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## ***The Beads* by Maria Wirtemberska – a transhistorical comedy of consolation<sup>1</sup>**

### ***Korale Marii Wirtemberskiej – międzyepokowa komedia pokrzepienia***

**Keywords:** *théâtre de société*, masquerades, comedy, sentimentalism, Romanticism

**Słowa kluczowe:** théâtre de société, maskarady, komedia, sentymentalizm, romantyzm

#### **Abstract**

The article discusses Maria Wirtemberska's one-act comedy, *The Beads*, which has survived to the present day in manuscript form. Duchess Wirtemberska's work is presented in the context of aesthetic trends in the author's era, with particular focus on the circumstances under which the comedy was written, the types of Enlightenment comedies, and the cultural history of *théâtre de société* and masquerades. The links between *The Beads* and sentimental and romantic literature are also considered.

Princess Maria Czartoryska, Duchess of Württemberg, commonly referred to as Maria Wirtemberska, remains an obscure author in the history of literature. Most researchers have focused on Wirtemberska's published works, whereas the manuscripts deposited in the Czartoryski Library of the National Museum in Kraków have been weakly explored to date. Alina Aleksandrowicz was the only researcher who analysed Wirtemberska's manuscripts in greater detail. The results of Aleksandrowicz's long-term archival research gave rise to a monograph

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entitled *Twórczość Marii z ks. Czartoryskich ks. Wirtemberskiej. Literatura i obyczaj* (The work of Princess Maria Czartoryska, Duchess of Württemberg. Literature and convention) which is a compendium of knowledge about Wirtemberska's literary work. The monograph is the only publication that makes a reference to *Korale. Komedyjka w jednym Akcie* (The Beads. One-act comedy) (Ref. No. 6131 IV Rkps: 175–182) which is deposited in a collection of Wirtemberska's short stories, poems, and other literary works dating back to 1786–1840. The collection consists of 338 pages of manuscripts, measuring 36.5 cm by 25 cm.

This article is dedicated to *The Beads*<sup>2</sup>, a short play that has been preserved in manuscript form<sup>3</sup>. The aim of this article was to analyse the circumstances under which the play was written against the backdrop of the main aesthetic trends in Wirtemberska's era. *The Beads* is a comedy of consolation, and it will be examined in the context of the main problems addressed by the play.

*The Beads* is a story of Liżychna, a country girl (also referred to as Lidychna or Lizia) who has been living with her Nana ever since Liżychna's Mother had left the village in search of her son Zdzisław, who is described by the author as a brave soldier. Other characters in the story include Liżychna's younger brother Staś, the Neighbour, and the Neighbour's daughter Kasia. The village is visited by two Hungarian merchants, one of whom offers beautiful beads to Liżychna. When Agatka, Jaś and Adaś, poor orphans in the Old Man's care, unexpectedly arrive in the village, Liżychna decides not to buy the beads and gives her money to the needy visitors. Shortly after the girl's charitable gesture, Staś brings good news about Mother and Zdzisław. The two have been found and are returning to the village. The local residents dance, sing, and celebrate in an act of collective happiness.

This dramatic piece, preserved in the form of a single manuscript, provides important information about social customs and aesthetic preferences of the aristocracy in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. *The Beads* belongs to the genre of *théâtre de société* (society theatre), namely theatrical performances that were staged in private homes. This genre has been rarely examined by Polish literary scholars to date.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to the Czartoryski Library of the National Museum in Kraków for providing me with access to the manuscripts.

<sup>3</sup> The manuscript consists of three differently sized sheets of paper (the third sheet is the smallest). Many words or lines are crossed out or underlined; some words are illegible; the spelling is inconsistent. The graphic layout suggests that the writer attempted to fit as many lines as possible on a single sheet of paper. One of the sheets features a short message whose content suggests that it was written by Wirtemberska's guests before dinner. The front side of the last sheet contains a fragment of a previously written and unfinished version of the comedy.

Wirtemberska's play combines various aesthetic styles. The theatrical style of *The Beads* escapes easy classification, and it cannot be examined solely in the context of comedy in the Age of Enlightenment or sentimental literature. The play also addresses other political and social problems in Wirtemberska's era, including the November Uprising, sense of suffering, and personal sacrifice.

