *Moralia* volume:

Wolno gardzić starego szlachcica przestrogą,  
który nie mając dzieci, jedną w grobie nogą

[You can disdain the warning of an old nobleman,  
with no children and one foot in the grave]  
(Potocki 1987c: 48)

The pessimism accompanying the poet's late works was undoubtedly related to his personal experience, his loneliness after the death of three adult children and his beloved wife, Katarzyna from the Morsztyn family, many years of trouble related to the accusation of crypto-Arianism, preceded with a dramatic choice between leaving the country or conversion (Budzyk 1953: 314–321). However, a bitter tone, so strongly manifested in numerous works by Potocki, was most probably not only a reflection of his life experience but also resulted from the growing conviction about the fatal condition of the Republic of Poland. A huge (more than 300,000 lines) collection of the poet's works is filled with remarks concerning problems of the state, which clearly demonstrates the author's involvement in commenting on the defects posing a threat to the homeland, as he saw it, and suggesting potential ways to improve the situation. The studies discussing his literary output – although his monograph has not yet been published, perhaps due to difficulties posed to researchers by his huge legacy (Czechowicz 2008: 9–12) – Potocki is referred to as a zealous patriot (see e.g. Bobek 1929: 12), also in those cases when individual authors notice the one-sidedness of his views and perception of reality primarily from the perspective of the privileged gentry. A true representative of this social group, convinced of the legitimacy of its dominant position, conservative in his views, condemning the so-called new nobility buying or falsifying family titles, was also time very critical towards the social class to which he belonged (Baczewski 2009: 189–196). Backvis emphasizes that Potocki “to some extent diverged from his environment with the severity of moral requirements and astute realism” (Backvis 2003b: 192) and this is what determines the value of his poetic voice, as “Where he is able to reach the truth, he unquestionably sails against the current, particularly when it is about exposing the generally accepted sophism of the social class, of which he was so proud to be a member, after all” (ibid: 344).

The problems of the homeland troubling the author were addressed in works representing various genres, as well as in those in which the reader generally did not accept such content. His rhymed love stories are a good example of this, containing – besides the love-and-adventure plot – extensive digressions full of remarks about the conditions necessary for the proper functioning of the state and critical of its all shortcomings. Potocki was an ardent and tireless moralist, who did not miss any opportunity to address the issues that were important to him. *Argenida*, a modification of the Latin romance by John Barclay, a Scottish writer, provides a notable example. The original text described, under the cover of the fate of characters living in unspecified time period, the political conflicts between France, England and Spain during the French religious wars in the 16<sup>th</sup> century

(Bobek 1929: 8), but the poet from Łużna also made it a commentary on the Polish situation, in which the author significantly expanded his narrative reflection, discussing all issues important from the perspective of the First Republic of Poland. In 1929, Władysław Bobek analysed the relationship between the source text and the version by Potocki, describing the method applied by the Polish author in the following words:

And when [...] a detail strongly touches his heart and makes it strongly resonate, he forgets about Barklay and all his Sicilians, seeing only contemporary relationships in his own homeland, and apparently not mentioning that, transfers the Polish reality into the translated novel; speaking freely at those moments and adding entire sections absent from Barklay's story (Bobek 1929: 14–15).

The above-described technique is the reason why in this romance story about affectionate love, kidnapping, duels, betrayals, etc. taking place far from our homeland, the reader can find extended passages discussing the numerous ills of 17<sup>th</sup> century Poland. As the above-mentioned researcher observes, the Baroque poet in his *Argenida*

[...] condemned [...] the election with its anarchy, *liberum veto* and breaking of the parliamentary session, demonstrated the weakness of the royal power, refuted false opinions of the gentry, who left the king to his own forces and measures, but he also did not spare the king. He opposed lifetime offices, luxuries, waste and hypocrisy at the royal court; fulminated about idlers, “galantomes”, flatterers and parasites, pointed out domesticity, sluggishness, indolence, lack of the knightly spirit, and – just like in *The Chocim War* – often compared today's dwarfs – “Pigmies” with former giants – heroes, pointing out with sadness what it used to be like “once and today” (Bobek 1929: 47).

