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Orszula's Death: Grief and Consolation in the Renaissance--The Treny of Jan Kochanowski

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Orszula's Death:
Grief and Consolation in the Renaissance—The *Treny* of Jan Kochanowski

By

Michael T. Tworek

A DEPARTMENT HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE
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Orszula's Death:

Grief and Consolation in the Renaissance—The *Treny* of Jan Kochanowski

Michael Tworek

Abstract for Honors Thesis entitled “Orszula’s Death: Grief and Consolation in the Renaissance—the *Treny* of Jan Kochanowski

In this thesis, I use the *Treny*, a late 16th century collection of nineteen poems by the Polish humanist Jan Kochanowski, as a basis from which to reconstruct a historical narrative of his attempt at self-consolation over the death of his daughter and, in the process, reconsider our current understanding of the Renaissance in Europe. Until fairly recently, scholars have tended to view the Renaissance as a primarily Italian or western European phenomenon. Eastern Europe receives little mention in current academic discussions of the Renaissance. This thesis, however, will show that the *Treny* does offer compelling evidence that this view is mistaken, and that Jan Kochanowski is indeed an outstanding representative of cosmopolitan European culture in Poland.

It is not an easy matter to reconstruct Kochanowski’s life. Few records concerning his daily life remain, outside his numerous poetic works. Yet in joining the intellectual ranks of the humanists, Kochanowski obviously devoted much of his early life to the study of the languages and literatures of Greco-Roman antiquity, the results of which echoed throughout the works of his maturity. Similarly, he knew and interacted with many of the same philosophical and religious movements that flourished throughout Renaissance Europe. Thus, my task in this thesis is primarily to use poetry as a biographical source; and my method is to develop historical contexts that help explain the sorts of sentiments and ideas that Kochanowski expressed in the *Treny*.

In the preface, I examine Kochanowski’s response to the death of his daughter and his subsequent grief as recorded in the first part of the *Treny*. In chapter one, I reconstruct a glimpse of his humanist education in Kraków, Königsberg, and Padua, thereby providing a context for comparison; with chapter two, I examine the influence of the humanist consolatory tradition on Kochanowski and the *Treny*, focusing on the roles that the writings of Cicero and Petrarch played within the work. With next two chapters, I look at Kochanowski’s reaction to and eventual rejection of humanist consolation in the *Treny*, specifically against the Classical philosophical concepts of wisdom and virtue. In the last chapter, I focus on Kochanowski’s virulent critique of Cicero, philosophy, and human knowledge and pride in the last part of the *Treny* for their roles in aggravating his grief. Finally in the epilogue, I consider Kochanowski’s eventual decision to reject his humanism and find consolation in blind obedience to the divine will of his now more reformed and sterner Christian God and faith, and elucidate the significance of Kochanowski’s story of personal grief within the larger picture of European Humanism.

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Preface

In 1579 on a country estate in Czarnolas near Warsaw, Orszula Kochanowska died suddenly. A little less than two years old, Orszula suffered the same tragic fate that befell so many other children throughout Europe. Illness, famine, war, or even “divine will” could cut both a child’s life and its parents’ happiness painfully short, making childhood a hazardous journey for children “in the centuries prior to the twentieth.”¹ Orszula’s death did not seem to occasion any great public notice from either the immediate or the larger community of her region, though she had been the daughter of a nobleman.² No one came forth to offer her a public eulogy. Neither written public accounts describing the circumstances of her death nor her grave have survived the passage of time. Thus, the memory of Orszula’s life and death would likely have faded away had not the intense love and grief of her father, Jan Kochanowski, held on to it so dearly.

Deeply saddened by the untimely loss of “his dearest daughter,” Kochanowski threw himself entirely into grieving for Orszula.³ “You are gone, my Orszula!” he cried out desperately.⁴ Choked by the sorrowful reality of her untimely departure, he could do nothing for Orszula but mourn her loss, honoring her memory with his tears. Even a year after her death, Kochanowski was still mourning Orszula’s death, grieving unremittingly

¹ Margaret L. King, *The Death of the Child Valerio Marcello* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1.

² Janusz Pelc, *Kochanowski: Szczyt renesansu w literaturze polskiej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001), 525.

³ Jan Kochanowski, “Dedication,” *Treny: The Lamentations of Kochanowski*, trans. Adam Czerniawski. (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre of the University of Oxford, 2001), 2-3.

⁴ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 2-3.

and uncontrollably beyond the limits permitted for the bereaved.⁵ The social consequences for such “unmanly” behavior could be severe. Excessive grief in a man would have “concerned his friends,” as well as his family, “who feared to be dishonored by his immoderate expression of sorrow.”⁶ Yet, regardless of what the potential repercussions might have been, they seemed neither to have concerned Kochanowski, nor to have tempered his sorrow. How could he forget Orszula, a child so full of every “virtue” and “maidenly gift,” from his racked mind, especially when grief over her death followed him everywhere?⁷ His mental anguish, he thought, must find understanding and release: Where then would this devastated father turn?⁸ In a manner typical of him as a humanist and a poet, Kochanowski turned to his pen and “scroll,” to record the emotional torments of his tragedy as well as explore his “uncommon” reaction to the death of a child.⁹ Completed and published in 1580, this testament would be his last gift to Orszula. Kochanowski’s touching tribute of paternal love for his dead child was a cycle of nineteen poems, written not in Latin but in the emerging vernacular—in Polish—and fittingly entitled *Treny (Laments)*.¹⁰ This bereaved father would have never imagined that he, “driven by chance and my pervasive loss/ to compose laments,” would achieve perpetual “fame” for “these elegies,” the only testimony of his “unbearable grief” to both his contemporaries and to posterity.¹¹

⁵ John Mersereau, Jr., “Jan Kochanowski’s *Laments*: A Definition of the Emotion of Grief,” in *Studies in Russian and Polish Literature: In Honor of Waclaw Lednicki* (Copenhagen: Mouton & Co, 1962), 37.

⁶ King, *The Death of The Child*, 148.

⁷ Kochanowski, “Dedication,” *Treny*, 3.

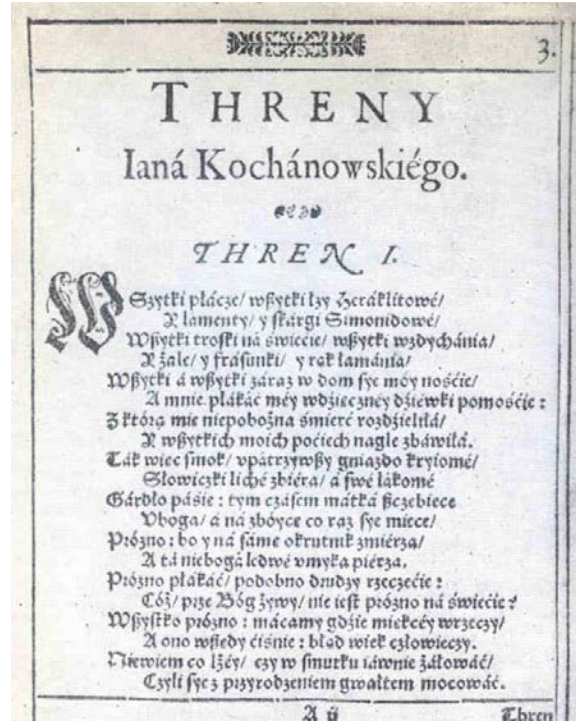
⁸ George W. McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 4-6.

⁹ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 35; Mersereau, Jr., “Jan Kochanowski’s *Laments*,” 37.

¹⁰ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 525-526.

¹¹ Kochanowski, “Dedication,” *Treny*, 6-7.

Fig. 1. The First Page of *Treny* in Old Polish Script, 1580



Source: Janusz Pelc, *Kochanowski: Szczyt renesansu w literaturze polskiej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001), 530.

Inexplicable to him and others, Kochanowski's grief found its uncompromising manifestation in the poetic and emotional beauty of his verses in *Treny*.¹² It was one thing for him simply to describe the pains of grief, ultimately failing to convey to readers their effects on him, yet it was quite another to speak of its cruelty in a manner so moving and elegant that another person could not help but mourn with him. He felt undaunted by this task however, Kochanowski sought to capture the *pathos* that his dire situation demanded, at least in his eyes.¹³ As he labored over Orszula's literary monument, chiseling out the words that captured every subtlety, every shade, and every tear of his

¹² Mersereau, Jr., "A Definition of the Emotion of Grief," 37-38.

¹³ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 525.

grief to full light, Kochanowski began at the beginning of his misfortune, when the force of Orszula's death first came down on him.

Wszytki płacze, wszyti łzy Herakitowe
I lamenty, i skargi Symonidowe,
Wszytki troski na świecie, wszytki wzdychania
I żale, i frasunki, i rąk łamania,
Wszytki a wszytki zaraz w dom sie mój nóście
A mnie płakać mej wdzięcznej dziewczki pomoście,
Z którą mię niepobożna śmierć rozdzieliła
I wszytkich moich pociech nagle zbawiła.