The comedy was dated based on a short inscription reading "a scene in Wysocko" on the first page of the manuscript. Initially, the estate in Wysocko belonged to Marie Casimire Louise de La Grange d'Arquien (also known by the diminutive name of Marysieńka), the wife of Polish King Jan III Sobieski. The palace went into the hands of the Sieniawski family, and it became the property of the Czartoryski family when Maria Zofia Sieniawska married August Czartoryski. Sieniawska and Czartoryski were Wirtemberska's paternal grandparents. According to Aleksandrowicz, who provides an abridged history of the estate in her monograph, Wirtemberska received the palace in Wysocko as part of her dowry<sup>4</sup>. The princess was not deprived of her property after she had divorced Duke Louis of Württemberg in 1793 (Aleksandrowicz 2022: 413).

Many aristocratic estates were confiscated after the November Uprising. A similar fate befell the Czartoryski family, and on 5 March 1831, Maria Wirtemberska, her mother Izabela Czartoryska, and her sister Cecylia Beydale were ordered by Adam Jerzy Czartoryski to leave the palace in Puławy (Aleksandrowicz: 412–413). This event is related to the duchess' personal tragedy. Despite her efforts, Wirtemberska was unable to build a close relationship with her only son Adam who remained with his father after the divorce. Duke Adam of Württemberg was raised in an atmosphere of prejudice against Poles, and during the November Uprising, he commanded his troops to fire on the palace in Puławy where his mother, grandmother, and aunt had taken up residence (Aleksandrowicz: 13).

According to Wirtemberska's correspondence with her brother, after the palace in Puławy had been confiscated, the women found refuge in the estate in Wysocko, situated on Polish territory annexed by the Austrian Empire<sup>5</sup>. The first letter written by the princess from Wysocko to her brother Adam Jerzy Czartoryski is dated 23 March 1831, and it is deposited in the Czartoryski Library of the National Museum in Kraków (Ref. No. 6297 II Rkps: 19–24). In the letter, Wirtemberska's expresses her sadness over the dire situation. She describes the

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<sup>4</sup> A reference to the gardens created by king Jan III Sobieski in Wysocko can be found in Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz's diaries (Niemcewicz 1858: 425–426).

<sup>5</sup> Wirtemberska described her journey and the preceding events in a letter to A. J. Czartoryski written in Zawichost on 14 March 1831 (Ref. No. 6297 II Rkps: 15–18).

dilapidated estate in Wysocko, gives an account of the damage inflicted on the palace, and adds “*nous avons patched, darned, and repaired et nous avons meublé tant bien que mal quelque chambres!*” (Ref. No. 6297 II Rkps: 21)<sup>6</sup>. The description of the repairs suggests that the women had been present in Wysocko for some time before the letter was written. This fact should be considered when attempting to date the comedy – the process of adapting the residence to the new tenants’ needs and turning it into a venue for social events, such as society theatre, required some time.

Maria Wirtemberska left Wysocko in 1836, one year after her mother’s death. The princess wrote the last letter to her brother from the estate on 21 June 1836 (Ref. No. 6297 II Rkps: 409–410). Wirtemberska spent the rest of her life in Paris.

Citing Franciszek Ksawery Prek, Aleksandrowicz notes that after the November Uprising, the palace in Wysocko was visited by friends of the Czartoryski family, some of whom were in need of assistance after their estates had been destroyed or confiscated, including Duchess Celina Działyńska and Izabela Neuville and her family (Aleksandrowicz 2022: 415–416). These circumstances were portrayed by Wirtemberska in her comedy. All guests, regardless of the purpose of their visit to the Czartoryski estate, had some connections with Puławy and Sieniawa, where theatrical performances had been organized in the fashion of Enlightenment salons. Undaunted by the failure of the November Uprising, the aristocratic community in Wysocko were keen on staging amateur theatrical performances.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the aristocracy organised various social events “with the main or sole purpose of enjoying their free time” (Kaczyński 2005: 69). The most famous events included *Zdobycie Gibraltaru* (Conquest of Gibraltar), a historical production staged on Karol Radziwiłł’s initiative during Stanisław August Poniatowski’s visit to Nieśwież (Nesvizh in present-day Belarus) (Ryba 2005: 60–61), or a market fair to commemorate the king’s visit to Puławy (*Wizyty królewskie...* 1926: 94–98). Both para-theatrical events were lavish in form, but meagre in content. Their main purpose was to provide the king and other visiting members of the aristocracy with enjoyable entertainment. Such performances were also staged by Izabela Czartoryska, and they directly inspired Wirtemberska’s comedy.

