

The Positive Reawakening Of Polish Nationalism

Positivism is an intellectual movement that emerged in Europe during the mid to late 19th century. This movement was a direct reaction to Romanticism and impacted what had been the country of Poland in a very unique way. Poland was partitioned by Prussia, Russia, and Austria, and by 1795 the nation that once was Poland no longer existed on the map. Positivism was a philosophy developed by Auguste Comte a Frenchman in 1856. This philosophy was adapted by Polish intellectuals, writers, poets, and politicians in hopes of using this to re-establish Poland's national and cultural identity without the existence of the Polish nation.

Positivism in Poland was synthesized into a national reawakening through the literary works of Boleslaw Prus during the second half of the nineteenth century. Prus was a journalist that turned to writing fiction describing Polish society under the influence of Positivism. He wrote a series of books that show in detail the influence of positivist thought on the different facets of society. Prus represents Polish society in the majority of works and he also includes positivist commentary and represents the conflict between Positivist thought and the Polish reality. Those books were titled, *The Outpost*(1886), *The Doll*(1889), and *The Pharaoh*(1895). This paper is going to examine *The Doll*, and *The Outpost*, and how Positivism impacted Polish society.

Positivism was a path to promoting Polish nationalism between 1860 and 1890. In the Polish case it separated the nation from that of the people. In Poland, Positivism was based on Comte's philosophy that all parts of society are working toward one goal. In Comte's philosophy society is advancing through three stages on its way toward the

positive. While many Polish intellectuals discussed and wrote about Poland as moving through these stages, they did not agree with Comte that it was a higher power guiding them, but the power that they themselves have. That is why many Polish nobles saw him as too religious and looked toward the English social Darwinist; Herbert Spencer and his idea of the nation being a social organism.¹ Polish intellectuals turned to Spencer because he wrote that it was humanity that controlled their path through Comte's three stages. Positivism was a national response to the previous Romantic movement that had swept through Europe.

As a result of Romanticism, many failed armed conflicts took place in the 19th century, when Poland was fighting to regain its "nation". Intellectuals viewed the failures of these armed uprisings against the partitioned powers as failures of Romanticism and its philosophy. Romanticism failed because the inspired uprisings only cost the Poles the lives of their people and the loss of their property and more importantly an even further loss of their nation. They in turn looked toward Positivism, which was a nationalist movement based on their own experience. Poland was in no shape to break free from the partitioned powers, they had weak political leaders, and a country that was divided by class. Polish intellectuals, who identified themselves as Positivists looked at re-establishing the Polish cultural identity through grass roots reforms, in education, industry, and in the Polish social order.

The Positivist movement looked at re-building a nation from its very foundations. However, before they could rebuild their nation, they had to reform the idea of what it meant to be Polish. This was done through the Polish media in books, poems, and plays.

¹ Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began To Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000),47.

One of the best representatives of the literary world that spawned what it meant to be Polish was Boleslaw Prus. He was a Polish writer and newspaper editor, who was born in 1847 and died in 1912. He was one of the foremost leaders of the Positivist program.

The Polish Positivist movement was unlike any other national movement before it. The Positivist movement was born out of an absence of a nation in the physical sense. It preached uniformity and order, looking at the universe from a scientific perspective versus looking at it from a religious one. Positivism also encouraged industrialization and advocated for the advancement of industry and agriculture. Social improvement was another important part of the Positivist program, a primary goal was the uplifting of society across class and ethnic rifts.² These reforms also known as “Organic Work” would be the primary focus of the Positivists.

Historiography

Positivism in Poland has its own set of scholars that are drawn from within this paper and have all made significant contributions toward this topic. However within the group of scholars being examined there exists multiple interpretations on Positivism and its impact on partitioned Poland during the second half of the nineteenth century. The scholars discussed within this paper are Piotr Wandycz, Stanislaus Blejwas, and Brian Porter and Ilya Prizel. All have backgrounds in Polish history and in Eastern European history.

Brian Porter and Ilya Prizel share a differing viewpoint than Stanislaus Blejwas or Piotr S. Wandycz. Brian Porter is the author of the monograph When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth Century Poland and Ilya Prizel is the

² Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998),48.

author of National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine. Brian Porter uses many Polish archives as part of his research method, notably the Biblioteka Narodowa (national library) and the Archiwum Akt Nowych.(national archive) Porter uses many other published sources from the time periods he examines in his monograph, such as the Przegląd Tygodniowy, and looks at the periods between 1866 and 1886. Porter also uses a wide array of published monographs such as Imagined Communities by Benedict Anderson and Warsaw Positivism: Patriotism misunderstood by Stanislaus A Blejwas.

