

Death, Artistic Tradition, and Aesthetic Knowledge in Jan Kochanowski's Renaissance *Laments*

James Roney

Bookend Seminar January 20, 2010

James Roney is Professor of World Languages and Cultures at Juniata College.

In 1583 the Polish Renaissance poet, Jan Kochanowski, wrote a cycle of nineteen laments about his grief at the death of his two-and-a-half-year-old daughter Urszula. The study of these poems reveals the relationship between death, artistic tradition, and knowledge. Death is, perhaps, the ultimate challenge to meaning; the brute, incomprehensible reality of the end of someone's life resists knowledge, threatening all our attempts either to conceptualize it or to put it into narrative form. It's there, it's real, and we don't know what to do with it. For a loving father and established humanist poet like Kochanowski, the death of Urszula, followed shortly by the death of her sister, posed a personal, poetic, and philosophical challenge. How could he write about the intense grief that had overwhelmed all of his senses and reasoning abilities? How could he employ the poetic forms of his time to comprehend and express what he was feeling? How could he reconcile his rational humanist philosophy and religious faith with such underserved mortality and suffering?

Our challenge is to understand how an individual who lives in a strong artistic tradition solves these problems. Kochanowski does not create out of nothing, using only the resources of his own inspiration and personal experience. He neither attempts to transcend his tradition nor views it as a limitation on his personal freedom and creativity. Instead, he finds in the religious and artistic tradition of his times the forms of expression that allow him to comprehend reality, give expression to his own emotions, and communicate with others. However, these forms are not stagnant and his brutal artistic honesty and philosophical integrity cause him to change them even as he uses them. The result is a cycle that explores the grief of a parent who confronts the loss of a child, rational faith, and the desire to live before accepting with ironic doubt and human virtue the religious consolation that we have no choice but to live as men with the ambiguity of uncertain faith.

This is the kind of knowledge we get out of art. Knowledge can be thought of as a rule-governed relationship between forms and reality or between forms and other forms. In every act of representation or communication, individuals use general rules to make sense of particular occasions. There is always a

potential tension between the general and the particular. Art explores the nuances and details of those relationships, while working out and conveying our emotional attitudes towards them.

This essay, a companion to an earlier one centered on the point of view of Kochanowski and the narrative persona he created in the poems, emphasizes the issues of reception surrounding our reading of the *Laments*.¹ How can we explain the different evaluations of his work in the Renaissance and the era of nineteenth century Romanticism, and how should we understand them today? Jan Kochanowski lived from 1530- 1584 in the Republic of Poland and Lithuania, then the largest land power in Europe. He was born into a noble family. Both of his brothers were also literary figures; one translated the *Aeneid* into Polish. Jan was fluent in Latin by the time he was fourteen and studied at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, founded in 1364 and famous as the place where Copernicus studied. Like many young Poles of his time, he traveled abroad to study, attending Königsberg University in Prussia and the University of Padua in Italy. He also traveled around Europe, including France where he saw Ronsard, the renowned French Renaissance poet and leader of the Pléiade. From 1559 to 1574 he was a humanist official at the Polish court. This was an important transitional time in early modern Europe and in Poland. As the noble class changed from warriors to courtiers, they learned the skills of debate in the universal language, Latin, and the other humanist techniques that allowed them to flourish at the court of the elected monarch and in the Polish Republic's assembly. The sign of high status became less military skill and more a Latin education, fluent rhetoric and the ability to conduct oneself properly, obtained by travel and knowledge of the world.² Furthermore, Poland and the other countries in the later northern Renaissance placed great importance on translation and the creation of a national literature.

Kochanowski's fame rested on his status as a Renaissance humanist and poet. For reasons that are not entirely clear, perhaps he was dissatisfied with political developments at the court, he retired to his estate where he married in 1576 and had seven children. However, the sudden deaths of a brother and two daughters disrupted his plans for a happy life. The *Laments* are his response to that crisis. In "Lament 17" he describes how God's hand found and destroyed his happiness despite his withdrawal from the dangers of public life to live the modest life of a civilized rural noble on his estate.