However, these events were also organised to cheer up Polish magnates after the fall of the November Uprising. The consolatory value of aristocratic entertainment was analysed by Paweł Kaczyński:

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<sup>6</sup> Author’s translation: “we have patched, darned, repaired and furnished several rooms to a decent standard”.

Entertainment dispelled boredom, but it was also a form of therapy in the face of personal suffering (such as the performances staged by Hieronim Radziwiłł to console his brother after the death of his wife) and national surrender. After Poland's capitulation in the Polish-Russian War of 1792, the estate in Sieniawa was visited by Tadeusz Kościuszko who, as noted by Zofia Zamoyska in her memoirs, "conjured up various games" and "laughed to his heart's content" (Kaczyński 2005: 86).

Wirtemberska's comedy was one of such events which, according to the author's inscription on the manuscript, was to be staged in Wysocko, where Polish aristocrats sought refuge in the face of personal difficulties (as described above) and national defeat (failure of the November Uprising, repressions from Tsarist forces).

The poetic composition of *The Beads* deserves closer attention. The fact that Wirtemberska decided to write a comedy under such dire circumstances could seem surprising. However, an analysis of the play's structure reveals comedic devices which, according to Maria Wojtak, are characteristic of "elegant didacticism" or "confrontational and persuasive" literature (Wojtak 1996: 45). According to the researcher, these types of stage plays were written by Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski and Ignacy Krasicki who were members of Wirtemberska's social milieu.

Based on the types of Enlightenment comedies identified by Wojtak, *The Beads* can be classified as a literary work that amalgamates various styles<sup>7</sup>. The dialogues are written in authentic language that closely mirrors the character's upbringing. The characters often use colloquial language and exclamations ("ah", "ey", "nu") to express strong emotions. They use a dialect that is distinctive to their social class. Liżychna, her brother Staś, the Neighbour, and Kasia speak in a rural dialect, whereas the Hungarian merchant's pronunciation is indicative of his country of origin. However, these dialogues are not a faithful representation of specific vernaculars. Wirtemberska introduced elements of rural dialect and idiomatic language for comedic purposes, for example by imitating the pronunciation of Hungarian visitors and emphasising the foreign sounds in their speech. Based on these stylistic devices, *The Beads* can be classified as a confrontational and persuasive comedy (Wojtak: 46).

In turn, Wirtemberska builds the play's moral undertone by introducing contrasting characters (Wojtak: 46)<sup>8</sup>. None of the characters is presented in a purely

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<sup>7</sup> The multiplicity of styles is a characteristic feature of confrontational and persuasive literature (Wojtak 1996: 46).

<sup>8</sup> According to Wojtak, the use of contrasting figures to create a comic effect is also a distinguishing feature of confrontational and persuasive literature. In fact, *The Beads* fully meets the criteria of this literary genre.

negative light, although the Neighbour is portrayed as an antagonist who opposes Liżychna, the protagonist of the story. Liżychna has a pure heart, and she readily gives up her dreams and donates her money to the needy without hesitation. The Neighbour has a completely different attitude to the problem, and she comments on Liżychna's charitable act by saying: "She could wear the beads at her wedding. I wouldn't let my lassie waste money like that" (Ref. No. 6131 IV Rkps: 179). The Neighbour has a more practical approach to life, and she is convinced the beads are a good investment. In turn, Liżychna is guided by kindness and compassion. She gives her money to the poor with great joy because she is deeply concerned for the well-being of others. Despite these differences, both Liżychna and the Neighbour invite and feed the Old Man and the orphans. The Neighbour is not a character with only negative attributes. The contrast between the woman and the girl is portrayed in a subtle manner by emphasising differences in their sensitivity and their willingness to sacrifice personal comfort for those in need. Compassion is the key to interpreting the actions of the two main characters in the story.

*The Beads* relies on subtle comedic devices. In a study analysing humour in the Age of Reason, Roman Dąbrowski cites Jean François Marmontel who divided comedy into high comedy, bourgeois comedy, and low comedy (Dąbrowski 2021: 10). *The Beads* falls into the latter category because it tells a story of the common folk. Wirtemberska's work is free of vulgar or profane elements. However, the duchess' play does not fully conform to the definition of comedy proposed by Polish dramatists.