Ilya Prizel discusses national identity and how foreign policy shapes and develops a nation's identity. He does not include a lot of information on the period of time being looked at in this paper however he does present an interesting interpretation of Positivism and its faults however, and its failures to put into practice many of the Positivist policies meant to unite the people. Ilya uses a few different monographs such as Emigration in Polish Social Political Thought by Benjamin P. Murdzek. Ilya also quotes from primary sources like an essay by Boleslaw Prus, titled The Little Jewish Question. Prizel also views positivism as an elitist cause, one that never reaches the rest of the Polish people.

Brian Porter and Ilya Prizel differ from other notable historians on their stance toward Positivism. Both believe that Positivism was an elitist cause, and was never practical because of the lack of upper class Poles wanting to socialize and assist the lower classes. As a result Positivism began to lose its momentum and died out in 1890. Another fault of Positivism expressed by Ilya Prizel was that Positivism and its philosophy counteracted Laissez Faire economics and Organic work did not help to improve Poland as a nation.

Wandycz has written many books and articles on the topic of Poland. In his book The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918 he explores Poland and its social, political, and economic problems stemming from the partitions all the way up into World War I. He uses a broad array of sources within his work such as articles, monographs, journals, and other collections from the Polish national archives. He takes a unique approach to the material, because of his own connection to Poland. His monograph is very detailed and concise and covers a vast amount of Polish History.

Another article cited within this paper is by Stanislaus Blejwas and is titled Warsaw Positivism- Patriotism Misunderstood. This article draws upon a number of literary sources as well as other sources written by the author itself, such as Organic Work as a Problem in Polish Historiography and The Origins and Practice of "Organic Work" in Poland: 1795-1863. Blejwas draws from a number of sources that are Polish and untranslated in English, which makes it hard to gain a deeper understanding of the historiography of the paper. Blejwas looks at literary analyses of the Genre of Positivist Polish literature and uses them to develop his analysis of Positivism. Stanislaus Blejwas and Piotr Wandycz express the more popular view that Positivism was effective in Poland and reached out to the people and was a cultural rebirth.

Positivism is a unique national movement, and it was even more unique in Poland. The lack of a nation allowed Positivism to be more readily accepted than in other places around the world, such as India, Mexico, and Central America. These places all had rooted national foundations and Positivism was interpreted differently and ran into different problems in these other countries. The next article examined is by Giuseppe Flora and is titled The Evolution of Positivism in Bengal. This article has little to do with

Poland in its physical sense, other than the philosophy of Positivism. This article examines Positivism and its impact in India, specifically in relation to their religion and how different scholars within India have looked at Positivism. Flora uses many sources that are western in nature, such as The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans, and The Catechism of Positivism, or Summary, Exposition of the Universal Religion. These sources gave Giuseppe Flora, a western background, and complemented his local knowledge of India very well in writing this article. This article is relevant because of the non-western application of Positivism and how it interacted with the religious traditions in Bengal such as Hinduism. In India, unlike in Poland Auguste Comte was the figure they associated primarily with Positivism and found his philosophies to better suit their own needs.

Romanticism and historical context

The Partitioning of Poland began in 1772 and ended in 1795 with the last of Poland being absorbed by into Prussia, Russia, and Austria. The first partition occurred in 1772, when Prussia took over the north west frontier portion of Poland.³ Austria annexed Galicia, and Lemberg, while Russia took the eastern strip of Poland. (See appendix 1) The second partition occurred in 1793, when Prussia took a large piece of Western Poland, which included the towns of Posen, and Kalisch. Russia took the rest of Eastern Poland as well as Western Ukraine, which included Minsk and Pinsk. Austria was not a participant during this partition. The third and final partition occurred in 1795, Prussia obtained the northern part of Poland including Warsaw, while Austria took Western Galicia and Cracow, and Lublin. Russia annexed an enormous area from the Baltic

³ Henry Garland and Mary Garland. "Poland, Partitions of" *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*. Oxford University Press 1997. Oxford reference Online. Oxford University Press.

(Courland, Lithuania) southward to Volhynia, acquiring the towns of Kovno, Wilna, Grodno, and Brest. In 1795 the nation of Poland no longer existed; for a more detailed look at the partitions, (see Appendix 1).

The November Uprising of 1830 marked the beginning of the traditional Romantic nationalist view of Poland. The movement failed because of its lack of organization and unity. The insurrection took place in Warsaw, where two separate groups of conspirators attacked Belweder Palace, the home of the Russian territorial governor in an attempt to kill him and liberate Warsaw. Of the two groups uprising, one was a small group of civilians and the other were cadet officers from the military academy.