A brief list of his works demonstrates his range as a writer. Kochanowski wrote in Latin throughout his life and returned to Poland as a recognized Latin poet. However, he is most famous today for his works in Polish. *Chess*, a satire (1562-6), and *The Satyr, or The Wild Man* (1564) mock the political culture of the time. *The Dismissal of the Grecian Envoys* (1578) depicts a Greek embassy

seeking peace with the Trojans who send them away as a matter of republican honor. The play posed the question of how dysfunctional parliaments lead to unnecessary wars. Because of the religious interest of the time and the importance placed on translations of holy texts into native languages, he was most famous in his lifetime for his translation of the Psalms, *David's Psalter* (1579). Some of them are still used in churches today. The *Treny* (*Threnody* or *Laments*) were first published in 1583. His *Fraszki* (*Trifles*), published in 1584, were written over a period of years as high society pieces, mocking friends and joking about drinking, food, women, and flirting. His *Songs* (two books of verse modeled on Horace's *Carmina*), published after his death in 1586, are what we would now call lyric poetry.

Before turning to the topic of why the *Laments* were first considered unimportant and even criticized as an act of excess or personal indulgence and then later became the most popular of his works, I need to say a bit about their connection to Renaissance Humanism. In the first lament Kochanowski explains why he has to write about his daughter's death. He is aware both that the death of a private person of no public importance is not a proper subject for high verse and that by conveying the intensity of his private grief he is violating the rules of the social decorum on which his status and sense of identity are based.³ As one of the many Polish admirers of Erasmus's Christian Humanism, Kochanowski wrote a famous hymn of gratitude for God's bounteous gifts in which he praised the rational order of God's world. As a retired government official, he was also an admirer of Cicero's stoicism. For him, Renaissance humanism was both a way of life and a creed of personal responsibility.

Because of the influence of Neoplatonism, Renaissance Christian humanism was a complete rational system. Kochanowski's hymn depicted a rational God, the master artisan of a world beautiful in the harmony of its parts. Universal reason both grounded the order of the world and ensured its moral foundation. Violations of that order were the work of *fortuna*, or chance, but stoic self-control promised that rational virtue could ensure the harmony of the self. Finally, rational poetics codified the universal laws governing the harmony of content, form, and emotion. Art was to serve the purposes of morality, increasing both individual virtue and knowledge of the underlying order of things. The Renaissance lament, accordingly, was to be written in a high style about people of public importance to provide inspirational moral lessons. It was a single, five-part poem with prescribed personal roles: the deceased, a relative to be consoled, and the inspired poet.⁴ The poet's rhetoric turned private grief into public consolation as everyone memorialized the underlying order revealed by the deceased's accomplishments. The death of Kochanowski's daughter and his reaction to it disrupted this rational system because her death at too young an age to have public accomplishments demonstrated the injustice or amorality of the world, and his reaction to it revealed not the moral perspective of rational philosophy but its failure. Kochanowski replaced the canonical single poem with an entire poetic cycle exploring both the concrete,

intimate details of personal grief and loss and the public implications of his own failure to live up to the principles of humanist, stoic philosophy.

A brief summary of the content of the individual laments in the cycle shows how Kochanowski traced the path of his grief through philosophical and emotional trauma to an enigmatic consolation. In “Lament 1” and “Lament 2” Kochanowski invokes the classical tradition and explains why he has to write about his daughter’s death. In the next three, he explores his own pain, addressing, in turn, his daughter, a personified death, and his own suffering. He concludes that such death and such grief are unnatural and admits that emotionally he blames her and the personifications of death for it. Grief has changed his connections both to his memories of his beloved daughter and to the artistic traditions he loved. The imagery in “Lament 6,” “Lament 7,” and “Lament 8” becomes quite specific as he continues to describe his pain and loss in the personal space of his home. His daughter was the Slavic Sappho, but her last song almost killed her mother. Her clothes have lost all meaning. Her death has opened up great empty spaces in his house and removed its emotional center. Grief in these three laments is concrete and intimate rather than public and elevated as he asks how a parent can survive this.