Ignacy Krasicki and Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski sought humour by ridiculing and exposing human vices (Dąbrowski: 11). As previously noted, Liżychna's compassionate nature is juxtaposed with the Neighbour's initially reserved attitude to offer a contrast between positive and negative traits of character. However, a satirical portrayal of human flaws is not the source of humour in Wirtemberska's work. On the contrary, the author focuses on compassion and charity, and the plot centres around the beads as a symbol of personal sacrifice. The comedy depicts joy that stems from a sense of pure happiness. Wirtemberska relies on comedic devices (such as the humorous depiction of the Hungarian merchant's pronunciation), but it is the happy ending, rather than satire, that elicits laughter and joy from the audience. The theme of human suffering is thus attenuated, and it acts as a backdrop for the optimistic events that lead to dancing, singing, and elation in the last scene of the play.

Therefore, the comicality of *The Beads* escapes the rigid framework of literary genres. Serious themes are skilfully toned down, and they are not aesthetically

at odds with the entertainment value of the play. The happy ending elicits earnest joy, and the resulting humour is not at odds with the theme of suffering and the play's didactic message.

The masquerade elements in *The Beads* also deserve closer attention. The play was written specifically for the royal court. These events did not involve professional actors, but amateur performers who were acquainted with the audience. Such performances were highly popular in 18<sup>th</sup> century aristocratic circles, and during these fashionable gatherings, socialites played the roles of the common folk. Despite the popularity of *théâtre de société* among the wealthy elites, these performances have not been widely researched. The masquerades of the Enlightenment were examined in greatest detail by Janusz Ryba (Ryba 1998), and the leisure activities organised by small groups of Polish aristocrats have been described in several articles.

In an article entitled “*Théâtres de société* we Francji. Salonowy eksperyment i laboratorium nowych reguł” (*Théâtres de société* in France. A salon experiment and a laboratory of new rules), Piotr Olkusz discusses aristocratic performances in the context of French theatrical culture and describes the origins of private entertainment in wealthy homes. According to the author, *théâtre de société* emerged in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the first amateur performances were hosted by Duchesse du Maine, better known as Louise Bénédicte de Bourbon-Condé, in Châtenay. These lavish events were held to celebrate local holidays. Performances and other types of entertainment were attended by “the small town's residents and their guests” (Olkusz 2018: 40). According to Olkusz, various forms of entertainment enjoyed by the rural populace, including market fairs, vulgar jokes, and parades, were included in the repertoire of *théâtre de société* (Olkusz: 41). Duchesse du Maine organised the Grandes Nuits de Sceaux, nighttime celebrations in the court of Sceaux, during which socialites played the role of the French king (Olkusz: 42).

The origins of society theatre can be directly traced back to Marquise de Pompadour's salon. These performances involved both amateurs (members of the French nobility) and professionals (costume and stage designers) (Olkusz: 46). The festivities hosted by the chief mistress of King Louis XV were also a source of inspiration for Marie Antoinette who staged theatrical performances in the Petit Trianon estate (Olkusz: 47–48). These and other types of private entertainment in the Late Baroque period significantly contributed to the popularity of *théâtre de société* in aristocratic circles in Poland.

Bożena Majewska-Maszkowska provides valuable insights in an article analysing the stage events organised by Izabella Lubomirska née Czartoryska