Romanticism was a reaction against the enlightenment, specifically against the human reason and scientific law. Romanticism according to Johann Gottfried Herder was a romantic philosopher, who “believed that as the individual grew to maturity through his people, so all peoples were part of a broader humanity, to which all brought their distinctive gifts, the essence of nature was diversity; humanity would be the poorer for the loss of the humblest people’s contribution, for what was humanity other than the sum total of the potential of mankind.”⁴

Herders philosophy was an essential part of how many Polish nobles and intellectuals believed, and were a driving force behind the Polish Romantic nationalist movement. Poland had to make itself look to the rest of the world like it was a culture and people that no one could live without. Romantic literature elevated Poland’s sacrifice

⁴ Robin Okey, *Eastern Europe 1740-1985: Feudalism to Communism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 75-77.

and sorrow to new heights claiming that Poland was the Christ of nations.⁵ According to Polish Romanticists, Poland had a “sacred mission to fulfill, and that was to break the chains of absolutism and bring about universal freedom“.⁶ The effect of Romanticism on Poland was substantial, this can be seen in the following lyrics of the Polish National Anthem, written in 1797 by Jozef Wybicki.

Poland has not yet died,
As long as we live.
What foreign force has taken
We will reconquer by the sword!⁷

The first sentence was the most important because as long as Poles were alive, Poland would continue to exist.⁸ The last line is important because it reflects the spirit of the Polish people. The nation during the era of Romanticism was an ideal, it was a principle that gave meaning to history.⁹

According to the literary critic Maurycy Mochnacki, who crafted his own definition of nationalism, “the essence of the nation, is not a collection of people living on a territory defined by certain borders, but rather the collection of their own ideas, feelings, and thoughts. Those ideas, feelings, and thoughts must necessarily result from history, religion, legislation, and traditions.”¹⁰ Benedict Anderson’s definition of nationalism is the following; it’s an imagined cultural bond that connects individuals to a

⁵ Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Lands of Partition Poland 1795-1918*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 181.

⁶ Ibid.,181.

⁷ Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began To Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000),18.

⁸ Ibid.,18.

⁹ Ibid.,20.

¹⁰ Ibid.,20.

larger social collective, that is both inherently limited and sovereign.¹¹ Both definitions resonate with the same idea, a bond that links the people for a greater good. Anderson's definition of nationalism is based upon a cultural bond, where as Mochnicki's relies on the same basic bond however, with a greater emphasis on the cultural connection.

Polish Romantic nationalism was devoid of any "ethnic nationalism" that later emerged with Positivism and its successors. According to Andrzej Walicki

Polish thinkers of the "romantic epoch" were convinced that Poland had to prove that her restoration was necessary for mankind. The existence of the nation, they thought, is not of value as such; on the contrary, only such nations have an indisputable right to existence which can claim to represent universal value.¹²

Many Poles living within the three partitions of Poland during the 1830's were enthusiastic supporters of the universal cause of freedom, particularly in Warsaw. This was evident in their support of the American Revolution as well as in Napoleon's campaigns throughout Europe.¹³ Polish people enlisted in Napoleons armies and died for his causes, in areas all around the world. The Romantics battle cry throughout the nineteenth century became "For Your Freedom and Ours."¹⁴ For the Polish Romantics, who saw the partitioning of their country as a destruction of the old order and institutions that once made up their proud country. The French Revolution and Napoleon provided hope to the Romantics that Poland's old order and its nation would be restored.¹⁵

After another insurrection attempt in 1863, that involved most of the population, and more than a year of violence, and when the insurrection reached a high fervor and the

¹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* , pg 6.

¹² Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998),41.

¹³ Ibid., 41.

¹⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹⁵ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999*

population thought the moment of “national salvation” had arrived, came the defeat of the Poles and Romanticism.¹⁶ The defeat the Poles suffered brought about mass material destruction and loss of life but also broke the spirit of the revolutionary Pole, the ideals, beliefs, and hopes that had given the Poles faith in themselves were no more.¹⁷

It was after this failed uprising that the nobles and intellectuals within Poland begin to rethink their methods of regaining independence. They felt that it was no longer possible to maintain the same violent course that had sustained them for over half a century. The Polish nationalists changed their nationalist approach from that of an armed one to one that involved organic work. This movement came to be known as Positivism, and would have profound impact upon the nation of Poland in the 1860’s, 70’s, and 80’s.

Boleslaw Prus is the Polish author of The Doll, The Outpost and The Most General Life Ideals. Prus in his novels and works discusses the effects of Positivism on Polish society and more importantly provides lessons showing the effects of not changing to the Positivist way. These lessons are always harsh ones and the characters in Prus’s works end up suffering from their desire to cling to the past or try and become what they never were.

He is one of the main writers that wrote for and supported the Positivist movement. He saw no error in his beliefs when it came to the Positivist philosophy. He saw it as the only way to bring Poland back and the surpass its imperialist neighbors who had long sense dominated Poland and Eastern Europe. In his work The Most General Life Ideals, he points what he believes are the only important things to strive for and attain in

(London: Yale University Press, 2003), 28.

¹⁶ Brian A. Porter, “The Social Nation and Its Futures: English Liberalism and Polish Nationalism in Late Nineteenth- Century Warsaw.” *American Historical Review*, (December 1996): 1470.