This voice resounded even more strongly in the epic story of the Chocim Battle of 1621, mentioned by Bobek, where Potocki with crushing consequence, in numerous digressions incrusting the narration of past heroic events, pointed out to the dwarfs of his times, i.e. the confreres of the 1670s, all sins committed against his homeland, which was growing weaker year by year. Although in the story describing the times of the first Chocim battle, in his sense of writer's honesty and declared faithfulness to the truth, he was not uncritical in his assessments of the described events (Kaczmarek 1982: 50), although he saw the heroes of the past as demigods deserving gratitude for their patriotic dedication.

How was patriotism seen by the poet from Podkarpacie? In order to understand this, it is worth recalling a recent statement by Michał Rusinek in an interview concerning his latest book *Jaki znak Twój. Wierszyki na 100 dalszych lat niepodległości* [*What is Your Symbol? Rhymes for the Next 100 Years of Independence*]. The author stated that he was inspired to re-examine the famous

poem by Władysław Bełza by the words of Adam Hanuszkiewicz, who once said that:

... patriotism should be mentioned only during a war, occupation or partitions, i.e. when the nation fights for its freedom and independence. However, when the time of freedom and sovereignty comes, in his opinion, the sword should be sheathed and hung over the bed, and the term ‘patriotism’ should be changed into ‘citizenship’ (Rusinek 2018, online).

The analysis of Potocki’s rich literary output demonstrates that his vision of patriotism combines both of the attitudes mentioned by Hanuszkiewicz, which is reflected, among others, in various works from two huge collections unpublished during the poet’s life: *Ogród nie plewiony* [*Unweeded Garden*] and *Moralia*. On the one hand, in times of dramatic armed struggle, in which the author participated himself<sup>1</sup> and lost, as a result, his beloved son Stefan<sup>2</sup>, he firmly demanded that the gentry should be involved in the fight for defending the Republic surrounded by external enemies. For him, nobility was a privilege that should be paid for with blood and a heroic attitude in the battlefield (Baczewski 2009: 192). Let us recall that the 17<sup>th</sup> century was a time of recurring conflicts with Moscow, Swedes, Cossacks, Turks supported by Tartars, and with Rakoczy, which clearly showed the weakness of a territorially vast country, additionally beset by internal rebellions and disputes. In the poem *Dom gore, a gospodarz na kominie ogień kładzie* [*The House is on Fire and the Host is Kindling the Fireplace*], the author summarizes those dramatic times with a laconic, but telling statement:

Wojna pięćdziesiąt lat nie ustaje blisko:  
Gdzie pojrzysz, nic nie widać prócz pogorzeliśko.

[The war has been continued for almost fifty years:  
Where you look, nothing can be seen but the ashes.]  
(P 1987c: 309<sup>3</sup>)

The slowly growing crisis was fully revealed by Chmielnicki’s uprising started in 1648, which resulted in, among others, spectacular defeats of the Polish army at Korsuń, Żółte Wody and Piławce<sup>4</sup>. Their dramatic resonance was not overshadow-

<sup>1</sup> The reference here is made to participation in the battle of Beresteczko or two-year campaigns during the Swedish deluge, when after a short episode related to the involvement of Arians from Łuzna on the side of the Protestant invaders, Potocki set up an armed squad with his own funds and commanded it for two years, removing the enemy troops from Poland (Budzyk 1953: 317; Pizun 2000: 75–77).

<sup>2</sup> Stefan died of exhaustion in 1673 after the victorious battle of Chocim (Budzyk 1953: 314).

<sup>3</sup> All quotations from Waclaw Potocki’s works originate from the 1987 publication, edited by Leszek Kukulski. In the bracket after the given fragment, I use the abbreviation “P” and the date with a relevant letter a, b or c, corresponding to a given volume.

<sup>4</sup> This last defeat, ended with our troops fleeing in panic, was described by Łukasz Opaliński in his satirical piece *Coś nowego* [*Something New*]. Potocki wrote many times about this disgraceful

owed with the victory at Beresteczko in 1651, the battle in which Potocki participated. Shortly afterwards, Poland experienced the years of the Swedish deluge – the war fought this time, not at the borders of this vast country, but a regular, destructive occupation of huge areas of the Republic of Poland. It is not possible to describe here all events fraught with consequences, witnessed by the poet through the years. In fact, when reading his abundant literary output, we can find numerous references to territorial losses suffered<sup>5</sup> or threats of the neighbouring countries. The treats that were becoming more and more difficult to overcome, as, in the opinion of Potocki, his homeland, unfortunately, lost its defensive ability, which is mentioned, among others in the poem *Racjami, nie rogami na toż trzeci raz* [*With Reasons, Not Horns, on the Same the Third Time*]:

Miała kiedyś i Polska, miała, mówię, rogi:  
Nie był niedźwiedź północny, wschodni jej lew srogi  
[.....]