In “Lament 9,” “Lament 10,” and “Lament 11,” he moves from the personal space of his home to the universal space of humanism. Wisdom would be worth any price if it worked, but it has failed; he has been thrown down from the final rungs among the others (a reference to Plato’s ladder). He implores his daughter to come to him in any form from any of the various afterlives he knows: “Wherever you may be - if you exist” (“Lament 10”). Brutus was right: “Virtue’s a trifle” (“Lament 11”). It cannot stand up to life’s traumas. In “Lament 12” and “Lament 13” he returns to the personal, claiming that she was a like a stalk of grain brought down by its own bounty, but, unlike the grain, she will not yield new fruit when planted. He then exclaims in pain that it would be better if either she had never been born or had never died rather than living a short life that was like a dream of gold to her father, promising much and disappearing when he awoke.

In “Lament 14,” “Lament 15,” and “Lament 16” he turns to poetry and philosophy, addressing his lute before asking whether he is about to lose everything, even his poetic gift and criticizing Cicero as a representative of stoic philosophy. He appeals to the resources of Greek myth, saying he wants to go like Orpheus to make Pluto soften through song or stay in the land of the dead himself if his quest fails. In a typical Renaissance conceit he asks his lute to help him avoid becoming another Niobe, a living, crying corpse-stone: “This tomb keeps no corpse; this corpse keeps no tomb:/Here the room’s tenant is the tenant’s room” (“Lament 15”). In “Lament 16” he describes the failure of stoic philosophy. The demands of rational virtue and reason only seem good when people are fortunate. Personal grief overwhelms reason when they are not. Cicero mourned his own daughter and exile as we all do. Because a man is not a stone, only time, not reason can heal a person’s grief.

Man is not a stone; his wounds run deep;
His joys are like a scar on top;
And once it's touched that buried ache
 Throbs wide awake.
Time, father of forgetfulness,
Stronger than reason and no less
Potent than faith, heal, heal my heart
 That's torn apart. ("Lament 16")⁵

As a famous translator of The Psalms, Kochanowski turns to them in the next two laments.

"Lament 17" is reminiscent of Job: "That the Lord's hand could destroy/In one stroke all my joy." He who laughs at misfortune is mad. After describing the gap between the tenets of Renaissance Humanism and his own experience of grief, Kochanowski concludes: "For there are things beyond/Calm Reason's power to cope/God is my only hope." "Lament 18" is a prayer to God for help. Kochanowski accepts that God has to punish us because we would forget Him in our arrogant success but entreats Him to be a father to humanity, punishing us only within the limits of our endurance. He appeals for mercy to a God who always shows mercy to the obedient and repentant. God has changed from the rational, moral force at the center of existence to the sole possible help whose mercy, the only consolation amidst the capricious evil of an individual life, is only given as a reward for obedience and repentance.

The mercy seemingly comes in the form of a visit by his mother and daughter in the nineteenth and final lament, subtitled "Dream." As a dream, it might not be real. His mother strangely offers him the consoling lessons of the discredited Renaissance Humanism and classical stoicism: Life in this world is a painful illusion; Be grateful your daughter is in a happier, eternal place free of life's pains: "Earthly boundaries limit earthly joys--/Heavenly joys are boundless.../...happiness is absolute and pure...." Use your knowledge and will: "When others were in pain,/You've helped them over it, time and again;/Now, master, you will have to heal yourself." The purpose of knowledge is to allow us to facilitate time's work by preparing ourselves for the misfortune that is the human condition. The final "Dream" has joined the other poems in a more complicated understanding of life. We have no choice but to "Bear humanly the human lot" ("Lament 19"), but this does not mean that we always can. The Christian and classical views are reconciled in a rational world order, but the lives of individuals within that order are governed by fortune whose random brutalities can crush the individual. Fate and our guilt before an angry God can be accepted but not endured without the image of a responsive, maternal face even if it is a necessary illusion brought on by our own desire.