(All Heraclitean tears and woes,
All plaints and dirges of Simonides,
All the world's sorrows, griefs and cares,
All lamentations and wringing of hands,
All but all enter my house at once
To help me mourn my precious girl
Whom impious Death has gripped,
Suddenly ending all my joy.)¹⁴

Death had robbed Kochanowski of his "precious girl," taking with her all of his comfort and happiness. Mourning, with all of its heavy baggage, had arrived to

¹⁴ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 4-5.

Kochanowski's home without delay, cascading down "all but all" upon him. Profound grief was Death's reward to fathers who had loved their children too much; Kochanowski had now found himself the unwilling recipient of this "gift." He questioned the necessity of this "gift," begging Death to remember that Orszula had not deserved the bearing of its cost.

O prawo krzywdy pełne! O Znikomych cieni

Sroga, nieubłagana, nieużyta ksieni!

Tak li moja Orszula, jeszcze żyć na świecie

Nie umiawszy, musiała w ranym umrzeć lecie?

I nie napatrzawszy się jasności słonecznej,

Poszła nieboga widzieć krajów nocy wiecznej.

A bodaj ani była świata oglądała,

Co Bowiem więcej, jedno ród a śmierć poznała.

A miasto pociech, które winna z czasem była

Rodzicom swym, w ciężkim je smutku zostawiła.

(Oh merciless, cold and remorseless

Sovereign of departing shades!

Orszula died innocent of life's ways:

The poor child briefly saw the light,

Now she journeys into endless night.

Better if she'd never been!

What had she but birth and death?

Destroying the joy her shared

She left them anguish and despair.)¹⁵

Orszula, Kochanowski cried, had not deserved to die and to dwell in “endless night,” for she had been “innocent of life’s ways.” How could a child, he asked, who only “briefly saw the light” of the world, have suffered Death’s penalty? The echo of Death’s silence had sparked anger in Kochanowski, while rage added itself to the weight of his grief. If only Orszula had never existed, then her parents, above all her father, would not have to hold onto “anguish and despair” instead of her loving embrace. Regaining his composure, Kochanowski shamefully remembered that Orszula was not to blame for his sickness of grief. Perhaps, he thought, Death should have taken him instead:

Alem ja już z jej śmierci nigdy żałociwszy,

Nigdy smutniejszy nie mógł być ani teskliwszy.

A ona (by był Bóg chciał) dłuższym wiekiem swoim

Siła pociech przymnożyć mogła oczom moim.

A przynajmniej tym czasem mogłem być odprawić

Wiek swój i Persefonie ostantniej się stawic,

Nie uczuwszy na sercu tak wielkiej żałoci,

Której równia nie widzę w tej tu śmiertelności.

(But never could I have been

¹⁵ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 6-7.

More pained and grieving at her death.

Yet she, with God's assent,

Could in her fuller life

Have multiplied my joys.

I could have run my course

And gone to meet Proserpine

Without that deepest grief

The like no mortal eyes have seen.)¹⁶

Regardless of how much he wished to take her place, Kochanowski knew that Orszula was gone forever. No selfless act of parental love for her could save him from “that deepest grief” that now stained every part of his life. However, despite of all of its “sorrows,” “wringing of hands,” and showers of “Heraclitean tears,” he could not induce himself to part so easily with this painful token of his loss. It was all that Orszula had bequeathed to her father. Not even those closest to him could convince him otherwise.

‘Próżno płaskać’—podobno drudzy rzeczecie.

Cóż, prze Bog żywy, nie jest prózno na świecie?

Wszystko prózno. Macamy, gdzie miękcej w rzeczy,

A ono wszędy ciśnie: błąd wiek człowieczy.

Nie wiem, co lżej: czy w smutku jawnie żałować,

Czyli sie z przyrodzeniem gwałtem mocować.

¹⁶ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 10-11.

(‘You mourn in vain’—they say. But
Then what, by God, is not vain on earth?
All is futile! We grope for relief
But pain pinches us on every side.
Error rules our lives!
Is it better openly to grieve
Or struggle fiercely against nature’s course?)¹⁷

His state of uncontrollable grief was pointless, interjected Kochanowski’s anonymous “they.” However, the simplicity of their answer did not satisfy him again his previous anger and rage returned. Why was his grief and mourning, Kochanowski answered, completely “in vain”? Were not all earthly things “vain” and “futile,” he pressed on, if humanity could not grieve for ones it had most cherished? Such advice itself was “futile,” for it forgot that the “pain” pinching him now in his times of sorrow also was one which could pinch all of humanity. In Kochanowski’s eyes, grief was an “error” that controlled the lives of all men, and his own reaction provided convincing evidence enough. It was in humanity’s nature to grieve, in spite of the advice that the anonymous “they” proposed.¹⁸ In this rejection, Kochanowski presented the central tension of his crisis: how and with what could one alleviate grief if it is natural to humanity? The rest of *Treny* records the struggle that Kochanowski faced as he searched for the answer to this question. There, however, is far more to Kochanowski’s story of grief in *Treny* than just grief over a child.

¹⁷ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 4-5.

¹⁸ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 526-527.

In this thesis, I use *Treny*, a masterpiece in Polish literature, as a clue, a trace from which to reconsider our understanding of the Renaissance. Until fairly recently, scholars have tended to view the Renaissance as a primarily Italian or, more generally, a western European phenomenon. For most, the idea of the Renaissance in eastern Europe is simply absurd. Modern political developments of the twentieth century in eastern Europe have certainly contributed to this opinion. A few, more-perceptive historians “know that in its diffusion throughout Europe the Renaissance did not halt at arbitrary boundary dividing Europe into western and eastern halves.”¹⁹ Except for a few highly specialized studies, eastern Europe does not really exist in discussions of the Renaissance. But, as I shall argue, the *Treny* of Jan Kochanowski offers compelling evidence that this view is mistaken.

First, the sentiments that resonate through *Treny* are clearly tied to a cosmopolitan language. Kochanowski had traveled, as we shall see, extensively in western Europe, especially in Italy where he pursued his humanist interests at one of the most important universities at the time. In joining the ranks of the humanists, he shared their reverence for the study and proper imitation of the languages and literatures of Greco-Roman antiquity. Similarly, he knew and interacted with many of the same movements of philosophical and religious ideas that flourished throughout Renaissance Europe. In this sense, Renaissance humanism had offered a rich cosmopolitan European culture to persons from different countries, connecting them in a common outlook and approach to

¹⁹ Harold B. Segel, *Renaissance Culture in Poland: The Rise of Humanism, 1470-1543* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 1.

living.²⁰ By focusing on and contextualizing his reaction to grief, his search for consolation in humanism, and his subsequent rejection of his own humanism in *Treny*, we will see that Jan Kochanowski is an outstanding representative of this cosmopolitan European culture in Poland.

Yet it is not an easy matter to reconstruct Kochanowski's life. Simply put, Kochanowski's life is a mystery. We have few accounts of his youth, his education, his personal thoughts, his political life, his marriage, or his family life. What remains is his poetry, along with a few other scattered clues.²¹ My task in this thesis, therefore, involves the effort to use poetry as a historical source; and my strategy is largely contextual. My method, that is, is to develop contexts that help explain the sorts of sentiments and ideas that Kochanowski expressed in the *Treny*. Consequently, my work is speculative. But it is not blind speculation. Instead it is based on what the early modernist Natalie Zemon Davis has called a reconstruction of "the realm of the probable."²² In this effort, therefore, I use every clue I can find to make connections that enable a reconstruction of the significance of Kochanowski's story of grief. In the end, this story of a humanist's response to grief will not be one just isolated to the confines of Poland, but will find its place in Renaissance Europe.

²⁰ Paul O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 22-23.

²¹ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 63-65.

²² For an excellent treatment of the historian's approach to "the realm of the probable", see Natalie Zemon Davis, "AHR Forum: The Return of Martin Guerre 'On the Lame'," in *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 3 (Jun., 1988): 572.

One: Vergil and Homer in Poland—the Making of a Humanist

At the time of Orszula's death, Kochanowski had retired to the leisurely life of a country noble at his bucolic estate of Czarnolas, following a long and successful career as a courtier, poet, and humanist. Born in 1530 in the town of Sycyna, located in the region of Radom, just south of Warsaw, Jan had come from a well-to-do noble family. The distant rural setting of the Kochanowski ancestral home in Radom did not prevent the family from engaging in fashionable educational and cultural pursuits of the day.¹ Contacts with the vibrant renewal of classical culture, especially humanism, in Italy since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, fueled a strong infatuation among the noble families of Poland and Lithuania, who spared no expense in imitating and incorporating “all things ancients” into every aspect of their lives.² Instead of castles, they build palaces and villas in accordance with latest Renaissance architectural innovations, hiring Italian architects to supervise such projects. In less than a century, the royal capital of Krakow was transformed from a medieval town into a flourishing Renaissance city.³ They incorporated classical learning into their cultural lives by sending their sons to study at Italian universities. Returning to Poland, these young nobles brought back with them “a

¹ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 23.