in Łańcut<sup>9</sup>. The researcher describes the theatrical room in the estate, stage props, ornaments, and the costumes worn by the actors (Majewska-Maszkowska 1962: 464–468, 471–474). She notes that amateur theatre was highly popular in elite circles (Majewska-Maszkowska: 468) and that the aristocrats in the Łańcut estate probably staged fashionable *tableaux vivants* and were inspired by the French theatrical repertoire (Majewska-Maszkowska: 469). In the 1740s and the 1750s, comedies written by Princess Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł were enacted by amateur performers in the Radziwiłł Castle in Nesvizh to celebrate important family events (Judkowiak 2014: 82). The princess wrote a play as a birthday present for her husband Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł. The husband was a part of the cast; the event featured fireworks and singers, and the guests received gifts from the “goddesses” of the four seasons (Judkowiak 2005: 102–103). These accounts shed some light on the aristocracy’s attitudes towards amateur theatre, and they indicate that such performances were staged mainly for entertainment purposes. Similar observations were made by Stefan Durski who examined the events held in the palace in Sieniawa. The researcher notes that amateur theatrics in the Czartoryski residence were organised mainly as a source of entertainment for the royal elites, but even the most banal comedies had a sentimental and moral undertone (Durski 1970: 37). Durski cites Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski’s play *Plaksa i Wesółowski* (Mr. Gripe and Mr. Glee) which was staged in Sieniawa in 1819. The main message of the play was that life’s misfortunes should be embraced with stoic resilience because laughter and happiness can bring joy to the poor, whereas the wealthy elites’ constant preoccupation with riches is a source of sadness and sorrow (Durski: 37). This message is also clearly communicated in Wirtemberska’s *The Beads*, where poor folk are portrayed as those who lead the happiest and the most divine lives because they are not attached to material possessions. By choosing not to spend her money on beads, Liżychna not only improves the fate of others, but also makes herself happy (she is overjoyed when Nana approves her decision to make a charitable donation). Liżychna observes that “bread tastes better when it is divided” (Ref. No. 6131 IV Rkps: 180). However, Wirtemberska does not attempt to convince her audience that the fate of the Old Man and the orphans in his care would improve in the long term. Social problems and potential solutions are not addressed in the play. The Old Man’s words to Agatka emphasise that fate is a cruel mistress: “Let God’s will be done. There is always a rainbow after the rain – the sun will shine for us yet” (Ref. No. 6131 IV Rkps: 180). Charity is the only thing that eases a poor man’s burden.

<sup>9</sup> Izabela Lubomirska was acquainted with Marie Antoinette and was probably inspired by her salon (Szmit-Naud 2010: 269–279).

An analysis of historical sources indicates that theatrical performances and masquerades were Izabela Czartoryska's favourite types of entertainment (Ryba 1998: 30), even when she was no longer able to actively participate in the festivities due to advanced age (Aleksandrowicz 2022: 420–421). Stefan Durski also postulates that social events in the Sieniawa palace were hosted mainly by Maria Wirtemberska and her mother (Durski 1970: 46). These experiences had undoubtedly influenced Wirtemberska's literary work. Her one-act comedy draws upon the tradition of society theatre. In an analysis of the literary style of *The Beads*, Aleksandrowicz accentuates the importance of "market fair" events which were closely linked with "farmstead" (*Wirtschaft*) performances. According to Janusz Ryba, this concept originated at parties, where one of the actors played a peasant innkeeper (Ryba 1998: 35–36). However, the actor remained in the role after the performance, and the guests also took an active part in the masquerade. They wore costumes, played fictitious characters<sup>10</sup>, and were entertained by the "innkeeper". These masquerades were gradually transformed into plays, and theatrical performances made a direct reference to daily life events. In turn, "market fair" events depicted farmers, traders, and craftsmen who displayed their products in market squares. This is how these events were described by Stefan Truchim:

The king would play a craftsman, such as goldsmith or a flour miller; he would select a housekeeper and open a stall. Other members of the aristocracy would choose different crafts and open their stalls. The guests would visit the stalls, bargain with the vendors, and buy the offered goods. These events were a source of profit for local traders who supplied the merchandise (Truchim 1925: 73–74).

Wirtemberska's comedy is a prime example of the social gatherings described by the historian. The plot centres around a set of beads offered by a Hungarian merchant, and it initiates a series of events engaging other members of the party. The last scene of the play, in which the characters sing and rejoice, offered a smooth transition between the stage piece and subsequent attractions.

*The Beads* skilfully combines a moral lesson with an act of consolation. Lizia's story is based on the tragic fate of her brother, an insurgent of the November Uprising, and her mother who made every effort to find her son. This touching story is full of sorrow, but the characters' good nature introduces an element of joy and hope. The comedy gradually evokes an emotional response from the audience. The play opens with Liżychna's prayer, which hints at the protagonist's difficult life situation. The Old Man and the orphans are introduced in the following

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<sup>10</sup> For more information about various types of masquerades, refer to Janusz Ryba (1998: 19–44).