The brief summary shows Kochanowski has taken the risk of allowing his grief to question all aspects of his identity: his love for his family members, his life on his estate, his poetry, his humanism, and his religious faith. He explored four types of personal pain:

1. What he saw and experienced (his daughter's death, her final words, the burial service);

2. The changed meaning of past experiences and objects (her birth, her clothes, places, especially the great holes her death has opened up in his house);
3. What he should have experienced and never will (her talent, her wedding, the joys she would have brought to the entire family); and
4. The loss of the rational faculties, creative ability, and love on which his identity had been based.

The present pain blocks his pleasant memories and makes him wonder whether it would have been better if she had never been born rather than bringing such grief to her parents. He questions the value of humanism by describing his own loss of confident, rational self-control. His sense of social status as a member of the civilized class is shaken by his realization that he barely reached the highest rungs of wisdom before falling down among all the others at the first misfortune. He criticizes Cicero's hypocrisy at mourning misfortunes the Roman had earlier advised others to ignore in the name of rational virtue. His poetry also fails him. He turns to a God who is more like the God of Job than the rational God of his earlier hymn. The only consolation comes in the form of his mother, who offers stoic arguments about the illusions and uncertainty of life and leaves him in a state of uncertainty about whether his vision is real or only a dream memory. The cycle ends on a doubly ironic note with his matter-of-fact statement of his uncertainty followed by a calm mention of the death of his other daughter shortly after the first. Did the process of mourning repeat itself?

The ironic withdrawal sends the reader back to the other poems in the cycle. Renaissance poetics were designed to reveal the absolute within the particular, to show the deeper rational order beneath surface chaos, and to inspire readers to follow the universal moral principles. Kochanowski's *Laments*, however, remain a cycle of individual poems whose consoling moments never cancel out the uncertain chaos of the particular experiences, emotions, and states of mind in the rest of the cycle. His virtue is to write and go on living among the disorder and uncertainty. However, it is important to remember that the orderly tradition gives him the universal forms without which he could not have written. He changes them to convey a new content, but he creates that content only in tension with them, combining Christian humanism, stoicism, religious faith, Greek myths, and personal memories into an account of the stages of unresolved, but somehow endured and communicated, grief. Such writing is an act not only of self-expression but also of self-creation or, perhaps more accurately, of self-resurrection in the face of the brute annihilation of death. Readers of the cycle today are drawn to this display of stoic virtue in the grip of harsh *fortuna* provided they can understand the core tradition of which it is a part.

The final statement of the preceding paragraph raises the related questions of why members of other cultural periods read the *Laments* as they did and how and why we should read them today. These are questions of memory. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* remains perhaps the greatest exploration of how

human memory orders events on both the personal and the cultural levels. He showed how we remember a consoling, orderly history by forgetting the disorderly chaos of life. Historians trace the rational decisions and heroic deeds of the great men of the Napoleonic wars; reformers rationalize their actions and cannot see the harmful effects produced by the gap between administrative planning and the lives of those without access to the committee rooms where plans are made; individuals replace the trauma of armed conflict and painful awareness of misdeeds with the boasting tales and exciting anecdotes others want to hear and they want to remember. Tolstoy's point is that this is usually done unintentionally. Driven by our need for consoling order, we remember only those events and motivations that confirm our current sense of order. The rest is forgotten and ceases to exist as a part of our conscious social life. It remains, for Tolstoy, only as the barely sensed potential for moral recovery he associates with love and faith. Despite all the problems in his life and his development as an artist, the purpose of literature remained to resist the comforting illusions in order to allow human love to flourish.