[Also Poland had once, I say, horns:  
It was not the north bear; it was a fierce eastern lion]

And now

Dziury, gdzie były rogi, i próżne ich znaki,  
W których łagną ostatki gryzące robaki,  
Te przeda za pieniądze, drugich gwałtem strada.  
Nie lew, nie niedźwiedź, nie pies, królik jej dojada.

[Holes where the horns used to be, and their useless signs,  
where the worms breed, eating the leftovers,  
Some are bought with money, others lost for fear  
Not a lion, a bear, a dog but a rabbit is gnawing at it.]  
(Potocki 1987c: 230)

The poet blames this situation not only on people from lower classes entering the gentry, but also on the dramatic disappearance of the fighting spirit among effeminate noblemen, who as in the poem *Domator nie mógł wspomnieć, jako Turków*

defeat, among others, in the poem titled *Z okazji ucieczki sromotnej piławieckiej* [*On the Occasion of the Ingnominious Piławce Flight*].

<sup>5</sup> For instance, in the poem *Na toż piąty raz* [*Gdzie rządzców siłę, rządu mało*] [*On the Same the Fifth Time (Where Officials are Numerous, There is Nobody to Rule)*].

Moskwa Kijów z Zadnieprzem, wziął Turczyn Wołochy,  
Szwed Rygę, Niemiec Prusy. Broń królu tej trochy  
[.....]

[Moscow – Kiev with the left bank of the Dnieper, the Turk took Wołochy,  
The Swede – Riga, the German – Prussia. Defend this little bit, our King.]  
(P 1987c: 193)

zowią [*The Home Bird Was Not Able to Recall the Turkish Name*] (P 1987b: 558), focus only on their own farmsteads and safe life, while the south-eastern peripheries endangered with attacks are for them a completely distant and unknown issue. The poet in the poem *Do domatora* [*To the Home Bird*] puts forward a radical demand:

[...] kto nie stawał w szyku,  
niech nie ma szlacheckiego głosu na sejmiku.

[[...] who never stood in formation,  
should not have a noble vote in parliament.]  
(P 1987b: 588)

Worse still, his gentry confreres not only fail to offer the blood sacrifice for their privileged position but additionally they do not pay, just like all others, “who don’t even dream about the war” (Potocki 1987c: 309), to maintain starving soldiers. Potocki goes on the particularly fierce attack on the richest social group, aristocracy, “dwarfed disgrace of glorious ancestors”, a telling example of which include the works *Braterska admonicja do Ichmościów Wielmożnych Panów braci starszych* [*Brotherly Admonition to Their Lordships Elderly Brothers*] (P 1987c: 153) or *Do panów* [*To the Lords*] (P 1987a: 313–314). Although the poet, brought up in Arianism, associated the war with the worst evil, as the one which “ludzi nie rodzi” [“does not give birth to people”] (P 1987c: 14), yet facing the need to defend the endangered sovereignty, a true patriot must serve the homeland with actions, and God will recognize anyway “Kto swą napaścią, a kto umiera w obronie” [“Who in his attack, and who in his defence dies”].

Apart from the calls for the knightly involvement, formulated in many ways, the poet from Łuzna equally often builds a vision of patriotism as a civil attitude, consisting in taking care of the common good and due performance of tasks strengthening the body of the state, in the manner proper for a given social class. In his opinion, civic obligations stem from the dignity of the participant of collective life, demanding that individual reasons should be subordinated to the common good (Kotarska 1998: 94). As a conservative and traditionalist, he does not imagine a change in the social structure, but rather, unfortunately quite naively, expects that everyone will curb their appetites in the name of higher reasons. The poet is perfectly aware that the social order is defective, and the body of the homeland (e.g. in the poem *Siedm części Rzeczypospolitej* [*Seven Parts of the Republic*], P 1987b: 346–347) is sick for the excessive growth of some organs, and consequently, he keeps calling for improvement of this situation (e.g. in the work *Dokoła wszystko chodzi* [*Everything is Going on Around*], P 1987c: 48–49).