¹⁷ Ibid. 1470.

life.

He wrote in defense of Positivism and condemned Romanticism, statements such as this one represents the change in Political and Social thought throughout the partitions of Poland.

[The romantic nationalists] do not *really* love our landscapes and they have contempt for the peasants, the craftsmen, the merchants....This means that these people do not love the *real* country and society in which we live and which constitute the real human fatherland, but are in love with some sort of mental construct built from distant memories and vague desires. For that *unreal* country and society they are indeed prepared for sacrifices and exertions, which, however, do not bring the least benefit to the *real* land and its inhabitants.¹⁸

Prus explains in this quote that the “real” land and “real country and society”, made up the Positivist nation. The country of Poland under its new philosophy was intended to be “concrete, visible, tangible“-terms that have their roots in the sciences.¹⁹ Poland was now a community of people, and no longer portrayed itself as a “transcendent national spirit”.²⁰ Poetics such as these were now outdated with the onset of Positivism. The nation was no longer made real through shows of patriotism, such as armed uprising or dissent, the nation was now a “sociological” formation, a community of people without independence.²¹

Boleslaw Prus and other Polish Intellectuals turned toward Herbert Spencer, who was a social Darwinist. He was adopted by the Positivist movement in Poland because of his secular agnostic beliefs. The original philosophy was developed by Auguste Comte however this was deemed to inappropriate to Poland’s cause because of Comte’s religiosity. The concept of the nation as a social organism is not a modern concept; it has

18 Porter,50.

19 Ibid,50.

20 Ibid,51.

its roots in the middle ages. However the concept then and up until the 1860's was that each social organ had a specific task, the aristocracy was the "mind". The "muscles" were the peasants, and these specific tasks were assigned by god or nature.²²

However Herbert Spencer's philosophy was far more scientific in nature. Spencer believed that there was a more direct parallelism between man and society. His theory was based on a more evolutionary approach than anything previous. He believed it wasn't god or nature that gave different parts of societies different tasks. It was a mimicking of the natural order that was taking place. Human beings were emulating their own genetic traits and traits observed in nature. This can be seen through the partitioning of society, in the social classes, and the economic disparity present within Poland.

According to Spencer's philosophy, human beings looking for personal gain and welfare unknowingly contributed to society's formation of its division of labor.²³ Poland in this philosophy had to get its lower class population and its upper class population on an equal footing. It was the job of the rich upper class Poles to guide and assist the emerging middle class and to make them an effective contributor to the Polish society.

The Positivists believed that the church was a tool to educate and keep the masses under control. The church provided hope and faith to the poorer classes according to the Positivists. However unlike in other places, where Positivism and the church collided with their differing ideologies, the church in Poland worked side by side with the Positivists. After the partitions had taken place the Roman Catholic Church's

²¹ Ibid,50.

²² Ibid 50.

²³ Herbert Spencer, *Essays: Scientific, Political, and Speculative*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1883),395.

ecclesiastical structure was torn into pieces.²⁴

The three partitioning powers consistently intervened in religious affairs and more specifically ecclesiastical matters, In the Austrian partition, a policy of subordinating Church to state was put into place, thereby limiting the church's role and this also made appeals to Rome forbidden and no papal or Episcopal decrees could be published without prior imperial approval.²⁵ Church schools and theological seminaries were turned into secular, state run colleges, this also led to the abolishment of hundreds of monastic orders as well as the confiscation of their properties.²⁶

In Prussia, the Catholic clergy were supervised by the Protestant Consistory, and monastic property began to be gradually dissolved and its resources began to contribute to the state educational fund and the upkeep of the secular clergy.²⁷ In the Russian partition, the guarantee of religious liberty proclaimed by Catherine the Great during the first partition was long outdated and out of practice, tsarist policy was specifically designed to subordinate all ecclesiastical affairs and place them under the control of secular authorities.²⁸ With the creation of the sacred college of St. Petersburg in Russia, Rome was now disregarded completely and denied access to.²⁹ After the January Rising of 1863, the Russians confiscated all the landed property of the Catholic church within Russia and its partition of Poland.³⁰

The Roman Catholic Church began to see its power threatened, it had been the

²⁴ Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A history of Poland 1795-present*, (New York: Columbia University Press): 208.

²⁵ *Ibid.*,209.

²⁶ *Ibid.*,209.

²⁷ *Ibid.*,209.

²⁸ *Ibid.*,209.

²⁹ *Ibid.*,209.

³⁰ *Ibid.*,210.

uninterrupted power of Europe for centuries however the imperialist policies enacted by the partitioning powers challenged the power and role of the Polish clergy. Many of the clergy members frequently shared the ideals of national and social reformers. The lower clergy members in Poland knew the fears and desires of the common people and the impositions of church politics. The local lower church members practiced a far more fundamental form of Catholicism, which encouraged activism and supplied a steady stream of activist recruits to the political and national movements of their day.³¹ The local Roman Catholic churches around Poland supported the radicalism of the Positivist movement because it in the least promised them the return of church property and could only prosper if Poland regained its own statehood once more.

