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Pan Tadeusz - Adam Mickiewicz

Author: [Culture.pl](#)

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Pan Tadeusz is the last major work written by Adam Mickiewicz, and the most known and perhaps most significant piece by Poland's great Romantic poet, writer, philosopher and visionary

The epic poem's full title in English is **Sir Thaddeus, or the Last Lithuanian Foray: a Nobleman's Tale from the Years of 1811 and 1812 in Twelve Books of Verse** (Polish original: **Pan Tadeusz, czyli ostatni zajazd na Litwie. Historia szlachecka z roku 1811 i 1812 we dwunastu księgach**

Drawing on traditions of the epic poem, historical novel, poetic novel and descriptive poem, [Mickiewicz](#) created a national epic that is singular in world literature. Using means ranging from lyricism to pathos, irony and realism, the author re-created the world of Lithuanian gentry on the eve of the arrival of Napoleonic armies. The colorful Sarmatians depicted in the epic, often in conflict and conspiring against each other, are united by patriotic bonds reborn in shared hope for Poland's future and the rapid restitution of its independence after decades of occupation.

One main character is the mysterious Friar Robak, a Napoleonic emissary with a past, as it turns out, as a hotheaded nobleman. In his monk's guise, Friar Robak seeks by serving his nation to make amends for sins committed as a youth. The end of Pan Tadeusz is joyous and hopeful, an optimism that Mickiewicz knew was not confirmed by historical events but which he designed in order to "uplift hearts" in expectation of, eventually, a brighter future.

The story takes place over five days in 1811 and one day in 1812. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had already been divided among Russia, Prussia and Austria after three traumatic partitions between 1772 and 1795, which had erased Poland from the political map of Europe. A satellite within the Prussian partition, the Duchy of Warsaw, had been established by Napoleon in 1807, before the story of **Pan Tadeusz** begins. It would remain in existence until the Congress of Vienna in 1815, organized between Napoleon's failed invasion of Russia and his defeat at Waterloo.

The epic takes place within the Russian partition, in the village of Soplicowo and the country estate of the Soplica clan. **Pan Tadeusz** recounts the story of two feuding noble families, and the love between the title character, Tadeusz Soplica, and Zosia, a member of the other family. A subplot involves a spontaneous revolt of local inhabitants against the Russian garrison. Mickiewicz published his poem as an exile in Paris, free of Russian censorship, and writes openly about the occupation.

The poem begins with the words "O Lithuania", indicating for contemporary readers that the Polish national epic was written before 19th-century concepts of nationality had been geopoliticized. Lithuania, as used by Mickiewicz, refers to the geographical region that was his

encompassing most of what are now Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. Thus Lithuanians regard the author as of Lithuanian origin, and Belarusians claim Mickiewicz as he was born in what is Belarus today, while his work, including **Pan Tadeusz**, is written in Polish.

A verdict about this great masterpiece of Slavic poetry was written by [Zygmunt Krasinski](#), one of Mickiewicz's great successors in Polish literature:

No European nation of our day has such an epic as Pan Tadeusz. In it Don Quixote has been fused with the Iliad. The poet stood on the border line between a vanishing generation and our own. Before they died, he had seen them; but now they are no more. That is precisely the epic point of view. Mickiewicz has performed his task with a master's hand; he has made immortal a dead generation, which now will never pass away. ... Pan Tadeusz is a true epic. No more can be said or need be said.

From a letter by Krasinski quoted by Kallenbach in Adam Mickiewicz (Kraków, 1897)

[Krasinski](#)'s judgement remains the view of posterity. George Brandes, the Danish critic and scholar who influenced European literature, formulated principles of a new realism and naturalism in which literature should be an organ "of the great thoughts of liberty and the progress of humanity". Brandes literary goals were shared by authors including Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian realist playwright, and his estimation of Mickiewicz's masterpiece echoes Krasinski: "In Pan Tadeusz," Brandes wrote, "Poland possesses the only successful epic our century has produced."

The first translation of the poem was made in 1859 by the Belarusian writer-dramatist Vintsent Dunin-Martsinkyevich, in Vilnius. (Pressure from Russian authorities permitted him to publish only the first two chapters.) Maude Ashurst Biggs published the first English translation, **Master Thaddeus**, in 1885 in London. George Rapall Noyes published the poem in 1917 in prose, and Watson Kirkconnell translated the epic under the title **Sir Thaddeus** in 1962. A full version, translated by Marcel Weyland in the original metre, was published in Sydney in 2004, and London and New York in 2005.

books, founded by Michael Hart with the aim of encouraging the creation and distribution of eBooks.

Pan Tadeusz is recognized as Poland's national epic and has been compulsory reading in Polish schools for generations. Numerous productions have brought **Pan Tadeusz** to the big and small screen. [Ryszard Ordyński's 1928 film](#) was the largest Polish cinema production of the interwar period (and has been recently rereleased). [Adam Hanuszkiewicz](#) created a television mini-series (1970-71). [Andrzej Wajda](#)'s screen version from the year 2000 generated significant attention and recognition around the world.

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More works by Adam Mickiewicz



Dziady - Adam Mickiewicz



Świtez - Kamil Polak



Adam Mickiewicz's Forefathers' Eve - Jerzy Grotowski
1961



Pan Tadeusz - Andrzej Wajda
1999

Recommended