The poet applies very diverse literary concepts for expressing the problems bothering him, as if the author was constantly looking for the most adequate and effective means of expression. Therefore, *Ogród nie plewiony* or *Moralia*

includes an entire series of poems with the subtitle featuring the phrase „na toż” [“on the same”] a second, third, fifth or even an eighth time. Such a variation treatment of a topic is also typical for another leading poet of the Polish Baroque, Jan Andrzej Morsztyn, although in his case it results from the intention to demonstrate his virtuosity and conceptual ingenuity (Fałęcka 1977: 163). In Potocki, it is rather a demonstration of topics obsessively recurring in his head, triggered by his genuine concern for the fate of the weakening homeland, as well from his inherent garrulousness, verbosity and tendency to use repetitions. This shortcoming of *Wojna chocimska* [*The Chocim War*] is observed, among others, by Backvis, who calculated that in the epic – otherwise admired by the researcher – “digressions” condemning the decline of morality and civic virtues among the gentry take 717 lines, which is laconically, yet accurately evaluated by the researcher as “Co za dużo to niezdrowo!” [“Enough is enough”!] (Backvis 2003b: 185).

Although elaboration of the same topics over and over again can be tedious and annoying, it should be stated that Potocki in his patriotic reflections sought new images, apart from conventional and well-established ones, which through their ingenuity and originality could exert a higher impact on the potential reader. On the one hand, his poems include, e.g. popular allegories of the state as a house “undermined on every side, burning and changing into ashes [...]” (Krawiec-Złotkowska 2009: 34), but also a ship or boat (Borkowski 2011: 277–278) which is a potential catastrophe for all passengers:

Zerwałeś sejm, kiedyć to bez kary uchodzi.  
Abo nie wiesz, że i sam na tej pływasz łodzi,  
Którą wszystkim ojczyzna? Bezećny wyrodku!  
I ty zginiesz, dziurę w niej zrobiwszy ze spodku.  
Będziesz się chwycił deski, ale już po czasie,  
Oślepek wzięwszy tyle dusz chrześcijańskich na się.

[You broke the Sejm session, when does it go unpunished?  
Don't you know that you are also in the same boat,  
The homeland to everybody? You abominable disgrace!  
And you will also die, making a hole in the bottom.  
You will try to grab the board, but too late,  
Blindly taking upon you so many Christian souls.]

(P 1987c: 106)

On the other hand, there also appears an image of the homeland as “mężnej dziewoi sarmackiego rodu bogini” [“brave maiden, the goddess from the Sarmatian family”], sighing heavily after disgraceful treaties with the Turks (P 1987b: 10), or the image of lost fertile Ukrainian land, “wszech żołnierzy matki” [“mother of all soldiers”] (P 1987b: 12). Also, certain associations far from solemnity can be

found, like this one below, where the homeland is compared to a broom. This unusual idea is used by the poet to repeat his opinions known also from other texts:

Póki każdy z osobna leży z brzozy rzniętem  
 Dla złych ludzi karania, pręt zowiemy prętem;  
 Ale skoro ich w kupę kilkadziesiąt złoży,  
 Aż miotła, która z śmieci cały dom chędoży.  
 Jednak jeżeli znowu rozsypie się drobno,  
 Traci przezwisko miotły każdy pręt osobno,  
 I ni nacz się nie godzi, tylko w piec, bo suchy,  
 Abo więc wszywe trzepać kuśnierzom kozuchy.  
 Ludzie są pręty miastom; wsi, powiaty, miasta  
 Pospolitej rzeczy. Z tych jedno ciało zrasta  
 I w jedną miotłę, która, cokolwiek ją szpeci,  
 Wszelkich grzechów plugawe precz wymiata śmieci.  
 [.....]  
 Choćby żelazne, jakie widzimy u kotła,  
 Stargają się obręczy i rozsypie miotła.  
 O, jakoż tego blisko! Kto ma oczy, przyzna,  
 Że się wkrótce i nasza rozsypie ojczyzna.