The important point here is the connection between memory, order, and exclusion. At any moment in time, a culture notices certain things about contemporary reality while ignoring others and remembers its past by reshaping it into the form it desires. This process has both a synchronic and a diachronic dimension. It is both a systematic structuring of contemporary reality and a narrative ordering of the past. The initial undervaluing of Kochanowski's *Laments* was shaped by the way Renaissance Humanism viewed the world even as its nineteenth-century elevation to the greatest of his works resulted from the effects of Romantic attitudes toward the self, the nation, and art. Renaissance Humanism was a universal, rational culture. It cultivated a sense of civilized behavior and judged individuals and works by their ability to contribute to its advancement. Poles traveled to Italy not to learn Italian culture but to participate in civilized living. When they wrote in Polish, the purpose was to make the Polish language a means of expressing universal truth, not a unique Polish identity. An author's purpose was to create a talented manifestation of the artistic norms, not a new means of expression. From that point of view, the *Laments* were not an appropriate work but rather a breach of social and artistic decorum. They were too personal, too conflicted, and too ambiguous in their use of the civilized forms.

We can see the change in cultural norms during the Romantic era by examining three visual images: one of Copernicus and two of Kochanowski. Two of them are paintings by Jan Matejko (1838-1893), the most famous Polish national painter of the era. The painting *Astronomer Copernicus: Conversation with God* (1872) shows the famous creator of the heliocentric theory of the solar system bathed in light and surrounded by an open book, a diagram of his astronomical system, and some tools of observation.⁶ He is on a balcony. In the background we see stars against a sky with a muted radiance and a Polish building of the time. His pose, arms spread with one hand raised in an open-fingered gesture and one leg forward as if in motion at the intensity of the experience, and the expression on his face suggest

that we are seeing him at the instant when God and science have revealed the nature of things to him. This is the visual language of climactic religious emotion. The painting presents a moment in Polish history when religious, scientific, and artistic knowledge are united in one act of a great individual who has made a uniquely Polish contribution to the forward movement of world history. It is part of the Romantic response to the Cartesian dichotomy we now speak of as the fact/value distinction. Art is a means of expressing personal and national identity and emotion by, in this case, linking them to a narrative of the progress of European civilization. If Renaissance Humanism thought of culture as a universal, hierarchical space, popular nationalist Romanticism imagines it as a forward movement in time with episodes of great individual creativity.

The two images of Kochanowski place him within this narrative and, accordingly, value the *Laments* as a uniquely Polish expression of courageous religious faith in the face of personal disaster. Henryk Pillati's 1864 engraving of the poet of Czarnolas (Blackwood in English) depicts a member of the rural, landed nobility who embodied a uniquely Polish identity.⁷ He is depicted deep in thought with an open book in his hands and a lute, a symbol of poetry, resting upright in a position where he has either just used it or can pick it up at any time. The impression is of a rural genius who has just looked up in a moment of thought or inspiration. The immense oak tree immediately behind him and the estate in the background reinforce the sense of an important connection between natural, civilized, and Polish rural customs and truths, an impression strengthened by the woven branches that border the image. Matejko's 1862 painting *Jan Kochanowski Over His Dead Daughter's Body* emphasizes the personal over Kochanowski's place in the pantheon of national cultural heroes.⁸ The same personal anguish and deep, intimate emotion considered an unfit subject for Renaissance art is the central concern of this work and by implication the reason why the events depicted in the *Laments* are now his greatest accomplishment. His daughter's body lying in her coffin is in the center of the foreground. His body is bent over her, framing her with his arms, and either holding her head or kissing her forehead. The light bathing her face and his forehead links them both in an image of his intense emotional and spiritual concentration. The expression on her face suggests a certain peace after death. There is a large cross on her burial shroud and religious objects in the background. The painting suggests a reading of the cycle as the work of a father who, realizing that humanism and classical art are unable to deal with his grief, turns to a Christian God who sends him consolation through the nighttime visit by his mother and daughter telling him they are in heaven with God. If this painting is, as I think, a moment of grief inside a larger story of ultimate redemption, Matejko reads the poems as a sincere expression of grief leading to religious faith, a faith associated with Polish nationalism in the era after the loss of national independence at the end of the eighteenth century.