Herbert Spencer discusses four main similarities between individual organisms and a nation, they are constantly changing in mass, many nations grow thousand times larger than what they began as.³² Next is that the structure of a nation in the course of its growth becomes more and more complex in its structure. Simply put that a nation over the course of time, as it's population increases and the nation itself gets larger in size, more division will have to be made for order to be possible.³³ The third similarity is that in under-developed states there is no mutual dependence however parts of that society grow dependent on other parts of society as growth occurs.³⁴ The last similarity is that the "life and development of society, is independent of, and far more prolonged than, the life and development of its individual peoples."³⁵

Spencer is embraced by the Polish Positivists because of his belief in science.

³¹ Ibid., 216.

³² Spencer, 395.

³³ Ibid., 395.

³⁴ Ibid., 396.

Spencer's Social Organism example to the Positivists meant that "since society was organic its stratification was normal, but like all things in nature, this structure would change over time." This new reasoning was poisonous to existing political institutions throughout Europe, particularly the Ancien regimes of Western Europe.

This was dangerous because it said in essence that the social barriers that separate the different classes will not always separate the classes. The class structure was completely determinant on the times. According to the positivist method, "the physical world was tied to the social world; the unity dissolved by the centuries is returned."³⁶ The physical and social world are interconnected specifically when looking at nationalism. The unity that ceased to exist on the outside with the loss of Poland's statehood was what the Positivists sought after.

The concept of evolution was another key term when discussing organic work and how it relates to Positivism. The term evolution suggests both a scientific connotation as well as a term that suggests progress, according to the positivists, "science" signified a monistic philosophy that assumes the unity of all existence under scientific laws that are universally applicable.³⁷ Evolution and its application to Poland stems from Herbert Spencer's social Darwinist background and his belief in evolution stemmed from this. Organic work will cause society to evolve, and it will evolve in the following areas, the economy, the social order, and through Industry and Agriculture. It was only through this evolution that Poland would be able to throw off the shackles of the partitioning powers and regain their former statehood.

³⁵ Ibid., 396.

³⁶ Brian A. Porter, "The Social Nation and Its Futures: English Liberalism and Polish Nationalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Warsaw." *American Historical Review*, (December 1996): 1477.

³⁷ Ibid., 1477.

Although Herbert Spencer was the ideal philosopher/social scientist from whom the Positivists based their nationalist program from, he also believed in survival of the fittest. The Positivists had to be cautious about adopting Spencer's ideology so readily because the concept; survival of the fittest directly countered the positivist ideal of organic work. The Poles had to represent their English Mentor creatively and selectively through his works.

The Positivists found three ways to ennoble Spencer and condemn the partitioning of Poland, the first was the easiest, to accept the general scope of Spencerian philosophy but to argue against the emphasis on struggle, as it relates to survival of the fittest. The second way was to recast Spencer into a different light; the Polish elite had to reshape Herbert Spencer and his works. They did this by only acknowledging the works that were relevant to Poland, with some inventive and at times creative translation.³⁸ the third way was to represent Spencer's idea of struggle for survival, in a way that benefited Poland.

According to Spencer's philosophy, this struggle for survival was something all inferior organisms dealt with in nature, applying this to nations was no different, however this did legitimize the German, Prussian, and Russian partitions, seeing this as something that occurs in nature and therefore is just a part of nature.³⁹ Herbert Spencer was written about with great admiration by many Positivist writers, one in particular was Boleslaw Prus.

Boleslaw Prus was the author of three novels that describe the effects of Positivism either directly or indirectly upon society. The next section will look at two of Prus's novels; The Doll, and The Outpost. Boleslaw Prus was the leading author of the

³⁸ Ibid.,1484.

³⁹ Ibid., 1484.

Positivist program and came to believe that Positivism could reform society and bring awareness to the population that it was a “living social organism.” A book published later titled The Most General Life Ideals in 1905 laid out the basic ideals that he regarded as the highest and most general in the human world and the natural world. These ideals were not new to Prus; he used these same general ideals when writing his novels previous to the publishing of this treatise of beliefs.