scenes. Their misfortune compels Liżychna to give up the much-coveted beads and donate her money to the poor. However, this charitable act brings about only fleeting sorrow. The Old Man and the children are delighted by the gift, and their gratitude creates an atmosphere of joy and light-heartedness. Liżychna is also rewarded for her compassion. The girl's mother and brother have been found and are returning to the village. The characters begin to sing and dance when they hear the good news. This improbable story brings to mind folk myths and legends, where good always triumphs over evil. Wirtemberska based her comedy on costume parties such as the "market fair" events, and by gradually building positive emotions, she was able to offer moral guidance in line with the conventions of society theatre in the Age of the Enlightenment. The sentimental motifs in the play clearly indicate that the conceptions of countryside the role of humans in the world have their origins in Sieniawy and Puławy. *The Beads* differs from other stage pieces written in the 1830s in that it combines 18<sup>th</sup> century theatrical conventions with pastoral scenes and the Romantic concept of suffering as a necessary sacrifice in life. The protagonist's misfortune is a lesson in self-improvement and moral development. According to Czesław Galek, these ideals were expressed by Zygmunt Krasiński in his letters (Galek 2013: 208–209). For Romantic-era writers and artists, suffering served a definitive purpose<sup>11</sup> and was essential for moral rebirth, and this concept clearly permeated Wirtemberska's work. Liżychna, the Old Man, and the orphans are portrayed as positive characters through their suffering and misfortune, and they are able to appreciate the smallest gestures of compassion and good will<sup>12</sup>.

The comedy also depicts acts of kindness in Liżychna's immediate environment. The girl lives in fairytale-like village whose residents are filled with compassion for others. This image contrasts starkly with Romantic ideals. In *The Beads*, the portrayal of suffering follows the conventions of the Romantic movement, but the protagonist who suffers has a completely different relationship with the world. The characters form a strong support group, develop close personal ties, and do not exclude any group members despite the existing differences. In the most acclaimed examples of Polish Romantic literature, including Adam Mickiewicz's *Romantyczność*

<sup>11</sup> According to Anna Jończyk, suffering became an important theme in Romantic literature only after the fall of the November Uprising. The writers examined the capabilities and limits of direct human experience – empiricism vs. intuition, rationalism vs. irrationalism (Jończyk 2014: 208).

<sup>12</sup> Simplicity and humility are also praised by angelic choirs in Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (part III): "Peaceful, peaceful simplicity/ Humble and quiet virtue!". Both Mickiewicz and Wirtemberska argued that the lower social classes are more likely to recognise the ethical value of suffering (Mickiewicz 2012: 84).

and *Dziady* (part III), Juliusz Słowacki's *Kordian*, and Zygmunt Krasiński's *Nie-Boska komedia*, the protagonists are antagonised by their social group. As noted by Galek, in his letters to Konstanty Gaszyński, Krasiński argued that "the greatest suffering is inflicted by adversaries in our immediate surroundings" (Galek 2013: 205). However, in *The Beads*, misfortune befalls the protagonists regardless of their or other people's actions, whereas their home environment is the source of greatest happiness. The village is a place where the protagonists find comfort and where they are able to experience kindness and joy through acts of compassion.

Provincial life is highly idealised in Wirtemberska's comedy. The story is set in a bucolic village whose residents are amiable and benevolent. This image is consistent with the goals of sentimental literature, and *The Beads* was designed as a "tool for shaping authentic human relations based on mutual kindness and understanding" (Kostkiewiczowa 2002: 568). The comedy is also characterised by considerable simplicity (Kostkiewiczowa 2018: 207). The characters speak in rural vernacular, and universal truths are communicated through straightforward metaphors and short statements. The screenplay is replete with truisms such as "givers are happier than takers" (Ref. No. 6131 IV Rkps: 179), "there is always a rainbow after the rain", "there is no shame in accepting heartfelt gifts", or "bread always tastes better when it is divided" (Ref. No. 6131 IV Rkps: 180). The dialogues were written to promote moral values. These simple statements are easily remembered, which further reinforces the comedy's didactic undertone.