² Tadeusz Ulewicz, “Polish Humanism and Its Italian Sources: Beginnings and Historical Development,” in *The Polish Renaissance in its European Context*, ed. Samuel Fitzman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 215-219. The Polish contacts with Italian influences occurred in three ways during this time period: Poles traveling to Italy; the arrival and residence of Italian scholars in Poland, who were stationed usually for diplomatic and political purposes; and the diffusion of Italian cultural concerns from Germany and Hungary. For further treatment, see source cited above.

³ Adam Milobedzki, “Architecture under the Last Jagiellons in its Political and Social Contexts,” in *The Polish Renaissance in its European Context*, ed. Samuel Fitzman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 291-293.

taste for” cosmopolitan humanist culture, one which they did not hesitate to share with their peers.⁴

Fig. 2. Statue at Kochanowski’s Tomb in Zwolen, Poland



Source: Janusz Pelc, *Kochanowski: Szczyt renesansu w literaturze polskiej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001), 588.

Humanism was no stranger to the Kochanowski home. A fondness for Greek and Roman literature permeated the household throughout Jan’s youth. His mother, Anna, a “stately” woman of considerable learning and “wit,” took it upon herself to acquaint Jan

⁴ Paul W. Knoll, “The University Context of Kochanowski’s Era: Humanism and the Academic Culture of the Early Renaissance in Poland,” in *The Polish Renaissance in its European Context*, ed. Samuel Fitzman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 190.

and his brothers with the classics of antiquity from an early age.⁵ Far from the shores of the Mediterranean and Aegean, the gods and heroes of Homer and Vergil had found a new home in the life of this “rustic” Polish family. Two of Jan’s brothers, Mikołaj and Andrzej, went on to study in Italy and became noted humanists themselves, achieving significant literary success by translating respectively the works of Plutarch and Vergil’s *Aeneid* into Polish.⁶ Not surprisingly then, Jan would soon follow his siblings’ humanistic tendencies.

Kochanowski began his studies at the age of fourteen when in 1544 he entered the University of Krakow.⁷ He remained there until about 1549 at a university that was the chief center of humanist activity in Poland and Lithuania.⁸ Indeed, the thriving intellectual life of the university would have allowed a youthful Jan to immerse himself in the wide variety of humanistic studies.⁹ Kochanowski “entered a university whose scholastic character had, in the course of the generations before him, been transformed by the pedagogical program and literary tastes of the traditions of Renaissance humanism.”¹⁰ Again, Poland’s contacts with the Italian peninsula had made such a revolutionary makeover of the university possible. Furthermore, two eminent humanists, Conrad Celtis and Filippo Buonaccorsi (better known as Callimachus), helped cement the place of humanistic studies in the university’s curriculum by attracting masses of students and

⁵ Łukasz Górnicki, a prominent Polish humanist and friend of Jan Kochanowski, referred to the charm and wit of Anna Kochanowska in his *Dworzanin polski (The Polish Courtier, 1566)*, a work based on Castiglione’s *The Courtier*. See Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 23-24.

⁶ David Welch, *Jan Kochanowski* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), 14.

⁷ The lack of any records or information on Kochanowski’s humanist education is a subject that has both troubled and fascinated scholars. The recorded date of Kochanowski’s matriculation at Krakow in 1544 among the university archives is one of the few gems of knowledge we have on his education. See Henryk Barycz, “Studia krakowskie Jana Kochanowskiego,” in *Z Zaścianka na Parnas: drogi kulturalnego rozwoju Jana Kochanowskiego i jego rodu* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1981), 64.

⁸ Welch, *Jan Kochanowski*, 15-16.

⁹ Tadeusz Ulewicz, “Polish Humanism and Its Italian Sources,” 220.

¹⁰ Knoll, “The University Context of Kochanowski’s Era,” 189.

other humanists to Krakow with lectures at the end of the fifteenth century.¹¹ A close friend of Ficino, and later an important political figure in the Polish royal court, Callimachus provided Krakow with a direct connection to the ideas and texts of Florentine Platonism, whose influence lingered among several humanist circles of the university all the way into Kochanowski's time.¹²

As early as 1430, many Polish humanists at the university preferred the intellectual environment of Padua and its Aristotelianism, choosing to study there before returning Krakow to teach. The university orator from 1440 to 1447, Jan of Ludzisko, also a member of the medical faculty and a graduate of Padua (1421-1430), met and corresponded with its first humanist professor, Gasparino Barzizza, during his stay there.¹³ In a similar fashion, the works of several of Krakow's graduates would prove revolutionary and contributed greatly to the larger philosophical discussions and scientific discoveries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. No better examples of which exists than the *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* of Nicolaus Copernicus, also a Krakow graduate, which was published posthumously in 1543, only a year before Kochanowski's own arrival to this stimulating environment.¹⁴

Steadily arriving from such centers of classical learning as Florence and Padua since the middle of the fifteenth century, new humanist editions of ancient texts by Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Quintillian, Suetonius, Vergil and Ovid, along with the bold literary and philosophical works of such renowned humanists as Petrarch, Boccaccio,

¹¹ Knoll, "The University Context of Kochanowski's Era," 202-203.

¹² Segel, *Renaissance Culture in Poland*, 22-23

¹³ Knoll, "The University Context of Kochanowski's Era," 193-194.

¹⁴ Edward Rosen, "What Copernicus Owed to the West and What We Owe to Copernicus," in *The Polish Renaissance in its European Context*, Ed. Samuel Fitzman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 162-163.

Ficino, and Pico della Mirandola, would have found themselves into Jan's hands in the *Collegium minus*, the headquarters of the university's humanists since 1449.¹⁵ Founded for the explicit purpose of promoting the "heightened literary and humanistic tradition of the university," the *Collegium Minus* was the place where students of the university could go to indulge themselves in "the new learning from Italy."¹⁶ Undoubtedly drawn to the studies that it offered, it was within the walls of the *Collegium* that Kochanowski fell under the tutelage of its most eminent humanist, Jan of Trzciany.¹⁷

Also known as Arundinensis, Jan of Trzciany became the central figure in the humanist movement during his short tenure at the university. He had been a student at the university between 1525 and 1535. Though Trzciany may not have continued his studies in Italy, he proved himself a remarkable scholar and a fair philosopher, who knew and taught the most significant and latest works of the Italian humanists¹⁸ Advertising his epithet of "vir trilinguis" quite proudly throughout the university, Trzciany possessed a remarkable knowledge of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.¹⁹ Well versed in classical literature, he lectured practically on every author of antiquity, from Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, and Seneca to Homer, Vergil, and Horace, as well as on Augustine and other early Church Fathers.²⁰ With his frequent discussions of neo-Latin humanist works, such as Valla's *De elegantia linguae latinae* and Erasmus' *Adagia*, he also drew throngs of students and

¹⁵ Knoll, "The University Context of Kochanowski's Era," 196.

¹⁶ Knoll, "The University Context of Kochanowski's Era," 200.

¹⁷ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 30.

¹⁸ Henryk Barycz, *Historja Uniwersytetu Jagiellonskiego w epoce humanizmu* (Krakow: Nakladem Uniwersytetu Jagiellonskiego, 1935), 359-360. Scholars have neglected the importance of Trzciany to the University of Krakow, as well as the subject of his possible Italian influences. Further research could yield a better insight of his significance to the Polish humanist movement.

¹⁹ Barycz, *Historja Uniwersytetu Jagiellonskiego*, 360.

²⁰ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 30.

professors, young Jan among them.²¹ A consummate polymath, Trzciany provided Kochanowski with many of the essentials of the *studia humanitatis*, such as grammar, rhetoric, poetry, and the *ars dictamini* (the art of letter writing), as well as moral philosophy.²² The study of philosophy, above all else, appeared to excite Trzciany's interests and discussions, especially the topic of the dignity of humanity.

In 1544, Trzciany delivered a series of lectures entitled "lectura de anima", which concentrated on various philosophical interpretations of humanity's dignity and soul, later forming the basis of his most significant work, *Libellus de natura ac dignitate hominis*, published in 1554.²³ Demonstrating a familiarity of various philosophical traditions, classical and eastern in origin, as well as a syncretic understanding of them, Trzciany's discussions and conclusions on humanity's dignity owed much to the works of his beloved idol, the renowned humanist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in particular his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.²⁴ In celebrating humanity's ability to transcend any earthly difficulties and achieve perfection, Trzciany's work and lectures highlighted not only Pico's influential sentiments on this perennially favorite humanist topic, but also ones found throughout many of the works of such humanists as Manetti and Petrarch.²⁵ Not surprisingly, Trzciany's own reflections in sixteenth century Krakow on the dignity of man affirmed a longstanding and important concern that echoed through the larger humanist movement.²⁶ The subject of his lectures might have caught the attention of a young Kochanowski freshly arrived to Krakow, spurring him to seek out Trzciany.