Prus’s universal ideals represented in above represent the backbone of his belief and influenced his involvement with the Positivist movement in Poland. These ideals were Happiness, Perfection, and Utility.⁴⁰ Perfection to Prus is the “existence of various parts and properties that form an organized whole and supports one another mutually.”⁴¹ Happiness according to Prus in living beings results from “changes supportive of life, health, and development.”⁴² Utility according to Prus is such acts that produce “Happiness and Perfection.”⁴³ According to Prus the highest goal in life that should be attained by man is happiness however societies must work together towards realizing all ideals, everyone has the right to be happy and an obligation to society to be useful, in whatever capacity is attainable, and all people must strive towards perfection even when that may not be possible.⁴⁴

The following quote emerged from The Most General Life Ideals and it states that “You must be useful, because the whole world is useful, because utility is one of the most universal laws. The more useful one can be to his intimates, to his neighbors, to society, to civilization, the better are his chances of existence. But he who is unable to be useful will perish helpless and unmourned⁴⁵”

40 Boleslaw Prus, The Most General Life Ideals. (1905): 1.

41 Ibid., 1.

42 Ibid., 1.

43 Ibid., 1.

44 Ibid., 1.

45 Ibid., 1.

In their prose, Prus describes the Positivist work ethic that so many of his novels represent in different ways. The Doll describes the work of one, and his struggle at staying true to this way of thinking. The entire Polish social nation according to Prus had to follow this philosophy in order to throw off the shackles of their enslavement and take back what was once theirs. This quote also discusses those that must change with society, these are the people that refuse to change, whether they are peasants, or nobles, Prus's quote applied to all people. Everyone must become an integrated working part of Poland. This meant many progressive reforms and Prus does an excellent job at representing these. The elimination of the social strata, the incorporation of the Jews, industrialization of Poland, and development of Polish cultural values through education. Many of these ideals are represented in Boleslaw Prus's literature and will be examined in the context of two novels.

Analysis

The Doll by Boleslaw Prus takes place in 1878 and addresses the growing differences between the old nobility and the growing upper middle class, as well as providing an overall look at Polish society from top to bottom. The primary theme in the book that is expressed throughout is the battle of ideologies, between Romanticism and Positivism. These values are reflected in two specific characters throughout the novel. The two characters are Isabella Lecki, the daughter of a nobleman and a merchant named Wokulski. Isabella Lecki embodies the Romantic Movement that had previously made it relevant across Europe. Wokulski however is an upper middle class merchant, who makes his fortune selling war supplies abroad. Wokulski is unlike any other character in

the story because of the emotional and ideological conflict that ensues when he begins developing a relationship with Isabella Lecki.

Isabella is unique because she lives in her own bubble that she believes represents the world around her. She never knows the changing of the seasons because wherever she goes in Europe, it's all the same. Isabella believes that poor people want to be poor and have no desire to be better. This is because whenever she went out around town she was shown respect by all around her. Isabella is unaware of the social differences between the classes. Isabella also feels that the poor working people must have sinned in order to have to work everyday. Although Isabella does not see the world for what it truly is, it makes a lasting impact on her. Isabella is clearly a figure still enamored with that of the old world and the institutions that make up a part of it.

Prus begins to contrast Isabella's romantic world with that of the new developing world that is focused on industry. Isabella visited an iron foundry with her father in France and this sign of industrialization and modernization frightened her, this unknown was industrialization. This shows Prus's support of modernization and industrialization and modernization are key parts of the Positivists organic work strategy. Visiting the iron foundry cracked Isabella's fragile world and is just the beginning as she realizes that her world is changing.

Wokulski also experiences rapid changes. He differs from Isabella in that he is not a part of the old world. He inherits a haberdashery shop from his deceased wife along with her fortune.⁴⁶ He goes abroad to make his fortune selling war supplies as a way of rebelling against the monotony that was expected of him as the owner of a haberdashery shop. Wokulski was impatient with ordinary life; although he was rich and had

everything most people wanted he sought something more. Wokulski sought the hand of Isabella Lecki. This interest begins to radically shape the character of Wokulski, for better and worse. The Lecki family was bankrupt and as a way of getting closer to Isabella and her father, Wokulski was able to provide them income by giving them high percentage off of a small investment. He also bought the dinning set and held it in kind for Isabella. Wokulski begins to adopt more qualities of Romanticism, as a result of his exposure to the nobility of Warsaw and his pursuit of Isabella Lecki as his wife.

This becomes problematic however because it causes him to question his very soul and his beliefs that exemplified who he was. Wokulski was born into a failed noble family that had lost everything; he was apprenticed into a haberdashery shop where he worked. Wokulski became increasingly interested in studying science. His father constantly complained that he was doing nothing to help restore the family. His youth and intelligence connected him with many people, who also believed in the power of science as the way to cure society of its ways. These people were the Positivists.

Wokulski established trading relations in two of the biggest hubs in Europe, Moscow Russia, and Paris France. These trading relationships brought him much fame throughout the aristocratic and Jewish circles throughout Europe.

Wokulski was a philanthropist throughout Warsaw. He helped many people friend and foe. He also gave to the church even though he had no belief in a divine being that created everything. He did however realize that the church was very important to the poor because it maintained control over them and gave them hope to continue on as they are. Wokulski did not see the church as an enemy; he saw it as a tool for reaching out into the lower classes and influencing their lives for the better.