What do these conflicting receptions tell us about art and its changing roles? Richard Eldridge noted in *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* that debates over art often become disputes over whether art is representational, aesthetic, or expressive. His simple solution is to accept that art is all three at once and that debates over which one is the distinguishing feature are actually normative disputes over what art should be that are closely related to larger cultural, social, and political norms. Instead, we should assume that every work of art has three aspects and then investigate what forms these aspects take. First, every artistic work is about something. It has a mimetic or representational-thematic side. This could be anything from patterns of sound, to details of daily life, to abstract ideas, to an individual experience, but it is always there even in those cases when it is intentionally denied. Second, every work pays particular attention to form. Regardless of whether it is an aesthetic object, a process, or an event, it has a formal-material aspect. Aesthetic response requires at least a potential awareness of how the object or event is constructed and shapes our interactions with it. Finally, a work of art focuses the emotions and attitudes of both those who create and those who use it. It has an expressive-attitudinal aspect. Combining these, we can say that art involves the working out of the nuanced relationships between a content, a set of forms, and an emotional attitude.⁹

Art is an essential part of human existence because the knowledge produced by such nuanced relationships is always incomplete. We live as finite creatures with both rational and emotional means of responding to a world that is both constantly changing and never knowable in its entirety.¹⁰ Returning to Tolstoy and memory, we can see why artistic experience is fundamentally fuzzy, open, dynamic, and interactional. Each work and each perception of it can attend only to certain meanings, formal characteristics, and emotional attitudes. The others are excluded from memory and perception by the very acts of remembering or perceiving. Art serves as a means of serious play, an area for contesting different contents, forms, and emotions in connection with each other. For this reason, art changes as values and experiences change and remains a site for contesting different contents, forms, and emotions in connection with each other. Different groups of people come up with different senses of what it is to be a person. What should one do? What kind of things can happen in the world? How can we know the answers to these questions? Since answers to such questions cannot be final, we fight about them, and art becomes an ethical contest over forms of living and the proper attitudes towards them, a means of creating, defining, and criticizing identity. This remains true even if a particular culture or group denies the value of art entirely or reduces it to the status of entertainment (a form of relaxation from serious endeavors) or to a pleasurable means of conveying the knowledge that can be discovered only by forms of inquiry the society values more highly, giving them exclusive rights to the generation and control of knowledge.

The Renaissance response to the *Laments* assumed a version of the Platonic attitude toward art found in the *Republic*: knowledge, form, and emotion had to correspond to the rational humanist hierarchy discussed earlier in this essay. The poet's function was to use the recognized forms to connect the public expression of emotion to those persons, events, and forms of appropriate status. The public expression of his own grief, the creation of a cycle, and the inclusion of details of his personal life and emotional experiences violated that conventional hierarchy. By the conventions of the day, the *Laments* were either not a work of art or not a particularly significant or accomplished one. Romanticism brought a changed understanding of the importance of self-expression, both personal and national (we would now say cultural) and an emphasis on artists as geniuses who transcend the conventions of their time. The same traits that had been seen as artistic flaws then became the cycle's greatest virtues.

What of today? How is Roney's reading shaped by his cultural moment and role in the contest? Today we are in a cultural moment that is post-Renaissance, post-Romantic, and post-modern. The Renaissance ideal of a universal core tradition of absolute rational forms would be accepted by few humanists today and has been frequently criticized as an example of Eurocentric hegemony. The Romantic ideal of self-expression is no longer widely accepted because of the linguistic turn in criticism and our heightened awareness of how forms not only limit expression but actually shape the self itself. The modern professionalization of the university system brought a renewed emphasis on the aesthetic as the proper focus of literary studies. However, both that professionalization and the idea of a unique aesthetic realm have been widely criticized by postmodern critics and are now seen by many as a new liberal, process-based form of Eurocentric hegemony. Perhaps, the logical culmination of these trends is the suggestion that Kochanowski's daughter never existed at all and that the poems are either an elaborate hoax or a stylistic exercise.¹¹ Postmodern art pursues neither representation, nor formal excellence, nor self-expression, but self-consciously ironic play with codes of expression.