²¹ Henryk Barycz, "Studia krakowskie Jana Kochanowskiego," 64-67.

²² Barycz, "Studia krakowskie," 67. Also Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, 171.

²³ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 30.

²⁴ Barycz, *Historia Uniwersytetu Jagiellonskiego*, 360. For Pico's *Oration*, see Ernst Cassirer et al., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), 223-54.

²⁵ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 30.

²⁶ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, 171.

Perhaps, it was the idea that humanity alone could rise above all difficulties of the world to reach divine perfection that remained in the young Pole's mind as he pursued his humanistic interests, finding justification in the works of the ancients and the modern humanists. Though acquiring a wide familiarity with the languages, literatures, and thought of antiquity with Trzciany, Kochanowski would not finish his incipient humanist education in Krakow.

The University of Krakow began to suffer a considerable decline in academic rigor in 1547 with the departure of many of its humanist proponents, including Trzciany, for other schools in eastern Europe.²⁷ The culprit for this exodus was the resurgence of the Scholastics, who took over many of the key professorships and position in the administration of the university. Additionally, a drastic reduction of funding from the Polish Crown during this time certainly helped speed its decay too.²⁸ In time, the university simply could not compete with Italian universities such as Bologna and Padua, whose liberating intellectual atmosphere continued to attract new minds and cultivate bold ideas.²⁹ Krakow could not offer what Jan desired, but these schools in Italy, the birthplace of humanism, undoubtedly did. Kochanowski knew that if he wished to receive a truly excellent humanist education, the ancient ruins and sunny Mediterranean climate of the Italian universities could provide him with that.

Though leaving Krakow in 1549, Kochanowski did not set out for Italy immediately. Instead, he headed first to Königsberg, in northern Ducal Prussia, for a recently established academy dedicated to humanistic studies, as well as to the spread of

²⁷ Barycz, *Historia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*, 361. Also Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 30.

²⁸ Knoll, "The University Context of Kochanowski's Era," 205.

²⁹ Welch, *Jan Kochanowski*, 29.

Lutheranism into Poland and Lithuania.³⁰ Why would Kochanowski have chose to go to the new school in the north instead of the established and prestigious universities of Italy? Was it because Kochanowski was a Protestant? Though raised in a Catholic family, Kochanowski might have developed Protestant sympathies while studying at Krakow, which had also become a center for the Reformation in Poland in his time.³¹ Many of Kochanowski's friends, such as Stanislaw Grzepski and Andrzej Firlej, sons of noble families, dedicated themselves to furthering the reformed cause while in Königsberg.³² In fact, a large part of the nobility in Poland and Lithuania had converted to Protestantism during Reformation, whether for political, religious, or personal reasons. Yet, Kochanowski never explicitly stated his religious views, only dropping subtle and extremely vague hints on matters of faith in his poetic works.³³ Perhaps Kochanowski might have considered Königsberg a potentially more congenial and profitable place to study—a place that provided him with an opportunity to explore his Protestant sympathies.³⁴ During his brief stay, he befriended the academy's director, Georgius Sabinus, a German humanist and reformer, who was also the son-in-law of one of the most eminent humanist leaders of the Reformation, Philip Melanchthon.³⁵ More importantly, he found a munificent benefactor in the person of Albrecht Hohenzollern, the duke of Prussia and the academy's founder, who strongly supported his humanist aspirations and subsequently supplied him with generous funds to "hither forth to

³⁰ George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 404-407.

³¹ Welch, *Jan Kochanowski*, 26

³² Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 32.

³³ Wiktor Weintraub, "Religia Kochanowskiego a polska kultura renesansowa," in *Rzecz Czarnolas*, (Krakow: Wydawn. Literackie, 1977), 237-238.

³⁴ Stanislaw Kot, "Jana Kochanowskiego podróże i studia zagraniczne." *Polska złotego wieku a Europa: Studia i szkice* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1987), 218-219.

³⁵ Kot, "Jana Kochanowskiego podróże," 218-220.

Italy.”³⁶ The young Pole’s humanist interest and religious sympathies must have also appealed to Albrecht’s ambition in creating a group of highly educated and reform-minded Polish nobles loyal to him in Poland and Lithuania.³⁷ Not surprisingly when Albrecht died later in 1568, Kochanowski dedicated a major work, his *Proporzec, albo Hold pruski (The Banner, or the Prussian Homage)*, to him, praising the former duke’s virtues but above all, his generosity.³⁸ Armed with the duke’s blessing and funds, Kochanowski departed from Königsberg in the latter part of 1550, with his eyes set for Italy.

In April of 1551, Jan reached the chosen destination of his Italian journey, the University of Padua.³⁹ For young Polish noblemen like Kochanowski, eager to immerse themselves in the exciting new ideas in science, philosophy, and literature permeating throughout the Italian Peninsula, Padua was an ideal choice. The gem of the Venetian Republic, the University of Padua had become a school of high repute throughout Europe in the sixteenth century for its “scholarly accomplishments and pedagogical innovations” in medicine, law, and philosophy.⁴⁰ Many of the foremost scholars in these fields, such as Pietro Pomponazzi and Andreas Vesalius, also taught at Padua. Consequently, the university’s impeccable credentials provided many of its former students with many honors and lucrative political positions in their native lands “simply because they [had] been to Padua.”⁴¹ A well-trained humanist was a valuable commodity in the princely and

³⁶ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 35-36. Translation mine.

³⁷ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 34-35.

³⁸ Welch, *Jan Kochanowski*, 40-41.

³⁹ Kot, “Jana Kochanowskiego podróże,” 224-225.

⁴⁰ Paul F. Grendler, “The University of Padua 1405-1600: A Success Story,” in *Books and Schools in the Italian Renaissance* (Brookfield: Variorum, 1995), 12.

⁴¹ Grendler, “The University of Padua,” 13-14.

ecclesiastical courts of Poland and Lithuania and, as his later success as a courtier proved, Jan was no exception to this Paduan boon.⁴² Studying with two humanists of the highest caliber, Francesco Robortello and Bernardino Tomitano, Jan acquired a thorough knowledge of Greek and Latin authors. These two humanists' interests in poetry, almost certainly helped spur and shape Kochanowski's poetic ambitions, providing the young Pole with the literary tools and knowledge to experiment in both Latin and Polish verse.⁴³

Additionally, it was here that Kochanowski came to cherish Cicero above all other writers of antiquity. Like many humanists, Kochanowski admired Cicero's own combination of literary eloquence and wisdom in his works, a quality that would echo later on throughout Kochanowski's own writing.⁴⁴ Similarly, if in the likely event he visited other Italian cities such as Florence, he could have been exposed to other philosophical as well as humanist topics and discussions. Since he was not studying for a degree, Kochanowski was free to explore any of the vast number of subjects offered in Padua, and could have joined in any of the numerous philosophical discussions, ranging from man's dignity to the immortality of his soul, that dominated the university.⁴⁵ In a sense, Kochanowski's education in Padua brought him not only into contact with many aspects of what could be considered "mainstream European culture" but also specifically into the shared cultural and educational context of the humanists everywhere.⁴⁶ When he left Padua in 1557, Kochanowski would carry these humanist ideals with him to Poland, making full use of them in his endeavors as poet and courtier.

⁴² Welch, *Jan Kochanowski*, 29.

⁴³ Welch, *Jan Kochanowski*, 30.

⁴⁴ Wiktor Weintraub, "Kochanowski's Renaissance Manifesto," in *The Slavonic and East European Review* 30, no. 75 (1951): 417.

⁴⁵ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 43-46; also see Paul Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 403-407.

⁴⁶ Kot, "Jana Kochanowskiego podróże," 227-229.

Traveling through France and Germany after his departure from Italy, Kochanowski embarked upon a career as a courtier when he returned to Poland in 1559, moving among the courts of many prominent nobles and clergymen and eventually rising to the position of royal secretary to the Polish king, Zygmunt II August. During his spell as a courtier, Kochanowski became friends with many of the most powerful and important persons in the Commonwealth, such as Jan Tarnowski, *hetman* of Lithuania, Mikołaj Firlej, palatine of Małopolska and Lithuania, as well as Piotr Myszkowski, bishop of Krakow and vice-chancellor to Zygmunt II August, and Jan Zamoyski, the future chancellor of the Commonwealth, both of whom were graduates of Padua.⁴⁷ From these distinguished individuals, he received generous patronage, in the form of church benefices and favorable court appointments, which allowed him to concentrate on establishing his reputation as a poet.

Freed largely from financial burdens, Kochanowski gained considerable admiration from patrons and peers alike throughout Poland and Lithuania for his Latin and Polish poetry during his court years. Echoing his infatuation with Greek and Roman antiquity, Kochanowski transformed the Polish language with his use of classical literary modes in his poetry, placing it on par with the poetic achievements of France and Italy.