[When each one lies separately, cut from a birch tree  
 For punishing bad people, a rod is called a rod;  
 But when they are put together in dozens,  
 They form a broom which cleans the house from garbage.  
 However, if it falls apart again,  
 It loses its broom name, every rod alone,  
 Can be used for nothing but into the oven, as dry wood,  
 Or for furriers to beat lousy sheepskin coats.  
 People are the rods for towns; villages, districts, towns  
 Of the common republic. From these, one body grows into one broom,  
 Which, when anything impairs his looks,  
 Sweeps away all filthy sins rubbish.  
 [.....]  
 Even iron hoops, as those in the boiler,  
 Can wear out, and the broom will go to pieces.  
 Oh, how close it is! Whoever has eyes will admit it,  
 That soon also our homeland will fall apart.]  
 (P 1987c: 29)

More than one hundred years earlier, Jan Kochanowski in his *Zgoda* [*Concord*] wrote about internal conflicts as the potential source of danger, when the vision of the partitions was not even looming on the horizon, stating accurately and with foresight:



Kiedy przyjdzie niezgoda, uniżą się mury  
I wnidzie nieprzyjaciel nie szukając dziury.

[When the discord comes, the walls will lower  
And the enemy will enter, without looking for a hole.]  
(Kochanowski 1989: 49)

The image constructed by Potocki renders precisely the same truth but reaching for prosaic associations derived from the rural household, which must be tidied up. In the poem *Dokola wszystko chodzi* [*Everything is Going on Around*], the poet refers in turn to cycles observed in nature, which cannot be seen in Poland, where collected taxes are not spent on payment for soldiers defending the homeland, yet, after all, the soldier is properly compensated for his service:

[...] jeśli się z bogacił,  
Jeśli kupił wieś, będzie z niej żołnierzom płacił;  
Nie ma za co wsi kupić? Za chleb rolnikowi,  
Za rynsztunek je znowu da rzemieślnikowi;  
A ci, jako dodaje rzece wody morze,  
Znowu je żołnierzowi oddają w poborze.

[[...] if he got rich,  
If he bought a village, he would use it to pay soldiers;  
Not enough to buy a village? He will pay the farmer for bread,  
For the fighting gear he will pay the craftsman;  
And they, like the sea gives water to the river,  
Will repay again it to the soldier in conscription.]

However, in the opinion of a watchful observer:

Inaczej dziś z pieniędzmi, niż się dzieje z wodą,  
Kędy ją na swe koła prywatni rozwiodą:

[Today it's different with money than the case with water,  
When individuals take it on their private wheels:]

Thus the urgent appeal:

Postrzeżcie się Polacy! Mówię po sto raz:  
Porzucajcie prywatne na swej rzece jazy,  
Nim wyschnie, nim odejdzie waszej łodzie na dnie,  
Niech każdy swoim żyje, publiki nie kradnie.

[Beware the Poles! I say that one hundred times:  
 Remove your private weirs from the river,  
 Before it dries out, before it leaves your boat at the bottom,  
 Everyone should live on his own, without stealing from the public.]  
 (P 1987c: 49)

The realism of the language and association of the poet from Łuzna is often emphasized by researchers, proving that the strength of his moralistic argument lies, among others, in applying commonly functioning paremia and phraseologisms (Brückner 1920: 12; Kukulski 1962: 5–68; Kaczmarek 1982: 94–127). Additionally, the author did not refrain from using vulgarisms<sup>6</sup>, carried away by emotions, in describing phenomena he did not accept. This true representative of the Polish gentry quite frequently included in his works xenophobic remarks concerning other nations (Dybek 1998: 21–37), and his conservative views made him look with strong aversion e.g. at foreign trips of noble or aristocratic sons, or love for foreign fashion. A clear example of such poetic indignation is the poem *Zły to ptak, co swoje gniazdo maże* [*It Is a Bad Bird which Fouls Its Own Nest*]:

Złych ptaków, a dopieroż takich zowią ludzi,  
 Co swe gniazdo, w którym się urodził, paskudzi,  
 Dom, krewnych, parantełę, nawet i ojczyznę,  
 Włokąc nową lub starą odnawiając bliźnę;  
 Choć ci nie masz, przejrzawszy wszech stanów szeregi,  
 Żeby miał być bez jakiej dom szlachecki piegi.  
 Stąd przypowieść urosła, całym głośna światem:  
 Ani mi kurwa siostrą, ani złodziej bratem.  
 Co do ojczyzny, nikt jej nie lży, jak ten, który  
 Wyzuwszy się z jej stroju, chce wyzuć z natury.  
 Jawnie to pokazuje, jako jej nie kocha  
 I że w niej z musu mieszka, przetworzywszy w Włocha.