Wokulski and Isabella begin to affect each other more and more throughout the story. Wokulski and Isabella agree to get engaged; however Wokulski realizes that Isabella is simply using him for his wealth. She still does not think of Wokulski as her equal, merely a source of money that would enable her to continue her aristocratic life.

Ultimately this novel by Prus discusses two warring social and political ideologies and shows how and where they manifest themselves within Polish society. Within Prus's novel you can also see the interaction between the Jews living within Poland and how they are viewed by Polish society. The Jewry within Poland was still looked at as outsiders, men who had no equal in the world of finance but considered greedy by the other strata of society. Wokulski has many dealings with the Jews of Warsaw because of their connections in the business world. Wokulski's repeated dealings with the Jewry of Warsaw also go with the Positivists belief that the incorporation of Jews into Polish society will lead to a more productive, fruitful society.

Industrialization is another part of the Positivist program represented in The Doll by Prus. Industrialization is represented by Wokulski's dealings with other industrial centers across Europe. This would not be possible without the establishment of a railroad that would connect him to these places. Another aspect of industrialization that is looked at by Prus, is the importation of cheaper cotton fibers by Wokulski that allows cheaper textiles to be made that were not available to Poland prior.

Boleslaw Prus addresses the development of Polish cultural values through education in a unique way, Wokulski is a learned man, who has an education rooted in the sciences and its through this education that he see's the world, as a positivist does. Its not hope or emotion that fuels him but merely a belief that all things in nature and in

science will lead him and society to all the answers they seek and this was the Positivists belief that science and preparation would lead them to nationhood. Prus represents the ideological struggle with his main character Wokulski that he and other Positivists have to constantly deal with. Prus represents all classes of Polish society and how Positivism could not pair itself with another nationalist ideology like Romanticism.

The Outpost

The Outpost is a novel that was adapted from its serialized original print form into a novel. This story follows a farmer named Slimak, who is a landowner that obtained his land when many of the feudal lords could no longer keep and maintain the land. Slimak lives in the German section of Poland. Slimak is a proud man, who constantly complains about his state of being and the little amount of land that he has. Slimak is constantly wondering why he cannot obtain more land, and livestock.

Slimak is presented with a unique trade opportunity when railroad surveyors begin to survey land to build a railroad out by his property. Slimak is commissioned to bring them food and makes double the money selling to the railroad surveyors. As a result of Slimak's generosity and lower priced goods compared to that of the prices the Jewish merchants were trying to sell their goods for, the railroad surveyors chose to build the railroad closest to his property so that Slimak may be the first to profit when the railroad is completed. Many things happen as a result of Slimak's new found wealth. The community around him begins to resent his gain and his unwillingness to share his new business opportunities with his neighbors around him. The most significant events in the story all occur after the lord sells his manor on his wife's insistence to move into the city of Warsaw. The manor and all its lands are bought by a group of investors and are sold

off in pieces to German immigrants seeking a new life out on the frontier of the German controlled partition of Poland.

Slimak is challenged when meeting these German immigrants because they do not believe in the romantic notion that a man is tied to his lands and that they should be passed down from father to son and so on. The Germans believed that everything can be bought and sold for a price. Slimak was offered a premium price for his 10 acres however because of pride and the history of his land, he declines. Slimak immediately develops differences between the Germans and himself. He is shunned out of all major business opportunity and trade by the immigrants.

The world around Slimak changed rapidly more quickly than he could adapt to it. Slimak lost everything he had as a result of his failing understanding of the new world developing around him. The Outpost addresses Boleslaw Prus's positivist themes as well. The elimination of the social strata is addressed in the book by the selling of the squire's manor and all his lands. The squire represented the ancient institutions that once held power in Poland. The squire sells his manor and lands to a Jewish investor, who then turns around and sells these lands to the many incoming German colonists.

In the book this is Prus's way of representing the end of that social stratum that had continually oppressed the common Pole for many years. Prus in this book like in the last one represents an incorporation of the Jews into society. This is evidenced by a Jewish investor buying a noble estate. The industrialization of Poland in this book is also symbolized by the railroad. A railroad is being built by Slimak's property in the beginning and promises to increase profits by enabling him to ship his goods to other places. There is also a reference to a steam powered sleigh that could allow farmers to

ship there goods in quantity to the railroad depots without the use of horses or mules.

Polish cultural values were being changed during the course of The Outpost as well. Slimak's role as a peasant was being changed, Slimak still believed in his role as a peasant, and was unable to accept the change that was occurring around him. As German colonists moved into the area and the squire's manor was bought by a member of the Jewish community, he was no longer a servant to a large landowning noble, like he had been used to.