Kochanowski's success as a poetic innovator in this respect stemmed from

his replacing of the so-called relative syllabism of medieval poetry with a strictly codified and rigorously implemented system of regular syllabic meters; its increased discipline actually [allowed] him to gain more

⁴⁷ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 60-63. N.B. a *hetman* was the supreme military commander of a region or province in either Kingdom of Poland or the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

creative freedom in other area of style, just as the bridle improves a horse's maneuver-ability without necessarily affecting its speed.⁴⁸

Kochanowski's impact on the development of Polish poetry was so great that Mikołaj Rej, the leading writer of Polish verse before Kochanowski, upon reading Kochanowski's first published Polish poem, "Czego chcesz od nas Panie, za Twe hojne dary" ("What do you wish O Lord in return for your bounteous gifts") remarked: "I acknowledge his superiority in learning and place in his keeping the muse of the Slavonic Goddess."⁴⁹ Besides foreshadowing his future poetic achievements as a Polish writer, this poem revealed much about what Kochanowski had learned during his humanist education. Overflowing with jubilant praise for God's benevolence and majesty, Kochanowski's poem proclaimed his deepest optimism in the goodness and perfection of humanity. This theme would dominate his early works, such as *Satyr, albo Dziki Mąż* (*Satyr, or the Wild Man*) and *Muza* (*Muse*), despite the numerous political upheavals that he witnessed in Poland and Lithuania during his career as a courtier.⁵⁰

Tired of the demands and intrigues of court life, as well as disappointed in not receiving more lucrative and prestigious posts at the Court of Zygmund II, Kochanowski retired to the *otium* of a country gentleman. With his finances secured by his inheritance, he dedicated himself entirely to family and poetry in the bucolic setting of his country estate of Czarnolas. A considerable country estate, tranquil domestic life, and the life of a stoic poet, in imitation of his idols Horace and Cicero, seemed to promise Kochanowski a

⁴⁸ Stanislaw Baranczak, "Introduction," in Jan Kochanowski, *Laments*, trans. Stanislaw Baranczak and Seamus Heaney (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), x-xi.

⁴⁹ Reported by J.S. Herburt in 1612, as quoted in Weintraub, "Kochanowski's Renaissance Manifesto," 413.

⁵⁰ Welch, *Jan Kochanowski*, 33.

life of happiness and bliss to the end of his days. This environment provided Kochanowski with what he had sought for both personally and artistically. His family grew with the births of two daughters, Hanna and Orzsula. He also composed and edited several collections of his best-known poetry, which included *Fraszki*, *Pieśni*, and *Psalterz Davidów*, all resonating the faith in humanity that he had articulated in “Czego chcesz od nas Panie, za Twe hojne dary” almost twenty years earlier. But his idyllic life was shattered with the devastating and tragic loss of his daughter Orszula. The horrendous grief still tormented him, sending him on an arduous odyssey of deep personal introspection, one filled with despair, self-doubt, pain, and regret. In search of consolation, Kochanowski looked once more to humanism to lead him from the confines of grief.

Two: The Malady of Grief in Renaissance Humanism

Kochanowski could not shake the sadness and sorrow of his misfortune from the depths of his thoughts. Grief still loomed over him in *Treny*. Though continually startled from relief by their echo, he found himself uttering Orszula's last words yet again.

'Już ja tobie, moja matko, służyć nie będę

Ani za twym wdzięcznym stołem miejsca zasięde;

Przyjdzie mi klucze położyć, samej precz jechać,

Domu rodziców swych miłych wiecznie zaniechać'.

To, i czego żal ojcowski nie da serdeczny

Przypominać więcej, był jej głos ostateczny.

A matce, słysząc żegnanie tak żałościwe,

Dobre serce, że od żalu zostało żywe.

('I shall no longer serve you, mother dear,

I shall not linger at laden board,

I lay down my keys, I must abroad,

And lose for ever my dear parents' care.'

These, together with what fatherly grief

Finds too painful to recall,

Were her last words. And it is well

Her mother has outlived this pained farewell.)¹

The mourning over Orszula had passed from his household, Kochanowski noticed. His wife Dorota, the last person to hold Orszula at her deathbed, had “outlived this pained farewell” of her daughter and accepted her death. Only Jan continued to persist in his “fatherly grief,” exceeding even the sorrow expected of a mother.² Where could Kochanowski look to explain and perhaps relieve his “uncommon” grief? What could console the sorrow he recorded in *Treny*? His humanist principles, he thought, presented Kochanowski with the precise framework within which he could use in his search for consolation in *Treny*.³ Perhaps, he thought, his humanism could offer him the solace and repose that a bereaved father deserved.

Grief and consolation were concerns that “commanded a prominent place in humanist moral thought and literature.”⁴ However unpleasant they were, the humanists’ preoccupations with these topics were not unfounded. Instead, they reflected a “heightened awareness of death” that permeated the lives and actions of “men and women” in the Renaissance.⁵ With *Treny*, Kochanowski looked to this long tradition of humanist interest in the perpetual problems of death, grief, despair, and misfortune to understand his experience with his daughter’s death.⁶ A bereaved parent plagued with these difficulties, he would have found that he was not the only grieving father to have commiserated over the death of a child. Rather, the image of the grieving father had its

¹ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 14-15.

² King, *The Death of the Child*, 149.

³ Mersereau, Jr., “Jan Kochanowski’s Lament,” 38-39.

⁴ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 3.

⁵ King, *The Death of the Child*, 195-196.

⁶ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 3.

origins in the ancient world with the works of Crantor, Cicero, and Plutarch.⁷ Whether grieving or not, humanists such as Petrarch, Barzizza, Salutati, and Manetti would continue this tradition into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, expressing their sorrows in a variety of literary genres drawn from their predecessors in antiquity.⁸ Perhaps more important, by looking to the wisdom of the ancient world as a guide, these humanists would also shape the approaches and perceptions of grief in the consolatory works of later writers, especially Kochanowski.⁹

Kochanowski knew the “expectations” that accompanied a humanist attempting a work of consolation.¹⁰ The author had to praise the deceased’s past, character, deeds, virtues, and, family.¹¹ The work must also have a series of arguments and justifications to the bereaved “for the cessation of grief (the need for moderation, the dangers and pains of living, the understanding of death as a change for the better and as an occasion of joy).”¹² These “expectations” were not meant to limit and confine the emotional expression of grief of the author or the work. Instead, “[by] rejecting dialectic and theoretical learning [of the scholastics], humanist writers... cultivated a practical eloquence that spoke to the human emotion, the human will, the human psyche... [and by] fully acknowledging the humanity of sorrow, they sought out comforts from neglected troves of Platonic, Stoic, Peripatetic, Epicurean, and Christian thought.”¹³ In addition, a work of consolation had to capture the full emotional essence of the bereaved’s grief to convince them to ease them away from its tight grip. This had been Kochanowski’s intention in *Treny*. Yet, the

⁷ King, *The Death of the Child*, 192.

⁸ King, *The Death of the Child*, 194-195.

⁹ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 4.

¹⁰ Weintraub, “Kochanowski’s Renaissance Manifesto,” 423.

¹¹ King, *The Death of the Child*, 185.

¹² King, *The Death of the Child*, 185.

¹³ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 4.

interplay between his expression of grief and his reliance on humanist attitudes towards grief unsettled Kochanowski, presenting him with a troubling paradox. How could he express and legitimize the inconsolable grief, yet also adhere to the demands that humanist conventions dictated the need for the ultimate cessation of grief? The collision between the needs of the grieving father and the expectations of the humanist in *Treny* would only complicated the solution to this problem even further for him. How could he console the inconsolable?

For the humanists, the solution lay in the dignity of humanity. This idea, which Kochanowski held so dear, “was inherent in the cultural and educational program of the Renaissance humanists”:

When the Renaissance humanists called their studies the ‘humanities’ or *Studia humanitatis*, they expressed the claim that these studies contribute to the education of a desirable human being, and hence are of vital concern for man as man. Thus they indicated a basic concern for man and his dignity, and this aspiration became quite explicit in many of their writings.¹⁴

It was this confidence in humanity’s dignity and abilities which expected and necessitated the cessation of grief on the part of author or addressee in a humanist consolation, or *consolatio*.¹⁵ Drawing upon the philosophical writings and traditions of antiquity, humanist writers and Renaissance philosophers encouraged a person’s exploration of the nature and cause of grief for the benefit of the mind and soul. In drawing the rationality

¹⁴ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, 124-125.

¹⁵ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 6-7.

of these philosophies to the arguments concerning the continuation of grief, the bereaved would realize his or her irrational distress over the ‘bodily’ aspects of the world and reject them. In agreement with the conventions set forth for a humanist *consolatio*, the bereaved’s moving away from grief would echo this important cathartic moment.¹⁶ In doing this, the bereaved person would rise to the higher, more spiritual level that philosophy sought and demanded of humanity.