[Bad birds, the name used for people,  
 Who foul their nest where they were born,  
 Their home, family, relatives and even the homeland,  
 Dragging a new scar or renewing an old one;  
 Although, having looked over all ranks and classes,  
 You can't find any noble house without any flaws.  
 Hence a parable comes up, famous all over the world:  
 That a whore is not a sister to me or a thief a brother.  
 As to the homeland, nobody abuses it more than the one  
 Who having rejected its clothes, wants to reject its nature.

<sup>6</sup> In his paper (considered classic today), defining the features of the Baroque style, Wiktor Weintraub points out the breaking the canon of the poetic language e.g. by the use of vulgarisms, referring to the example of Potocki (Weintraub 1977: 79).

He clearly demonstrates that he does not love it,  
And converted into an Italian, is forced to live here.]  
(P 1987c: 35)

Crude terms used in the above texts are not an exception, but at the same time, they are not a rule typical for the poetic style of Potocki, who discussed homeland issues using both a sharp invective and a sublime or moving language. It is not possible to characterize in one paper the multitude of images or topics present in his rich literary output, undertaken by the Baroque poet in his moralistic argument inspired by patriotic reasons. It should be remembered that he did not publish his most outstanding works during his lifetime, which leads to the conclusion that he probably did not believe too much in their causative power. Aleksander Brückner, who greatly contributed to the popularisation of Wacław Potocki's works, claimed that the poet was prevented from printing by his awareness of the radicalism present in his critical judgements. According to the researcher, the works of the author of *Wojna chocimska* had no chance of being accepted even after his death, particularly in the House of Wettin period, when the degradation of the state reached its peak. They should be published during the reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski, when writers used their pens to save the country from the abyss, all the more so that in Brückner's opinion, e.g. the latest "*Moralia* feature [...] a truly civic, patriotic and Polish spirit, and the satires of Naruszewicz, Piotrowski or Krasicki, attacking softly and not right at the target, are not a match for them. This book could render a public service even eighty years after being written" (Brückner 1899: 269). However, it was not the case, and the manuscripts of his major works, preserved by a lucky chance, remained at that time hidden in a drawer. Discovered as late as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they provided a testimony to the deep patriotism of the poet, who despite the belief expressed in numerous works about the futility of his mission, did not stop, until the last moments of his life, calling for improvement and a change in the attitudes dragging his beloved homeland into the abyss. His critical judgement of human values did not allow him to accept the passivity of an individual, which is the reason why the ideas of constant struggle with human imperfections (also in the social and civic dimensions) frequently recur in his works, following popular Baroque models: *homo militans* and *miles Christianus* (Malicki 1980: 155–159; Kotarska 1998: 98; Krawiec-Złotkowska 2014: 77–89).

The question remains whether his critical attitude towards his compatriots and harshness of his judgements would make him a true patriot in the eyes of today's, often very radical, nationalist circles. The bitter and blunt opinions expressed by Wacław Potocki could be perceived as fouling his own nest and a manifestation of the lack of love for his homeland. This demonstrates the continued relevance of the discussion concerning the concept of patriotism, in which the voice of the poet from Łużna so forcibly resounded more than three hundred years ago.

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### Summary

This article describes the concept of patriotism, as shown in the writings of Wacław Potocki – a poet of the Polish Baroque. The analysis shows that the author, who came from the middle-income gentry, understood love for his country in two ways: firstly, as the commitment to defend its borders during the numerous wars of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; secondly, as the obligation to perform one's civic duties and adopt a pro-state and pro-community attitude. Raising these issues on several occasions, Potocki did not propose any major political changes with the aim of weakening the position of the gentry or the aristocracy. Nevertheless, in his poetic reflections he was very critical of the conduct of some representatives of those privileged social classes.