In these comments, I have been seeking some kind of alternative to the postmodern impasse I just described, an impasse which, in my opinion, undermines the status of literary criticism and other forms of humanist inquiry at a time when they are already undervalued by a society that privileges scientific and practical education. In a sense, we critics who were shaped by the cultural battles of the 1960s won the battle against what we saw as the restrictive canon of the time. The task today might be to reestablish a dialogue with our tradition and reassert the value of art as a means of representation, formal excellence, and self-expression. Kochanowski's works appeal to me precisely because he demonstrated the value of tradition as a means of dealing with the brute reality and annihilating emotion of death and because he showed how we always change a tradition as we use it. Using Eldridge's categories, the *Laments* are:

1. About something: Kochanowski's daughter's death and virtues, her father's and mother's grief, the stages of mourning, the limitations of reason, the power of death and fortune over

- human life, God, the need for consolation in a human form, the struggle between existing values and the need for self-expression, etc.
2. A new aesthetic form made possible by and created as a dialogue with classical models, a lament in cycle form, a dialogue between the narrative persona's voices in each poem in the cycle, a contrast between the different laments (including the Psalms) and the framed dream vision at the end, etc.
 3. A nuanced expression of emotion in many stages, none of which cancels out the others. The ebb and flow of pain and hope is meant to be experienced. The ironic withdrawal at the end must be felt:

She vanished, and I woke, uncertain what
I had just seen: Was this a dream, or not? (Lament 19)

Perhaps contemporary readers could ask this question both of the *Laments* and of the core tradition itself. At a time when many educators and critics seem more interested in forgetting the literary tradition than sustaining it, we can wonder whether our remembered experiences with texts are real and whether the literary tradition is a mutual illusion to be overcome in the clarifying light of our current forms of rational wisdom or the memory on which our culture rests. However, the exploration of those questions would require another complete essay on the current state of our culture and the ethics of education.

NOTES

¹ James Roney, "Death and Core Tradition in a Polish Renaissance Lament." (forthcoming)

² Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

³ Stanislaw Baranczak, "Introduction." Treny/*Laments*. Trans. Stanislaw Baranczak and Seamus Heaney. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995) xvii-xviii.

⁴ Jerzy Ziomek, *Renesans*. (Warsawa: PWN, 1976) 318-319.

⁵ All English translations from Jan Kochanowski, *Treñy/Laments* trans. Stanislaw Baranczak and Seamus Heaney (New York. Farrar: Straus and Giroux, 1995).

⁶ Jan Matejko, *Astronom Kopernik, czyli rozmowa z Bogiem* (*Astronomer Copernicus: Conversation with God*). Wikipedia: Wolna Encyklopedia. 15 Jan. 2010. This can be seen at http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astronom_Kopernik,_czyli_rozmowa_z_Bogiem.

⁷ Henryk Pillati, *Poet of Czarnolas*. 26 January 2007. 22 July 2010. This can be seen at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:POL_Jan_Kochanowski.jpg.

⁸ Jan Matejko, *Jan Kochanowski nad zwłokami Urszulki* (*Jan Kochanowski Above His Daughter's Body*). Wikipedia: Wolna Encyklopedia. 15 Jan. 2010. 21 July 2010. This can be seen at http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Kochanowski_nad_zw%C5%82okami_Urszulki.

⁹ Richard Eldridge, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Richard Eldridge, “Introduction: Subjectivity, Modernity, and the Uses of Literature.” in *Literature, Life, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 1-26.

¹¹ Baranczak, “Introduction”, xvi-xvii.