Yet, these humanist interpretations of grief therapy emphasized the importance of humanity and ability to overcome its misfortune, they differed in how they substantiated and explained its release. To the Platonists, such as Ficino and Pico, “the immortality of the soul and its separation from the body served as the principal *locus* for otherworldly idealism.”¹⁷ For such advocates, the soul has an innate desire to return to God and remain aloof from the complications of fortune to which the body is subject. Hence, as Ficino underlined, “the bereaved need but open their spiritual eyes and ears to regain the company of the departed.”¹⁸

The Stoics, by contrast, offered a more severe explanation for the termination of grief. They stressed the importance of “virtual impassivity,” that is freedom from all *pathe* towards tragedy, as the most appropriate reaction to death.¹⁹ Basing the goods and evils of the world on humanity’s exercise of virtue and vice respectively, they called for its indifference to any emotional preoccupations that the misfortunes and externalities of the world had spurred. Though related to the Stoics in their emphasis on virtue being the ultimate good, the Peripatetics or Aristotelians delineated a quite different view on the

¹⁶ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 6-7.

¹⁷ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 5. Also King, *The Death of the Child*, 176-177.

¹⁸ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 147.

¹⁹ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 5.

subject of grief. For the Peripatetics, the misfortunes of death and grief had “an inexorable and legitimate impact on man’s equanimity.”²⁰ Consequently, the exploration and cessation of grief was a valid concern of mankind, for it led him or her back to the virtuous pursuit of human happiness.

Despite their differences, each of these philosophical traditions emphasized the eventual need for the bereaved to move beyond the emotion of grief. Drawing from such classical philosophical bases, the humanists centered their approach to grief, as well as its alleviation, in the elevated status that these traditions had accorded to humanity. For most part, the humanists did not focus solely on one philosophical perspective solely in a work of consolation. Instead, they would incorporate frequently various parts from these philosophies within the *consolatio*, choosing points that were most suitable to the argument, even if they held a penchant for a particular tradition.²¹ A humanist *consolatio* could be an eloquent hodgepodge of eclectic philosophical perspectives, though not always free from contradictions, as Kochanowski began to learn. Yet, the humanists still looked to one figure from the ancient world as a model that could overcome these contradictions, Cicero.

Cicero’s impact on the humanist movement as a whole was decisive: “Renaissance humanism was an age of Ciceronianism in which the study and imitation of Cicero was a widespread concern.”²² The force of Cicero’s influence resonated strongly throughout the varied interests of the humanists, as well as their works, because of the valuable knowledge that his works provided of the ancient world. For instance, his writings “served as [sources] of information for several schools of Greek philosophy and

²⁰ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 5.

²¹ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 9.

²² Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, 18.

also as a model of that eclectic type of thinking which was prepared to take its crumbs of knowledge wherever it could find them, and which also characterizes many of the humanist treatises.”²³ Lastly, his “synthesis of philosophy and rhetoric in his works provided the humanists with a favorite ideal, namely the combination of eloquence and wisdom,” which they themselves sought eagerly to emulate in their own works.²⁴ The ubiquity of the humanists’ “worship” of Cicero was not without its critics however, such as Montaigne. Regardless, his philosophical impact (and to a lesser degree that of his successor Seneca) made later the humanists’ understanding of grief and death (and consequently the *consolatio*), was tremendous.²⁵

How did Cicero influence the humanists’ approach to grief? Two of Cicero’s works in particular, his lost *Consolatio* and his *Disputationes Tusculanae*, proved to be the cornerstones of their understanding of grief. These works, especially his *Consolatio*, came to exert such influence on the humanists that “various writers from the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries cited, imitated, or, in one case, even forged his treatise.”²⁶ In these works, Cicero drew extensively upon the consolatory writings of the Greek philosopher Crantor, whose lost works only appeared in fragments, and examined the wide range of philosophical opinion concerning grief from antiquity. Much like Kochanowski’s purpose in *Treny*, Cicero’s *Consolatio* was an attempt to alleviate the sorrow he experienced with the death of his beloved daughter, Tullia.²⁷ Despite the unfortunate loss of his *Consolatio*, Cicero luckily makes several references to the work in his *Disputationes Tusculanae*, a synthesis of Greek philosophy. In Book III of

²³ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, 19.

²⁴ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, 19.

²⁵ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 6.

²⁶ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 6.

²⁷ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 6.

Disputationes Tusculanae, Cicero concisely conveyed the precise intended purpose of a consoler, tying it in to his own examination of grief:

These therefore are the duties of comforters: to do away with distress root and branch, or allay it, or diminish it as far as possible, or stop its progress and not allow it to extend further, or to divert it elsewhere... There are some too in favour of concentrating all these ways of administering comfort (for one man is influenced in one way, one in another) pretty nearly as in my *Consolation* I threw them all into one attempt at consolation; for my soul was in a feverish state and I attempted every means of curing its condition.²⁸

In discussing his own approach to grief and consolation, Cicero consequently laid out the key philosophical principles that would eventually pervade throughout the consolations of the humanists, including Kochanowski's *Treny*. Rather than dictating a specific format or genre of the consolation, Cicero's thoughts on this topic instead shaped the philosophical framework of the *consolatio*, whether the piece was a letter, a treatise, an elegy, or an oration.²⁹

This influence found its way most prominently into the second aspect of the humanist *consolatio*, which called for a discourse on various viewpoints and arguments for the elimination of grief. The humanists frequently used Cicero's own discussions of various viewpoints and arguments on the nature of grief in *Disputationes Tusculanae* (as well as his *Consolatio* indirectly) frequently as a philosophical "sourcebook" for their

²⁸ Cicero *Tusculan Disputations*, 3.31.76.

²⁹ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 7-9.

works, emphasizing Cicero's belief that philosophy was a healer of the soul and a liberator of anxiety, desire, and fear.³⁰ Outstanding humanists such as Francesco Filelfo and Gasparino Barizza, emphasized Cicero's advice that the divine attributes of man such as "activity", "wisdom", "discovery", and "memory" were essential in controlling grief and in further pursuing a virtuous life. Perhaps most significantly however, many humanists emphasized Cicero's criterion that the immortality of humanity's soul made excessive grief futile.³¹ In quoting an extensive part of his own *Consolatio*, Cicero set forth his view on the relationship of man's soul to the misfortune of grief, calling attention to its divine origin.

No beginning of souls can be discovered on earth; for there is no trace of blending or combination in souls or any particle that could seem born or fashioned from the earth...For in these elements there is nothing to possess the power of memory, thought, reflection, nothing capable of retaining the past, or foreseeing the future and grasping the present, and these capacities are nothing but divine...And indeed God Himself...can be comprehended in no other way save as a mind unfettered and free, severed from all perishable matter, conscious of all and moving all and self-endowed with perpetual motion.³²

Personal preferences for a particular philosophical tradition did not prevent humanist consolers from utilizing arguments drawn from other traditions for the soul's immortality in their works. The more proof that one could use from different

³⁰ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 7.

³¹ King, *The Death of The Child*, 176-177, 185.

³² Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 1.27.66-67.

philosophical viewpoints in the support of the cessation of grief, the humanists thought, the better.³³ If the revered philosophies of antiquity, despite their differences, urged the bereaved to not bear excessive grief, then how could one, especially a humanist, argue for or object to the prudent advice of these time-honored authorities?

The humanists also had to consider the Christian consolatory tradition and, at the same time, create with their consolations an “appropriate” balance between it and the classical tradition. Though infatuated with the philosophy of pagan writers, most humanists were, after all, Christians, and consequently found ways to incorporate their faith into their works.³⁴

Like that of the classical world, Christianity also offered a rich and varied tradition of consolatory works to those suffering from grief, such as the Book of Job and the Epistles of Paul from the Bible, as well as the writings of the Latin and Greek Fathers, such as Augustine, Jerome, and John Chrysostom:³⁵

Judeo-Christian thought generally gave spiritual meaning to suffering in terms of both its origin and purpose. Death and suffering [were] just punishments for Adam’s Fall. Labor and sorrow [were] the wages of sin...Worldly tribulation, moreover, [could] also be a vehicle for divine correction...recalling the afflicted back to piety.³⁶

³³ King, *The Death of The Child*, 178-179.

³⁴ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 9.

³⁵ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 9-13.

³⁶ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 9.

Placed at the sole discretion of a stern God, the grief and suffering of a Christian were the key factors that could lead him or her on the path to spiritual redemption. Mourning the adversities of the earthly life was considered much less important than bearing them for the sake of the bliss in the Christian afterlife. The only consolation for a Christian's grief laid in accepting divine fate and placing his or her faith "in Christ," not in the deceptive knowledge of pagan philosophers.³⁷

That said, the humanists attempted to reconcile classical and Christian traditions in their consolations, by placing ancient philosophy at the service of Christianity. Combining "Stoic calm" with "Christian forbearance" and the hierarchical spheres of Plato with the Christian Paradise, they showed that the wisdom of ancients, however incomplete, could support Christian faith in showing the bereaved the uselessness of grief.³⁸

Grappling with its dire emotional effects, Kochanowski turned to the philosophical remedies for grief that his humanism offered him first. As his sorrow played out in *Treny*, he discovered that the ancients' consolatory urgings did not relieve his grieving nor provide any new understanding of his child's death.³⁹ They would leave him only with sadness, anger, and despair.