In Boleslaw Prus's works, he shows the many Positivist reforms and the effect they had on the different parts of Polish society. In The Doll, and The Outpost, these reforms can be easily pointed out, in the next section of the paper, the positivist reforms enacted into Poland and its partitions will be discussed.

-Positivist Reforms-

Industrialization occurred all over Poland as both a result of Positivism and as a result of outside circumstances. Industrialization manifested itself differently in each partition. In the Russian partition, the development of the industrial revolution within the Russian partition was brought into place because of a transformation of the agrarian structure within Poland caused by the liberalization of international trade, which contributed to an agricultural boom.⁴⁷ This boom ended up producing products for the domestic market as well as for export to the west. An internal market began to be developed, combined with England's lifting of an embargo on the export of machinery in 1842, caused an even greater growth among textile industries.⁴⁸

Railroads were also developed in 1865 that spread out across the partitions. A

⁴⁷ Wandycz., 201.

⁴⁸ Ibid.,201.

major network of railroads linked all the large mining and industrial centers throughout Poland.⁴⁹ By 1865 Poland had 180 industrial plants, using 375 steam engines, this number only increased in 1878 when it had 674 plants with 807 engines.⁵⁰ The use of steam driven engines between 1853 and 1888 increased twenty-five times.⁵¹ Around this time, large industrial centers arose, specifically the city of Warsaw. The total value of industrial production increased over six times between 1864 and 1885, from approximately 30 to 190 million rubles.⁵²

Along with the increase in trade, and rubles coming in, the amount of industrial workers rose from 80,000 to 150,000 in Russian Poland, along with Galicia and Prussian Poland having 25,000 and 28,000 workers. From 1880 to 1890 Russia increased its trading with its part of Poland until 70 percent of Polish trade was with the Russia.⁵³ Not only was this partition of Poland becoming more industrialized, other reforms were being put into place to, demands began to arise for the emancipation of women, and peasant property increased by over 8 percent between 1864 and 1890.⁵⁴ Russia began a system of “Russification” within their partition of Poland. This dampened many Positivist claims, the Russian government applied very heavy censors on Polish literature and newspapers, which resulted in a weaker positivist movement all over the Russian partition except in Warsaw.

In the Prussian partition of Poland, most of the industry revolved around food

49 Ibid.,201.

50 Ibid.,202.

51 Ibid.,202.

52 Ibid.,202.

53 Ibid.,202.

54 Ibid.,199.

processing, such as spirit refineries, sugar refineries and machinery works.⁵⁵ Other than these industries, industrial development was very slow moving. By 1867 only 13 percent of the population of Prussian Poland made its living off of industry, including craft production.⁵⁶ Within this partition very few Poles owned and maintained large businesses, the majority of Polish business owners maintained very small businesses, only 95 businesses incorporated 50 or more workers.⁵⁷

Communication and transportation in this partition were much better off than in either the Russian or German partitions. By 1870 there were 528.1 kilometers of railroad track, and about 33.3 kilometers per 10,000 inhabitants.⁵⁸ while the Prussian partition may not have the sheer amount of Industrial success that its Russian counterpart had, it did however contain the best communication and transportation system in the Partitions.

The Austrian partition was the poorest of the partitions by far, they produced far less food than either of the other two partitions and the state budget granted to that area by Austria was inadequate to assist the Poles or provide investment for Industry.⁵⁹ The Austrian partition was the poorest part of Poland, it's birth and death rates were the highest out of all the areas of Poland, its agricultural productivity was the lowest in Poland and had the highest amount of salaried state officials, 3 percent of the population were state officials.⁶⁰

The Partitioning of Poland created a unique social and cultural conflict within the partitioned areas of Poland. Polish society looking for a way at freeing itself from the

55 Ibid.,230.

56 Ibid.,230.

57 Ibid.,230.

58 Ibid.,230.

59 Davies.,147.

60 Ibid.,146.

imperialist powers of Prussia, Russia, and Austria. Boleslaw Prus and the Positivist movement had a profound impact upon Polish society, it changed the definition of nationalism, and how an entire former nation full of people would represent themselves and what values they would share. Prus's characters like Wokulski and Josef Slimak embody this search for social identity in a landscape of ever changing political and social ideologies. In the words of Boleslaw Prus,

“no one knows a secure path, where superstition-bound man is prey to mischance, misery, and hate- in the dark trackless areas of life, lamplighters also bustle about. Each carries a small flame over his head, each kindles light along his path, lives unknown, labors inestimable, and then disappears like a shade.”⁶¹

⁶¹ Christopher Kasparek, “Two Micro-Stories by Boleslaw Prus,” *The Polish Review*, 1995, no.1, pp. 99-103.

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Positivism In Poland

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Seminar Paper
Presented to the Department of History
Western Oregon University
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in History

Spring 2009

Approved _____ Date _____

Approved _____ Date _____

HST 499: Prof. Max Geier & Prof. Narasingha Sil