The sentimental simplicity of *The Beads* is also manifested through the absence of mythological themes. In this regard, Wirtemberska's comedy contrasts with depictions of rural life in pastoral literature<sup>13</sup>. Despite the idyllic portrayal of the village, poverty, hunger, and social inequality are clearly accentuated in *The Beads*. However, no references are made to Greek gods or other supernatural beings. In Polish Romantic literature, bucolic settings were usually portrayed through the use of Slavic themes<sup>14</sup>. In Franciszek Karpiński's *Laura i Filon* (Laura and Filon), the pastoral world is depicted through images of the forest and raspberries (Karpiński 1919: 233–236)<sup>15</sup>. Adam Mickiewicz's *Ballady i romanse* (Ballads

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<sup>13</sup> In particular *Dafnis drzewem bobkowym* by S. Twardowski, *Roksolanki* by S. Zimorowic, and *Sielanki* by J. B. Zimorowic.

<sup>14</sup> Despite the rising popularity of Slavic themes, detailed accounts of rural life were considered to be in poor taste. In 1815, Józef Lipiński wrote in *Pamiętnik Warszawski*: "When portraying characters in the pastoral spirit of Theocritus [...], it is not advisable to recount the vulgar and bellicose arguments of goat herders, as is the case in the fifth idyll. One might argue that this is faithful representation of reality, but there are many aspects of reality that should be hidden from view" (Lipiński 1995: 56).

<sup>15</sup> Refer to Kostkiewiczowa for more information about pastoral imagery in Karpiński's work (Kostkiewiczowa 2016: 21; 2018: 208).

and Romances, 1822) further contributed to the Romantic portrayal of rural life by accentuating native themes. However, there are no references to fantastic events, characters, or objects in *The Beads*. Instead, the play attempts to imitate reality. Wirtemberska paints a faithful picture of rural life. Women's household chores (such as yarn spinning), traveling merchants, memories of wedding celebrations, and objects of daily use (clay pot for boiling potatoes) are mentioned in the comedy to depict the life and culture of rural communities.

Despite these attempts, the comedy's portrayal of the rural environment and its problems is not fully true to life. Polish nobles "sought entertainment by following the example of French aristocrats and escaping into a world of rural and sentimental simplicity" (Sawicka-Jurek 2010: 175). Peasant huts were incorporated into stately gardens, but these elements of the local folklore were merely superficial. Izabela Czartoryska designed the family estate in Powązki in a similar fashion. "Simple huts were built on the estate to create a semblance of life in harmony with nature, far away from the hustle and bustle of the royal court" (Sawicka-Jurek: 177). However, the interiors of these huts were furnished with splendour (Sawicka-Jurek: 177). *The Beads* also engages the viewers in a game of pretence. The comedy imitates the qualities of folklore culture, but it does not address the problems faced by rural inhabitants in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The charming rusticity of the countryside is depicted with the sole purpose of conveying humour, enjoyment, simplicity, kindness, and happiness.

Wirtemberska's play amalgamates several literary genres. It accentuates the importance of the empirical method in the Age of Reason, which posited that knowledge could be gained only through human experience (Kostkiewiczowa 2002: 567). In this regard, the comedy bears many similarities to sentimental literature. *The Beads* portrays the idyllic country life of the lower social classes and the aesthetics of beautiful simplicity. At the same time, it offers consolation after the November Uprising, an event which significantly contributed to the emergence of messianic literature. Wirtemberska's comedy differs from other literary works of the Enlightenment in that it addresses poverty, physical and spiritual suffering, and features diverse characters (peasants, merchants, and characters who are portrayed through the protagonists' stories: a soldier, a priest, a doctor, a manor). As a result, the play cannot be classified into any particular genre, but the absence of a singular literary form is a distinguishing feature of *théâtre de société*.

The diversity of styles and genres is the main feature that sets *The Beads* apart from other literary works written after the November Uprising. The play's originality also testifies to the author's meticulous and highly individual approach

to poetic composition. The comedy provides important insights into the culture of the late Enlightenment. It is also a valuable source of knowledge about the wealthy elites and their responses to the national tragedy. The aristocracy remained optimistic despite the fall of the November Uprising and Poland's loss of autonomy. Wirtemberska was able to transform a personal tragedy into a comedy of consolation, albeit one that pays considerable attention to suffering. The author addressed personal and national misfortunes with faith and compassion through a filter of comedy, but her work has a clear moral undertone.

*The Beads* is also one of the few literary sources that shed light on *théâtre de société*, which testifies to the manuscript's importance. The comedy combines several narrative threads, which accentuates the problem of periodisation in literary historiography. The fact that Wirtemberska's comedy escapes easy classification gives insight into problems that have not been sufficiently examined to date.

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