³⁷ King, *The Death of the Child*, 180.

³⁸ King, *The Death of the Child*, 176-178.

³⁹ Weintraub, "Kochanowski's Renaissance Manifesto," 420.

Three: Wisdom Under Fire—Cicero as a Scapegoat for Grief

Realizing the painful futility of the humanists' consolatory advice, Kochanowski found himself turning against humanism, eventually rejecting the philosophical fabric that supported their counsel for his grief. He saw the contrasts that existed between what his humanism taught him about the nature of sorrow and suffering, and his own reaction to them. For him, humanism could not provide Orszula's death and his subsequent mourning a proper "place" in his life as he had lived it, as well as in his ultimate goal of consolation. The excruciating ringing of this dissonance was too much for Kochanowski to bear. Release and resolution from this situation became an absolute necessity and it could only be achieved through rejection.

Expressing anguish and disdain within the poetic median of *Treny*, Kochanowski utilized ironically his humanist learning to both criticize and reject it at the same time. In fact, he had little alternative in his choice, given the paramount role that his humanism played in shaping his philosophical and religious development throughout his life. In this plethora of complexities and contradictions surrounding the narrative of *Treny*, Kochanowski's attack not only exposed the intricate interplay that his humanism had on his intellectual development, but also defined its relationship to his literary, philosophical, and religious understanding. Not surprisingly, these aspects and the close, interrelated dynamic that they played in Kochanowski's life became the driving force in shaping the manner and stylistic choices of both his attempt at self-consolation, and, subsequently, his rejection of humanist view of grief.

How did Kochanowski frame both his rejection of humanist consolation in *Treny*? Humanism did not alleviate his grief. In finding the humanist philosophical solutions to

his sorrow completely ineffective and also repugnant, Kochanowski directed his anger quite surprisingly at the one person who he felt was responsible for it, Cicero. Not only had Cicero been the most perfect representative of the antiquity to Kochanowski, but he was also a major shaper of Kochanowski's own philosophical thought throughout his life.¹ Kochanowski had read and reread most of Cicero's works, including the *Disputationes Tusculanae* and the *De natura deorum*, and drew inspiration from the philosophical ideals that the great Roman statesman had propounded in his works.² Kochanowski was a scholar of Cicero and had worked on reconstructing several fragments of Cicero's poetry with other humanists while studying at Padua, most notably his fellow Pole, Andrzej Patrycz Nidecki.³ Not surprisingly, Cicero's influence filtered itself into most of Kochanowski's works. In other words, Cicero had been Kochanowski's hero.⁴ In light of all of these things, why would Kochanowski direct his anger at Cicero and vilify him in *Treny*? Clearly, Cicero had not caused the death of his daughter. In Kochanowski's eyes, he had done something even worse. Cicero had misled him and caused the inconsolability of his grief by providing the philosophical basis to Kochanowski's view of life's tribulations and also the humanist approach to sorrow and consolation. When these philosophical solutions fail to eliminate his grief, Kochanowski became convinced that Cicero had "exaggerated man's position in relation to God, raising man above all else, and [by] calling this dignity... [had misled] man tragically."⁵

¹ Stanisław Lempicki, "Rzecz o Trenach," *Renesans i Humanizm w Polsce: materiały do studiów* (Kraków: Spółdzielnia Wydawniczo-Oświatowa, 1952), 211.

² Stanisław Grzeszczuk, "Cycero w 'Trenach' Jana Kochanowskiego," *Kochanowski i inni: studia charakterystyki interpretacje*, (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 1985) 105. Also Weintraub. "The Renaissance Manifesto of Kochanowski," 416-417.

³ Weintraub, "Kochanowski's Renaissance Manifesto," 418.

⁴ Grzeszczuk, "Cycero w 'Trenach'," 106.

⁵ Donald Pirie, "*Lamentationes, Tragoedia, Spes* in Jan Kochanowski's *Threny*." *Jan Kochanowski in Glasgow*, ed. Donald Pirie (Glasgow: Campana, 1985), 113.

Building upon this realization, Kochanowski focused on exposing the philosophical inconsistencies of Cicero. However, by singling out Cicero, Kochanowski did not intend to focus merely on the stoic tenets of Cicero. Rather, Cicero would stand as representative of all of the follies of classical learning that the humanists had embraced and taught, especially philosophy. Much like Cicero had done, Kochanowski would also draw freely different philosophical precepts in his critique. To strengthen his case further, he added both literary and historical references from the antiquity as examples of how others had also faltered and failed under the guidance of philosophy. Fuelled by wrath and sorrow, he would spare nothing now in severing his ties to humanism and Cicero.

Kochanowski's critique of Cicero itself comes at a very crucial juncture of *Treny*. In the first seven laments of *Treny*, Kochanowski encompassed his entire immediate reaction to Orszula's death by including a stirring, bittersweet *laudatio* of her person and character.⁶ Who better qualified than Kochanowski to praise her "maidenly" and "virtuous" traits, her poetic promise as a "Safó słowieńska" (Slavic Sappho), and then to grieve their untimely loss?⁷ For Kochanowski, their loss to him and to all Slavs is the chief source of his immediate anger and grief, yet his acknowledgement of Orszula's lost gifts is also the greatest honor that he could assign to her. It is in transition from this bittersweet laudation that his anti-Ciceronian polemic begins to surface, just when a humanist reader would expect the rational and philosophical debate for the cessation of grief. In other words, a change in mood is expected. Under "normal" circumstances, these arguments, drawn from eclectic classical sources, would convince and prompt the bereaved to realize the futility of sorrow rationally. Echoing Cicero's advice, philosophy

⁶ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 533.

⁷ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 538.

would conquer the grief, regret, and doubt of humanity. This, however, would not be the case with the bereaved Kochanowski, for philosophy had not only failed to conquer his grief, but also to explain why Orszula had to die so needlessly. Utilizing his wide knowledge of philosophical sources from antiquity, he planned to make sure that his “vendetta” against Cicero would be repaid in kind.⁸ Yet, Kochanowski’s initial reactions to grief were not against Cicero. Whereas in the first part of *Treny*, his “emotion was unrestrained and seemingly dependent only upon internal stimuli, Kochanowski now [showed] how, when the initial outpouring of grief has somewhat abated, the sufferer [began] to respond to external stimuli.”⁹

Wielkieś mi uczyniła pustki w domu moim,
Moja droga Orszulo, tym zniknieniem swoim.
Pełno nas, a jakoby nikogo nie było:
Jedną maluczką duszą tak wiele ubyło.

(Your flight, my dearest, caused
This vast emptiness in my house.
We are so many yet no one’s here:
One tiny soul and so much is gone.)¹⁰

The initial shock of grief had passed for Kochanowski. He realized the greater implications associated with Orszula’s death. Having expressed his more unbridled,

⁸ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 553.

⁹ Mersereau, Jr., “Jan Kochanowski’s *Laments*,” 41.

¹⁰ Kochanowski. *Treny*, 18-19.

personal emotions (i.e. “internal stimuli”), Kochanowski acknowledged the larger, more “external” effect that her loss has taken on his household and outer world. Unfortunately, Kochanowski left no account or record of his family life in Czarnolas, detailing more precisely his relationship with Orszulo before her death.¹¹ Still, an unmistakable void filled his family’s daily life. Yet, as many humanist contemporaries of Kochanowski might have objected, why would Kochanowski attach so much importance to a small, insignificant child’s (much less that of a girl)?¹² Did not the distinguished Roman orator Sulpicius himself, they might have added, urge Cicero to desist from weeping over “the tiny soul” of his daughter Tullia?¹³ Kochanowski knew these objections, as well as the plethora of others, that stated continually a common theme: do not grieve anymore! Despite them, it is clear that Orszulo was an essential and vital part of his family and his life:

Tyś za wszytki mówiła, za wzytki śpiewała,
Wszytkiś w domu kąciki zawždy pobiegała
Nie dopuściłaś nigdy matce sie frasować
Ani ojcu myśleniem zbytnim głowy psować
To tego, to owego wdzięcznie obłapiając
I onym swym uciesznym śmiechem zabawiając.

(You spoke and sang for all alone,
Skipped around in every corner of the house,

¹¹ Pelc, *Kochanowski*,

¹² Welch. *Jan Kochanowski*, 113.

¹³ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 538.

Never let your mother fret,
Never let your father brood,
Hugging one and then the other,
Cheering all with joyful laughter.)¹⁴

Clearly, Orszula's death was no mere forgettable trifle. On the contrary, she appeared to exude the very being of happiness and life for Kochanowski and his family. Although her elevated status here probably was a poetic exaggeration that was typical of humanist consolatory works, Orszula was nevertheless considered a worthy subject for Kochanowski's thoughts and pen.¹⁵ Her departure itself prevented Kochanowski from forgetting this:

Teraz wszystko umilkło, szczerze pustki w domu,
Nie masz zabawki, nie masz rośmiać się nikomu.
Z każdego kąta żalność człowieka ujmuje,
A serce swej pociechy darmo upatruje.

(Now all is silent, the house stands bare,
There's no laughter, song, or joy.
From every corner stares remorseless grief
As gnawing heartache vainly seeks relief.)¹⁶

¹⁴ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 18-19.

¹⁵ Mersereau, Jr., "Jan Kochanowski's *Laments*," 37-38.

¹⁶ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 18-19.

Grief over Orszula's departure, however, also reminded Kochanowski of something else of importance, relief. But, how would he find it? This was the question that Kochanowski posed himself. His search would have to free him from the thing that was "gnawing" at his heart and mind. What was the cause of this "gnawing" then? Kochanowski himself mentions and emphasizes it in this poem: *Pustki* (emptiness). This "emptiness" was not only the literal emptiness in Kochanowski's household that he had described. It was also the personal vacuum that Kochanowski felt in understanding the deeper meaning of Orszula's passing away. As his humanist learning and his personal preference would have encouraged, Kochanowski turned halfheartedly to Cicero, as a guide in this matter, to seek "vainly" for the philosophical understanding that he knew could and would not accept. Instead of attacking Cicero immediately, Kochanowski turned his anger first on the humanists' cherished notion of *sapientia* (wisdom).

Kupić by cię, mądrości, za drogie pieniądze,
Która (jesli prawdziwie mienią) wszystkie żądre,
Wszystki ludzkie frasunki umiesz wykorzenić,
A człowieka tylko nie w anioła odmienić,
Który nie wie, co boleść, frasunku nie czuje,
Złym przygodam nie podległ, strachom nie hołduje.
Ty wszystkie rzeczy ludzkie masz za fraszkę sobie,
Jednaką myśl tak w szczęściu, jako I w żałobie,
Zawždy niesiesz; ty śmierci namniej się nie boisz,
Bezpieczną, nieodmienną, niepożytą stoisz.

(Wisdom, you would be worth a treasure-ward

If—as some hold—you could bar

All desire, all human cares, making man

Almost an angel, who knows no pain,

Feels no terror, suffers no reverse or strain.

You treat all human matters as a game

And think alike in happiness and grief.

Fearless of death, secure, unmoved you stand.

You measure riches not in gold or land

But in contentment and simple needs,)¹⁷

Clearly, Kochanowski's previous fondness for wisdom (in Polish, *mądrość*) had changed in light of his grief. In his earlier works, most notably *Pieśni*, Kochanowski had praised the importance of *sapientia*, citing the practical and philosophical benefits that it offered man in all aspects of life.¹⁸ Yet, Kochanowski had not experienced these benefits with the death of his daughter. What explanation could Kochanowski offer for wisdom's failure? Had Cicero and the humanists deceived him? Indeed, Wisdom would have been "worth a treasure-ward" only if its benefits had served their promised purpose in Kochanowski's case. Ironically, the absence of these benefits had become the sole criterion in judging wisdom's worth for Kochanowski. What benefits had Kochanowski expected then? Drawing on both the Stoic and Epicurean traditions primarily,

¹⁷ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 20-21.

¹⁸ Stanisław Grzeszczuk, "'Treny' Jana Kochanowskiego—Próba Interpretacji." *Kochanowski i inni: studia charakterystyki interpretacje* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 1985), 69.

Kochanowski listed the very benefits that a pursuit of *sapientia* should have yielded. From them, he had expected to be free from “all desire” and “all human cares”, to know “no pain”, to feel “no terror”, nor to suffer “no reverse or strain.” Likewise, he wished to “treat all human matters as a game” and, most importantly, to “think alike in happiness and grief.”¹⁹ Yet, he still felt all these things when his daughter died, despite his efforts in searching for wisdom:

Potrzebami; ty okiem swym nieuchronionym
Nędznika upatrujesz pod dachem złoconym,
A uboższym nie zajrzysz szczęśliwego mienia,
Kto by jedno chciał słuchać twego upomnienia.
Nieszczęśliwy ja człowiek, którym lata swoje
Na tym strawił, żebych był ujrzeć progi twoje
Terazem nagle z stopniów ostatnich zrzucony
I między insze jeden z wielu policzony.

(Your sleepless eye knows who’s wretched
Beneath a gilded roof; nor are you jealous
Of a poor man’s joys—
But who heeds your voice?
I am the wretch who spent his years
Searching to find your door.

¹⁹ Jill Kraye, “Moral Philosophy.” *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. ed. Charles Schmitt et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 360-370; 374-386.

But now I am hurled from the topmost stair

To be counted with the rest.)²⁰

Kochanowski had heeded the humanists' call to search for wisdom and "spent his years" studying the works of antiquity to find it, only to be "hurled from the topmost stair" of his learning when his daughter died. Now, disappointment and betrayal fueled his skepticism of wisdom's power. Moreover, the failure of *sapientia* to prevent Kochanowski's grief here reflected the greater problem that he had developed with the humanists' association of philosophy with the pursuit of wisdom.

The notion of wisdom, however, had been of immense importance to Kochanowski and the humanists. Through their rediscovery and thorough study of ancient texts, many humanists, such as Petrarch, came to believe that the true and undiluted notion of wisdom lay in the "resurrection of the classical ideal."²¹ Cicero's dictum, stating that *sapientia* encompassed "the knowledge of all things human and divine," only spurred them to search further for lost classical works and purify existing ones from medieval textual errors and "centuries of dubious exegesis."²² Their philological and literary efforts in this regard lead to a rediscovery and revival of many philosophical schools of antiquity, such as Platonism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism, as well as Aristotelianism. Likewise, this reawakening also led to a "constantly changing notion of philosophy, its scope, its purpose, its objects and its methods" within different

²⁰ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 20-21.

²¹ Cesare Vasoli, "The Renaissance Concept of Philosophy," *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* ed. Charles Schmitt et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 61.

²² Vasoli, "Concept of Philosophy," 61.

humanist philosophical circles.²³ Consequently, these circles' interpretations of how to achieve *sapientia* and its benefits varied, as did their focuses to toward this matter, ranging from the ethical (Stoic and Peripatetic) to the metaphysical (Platonic). Still, the key theme among these schools' approaches to wisdom was "the centrality of [humanity], which was reinforced by the preference given to techniques favouring communication and persuasive methods" of the humanists."²⁴

Yet, in using his own failing as an example, Kochanowski presented a philosophically eclectic rebuttal to the humanists' desire to attain *sapientia* through a diligent study of philosophy. While wisdom stood cruelly indifferent to his grief, Kochanowski's suffering over the loss of Orszula continued unabated. By being "counted with the rest" of mankind in his failure, Kochanowski saw man's pursuit of wisdom as futile and its benefits useless. His strenuous efforts had proved unrewarding in Orszula's death, when it had mattered most. By dismissing the worth of wisdom's benefits, Kochanowski also dismissed the value of Cicero's views on the importance of *sapientia* in the humanists' approach to grief. Yet, Kochanowski's rejection of wisdom was only his first step in challenging Cicero. With her image lingering in his mind continuously, he pondered if Cicero had deceived him in other ways, particularly on questions of the soul.²⁵

Within the context of a humanist *consolatio*, the acknowledgement of the soul's immortality was an especially significant argument against the continuation of excessive grief.²⁶ Cicero's view on the soul and grief had molded this part of the humanists'

²³ Vasoli, "Concept of Philosophy," 61.

²⁴ Vasoli, "Concept of Philosophy," 61-65

²⁵ Grzeszczuk, "'Treny' Jana Kochanowskiego", 68-69. Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 542.

²⁶ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 4-9.

approach to consolation. Yet again, philosophy, as Cicero dictated, could provide the answer to this difficult question. Different humanist interpretations of classical philosophical traditions offered Kochanowski many various perspectives on the immortality of the soul to consider. Two “offshoots” of the humanist movement in particular, Platonism and Aristotelianism, proposed very influential yet different explanations regarding the nature of the soul and played exceptionally important roles in debates on this topic during the Renaissance.²⁷ The central problem that differentiated these two traditions was whether the use of philosophy could demonstrate definitely the existence of an immortal soul.²⁸

Orszulo moja wdzięczna, gdzieś mi sie podziąła?
W którą stronę, w którąś sie krainę udała?
Czyś ty nad wszystkie nieba wysoko wniesiona
I tam w liczbę aniołków małych policzona?
Czyliś do rajū wzięta? Czyliś na szczęśliwe
Wyspy zaprowadzona? Czy cię przez teskliwe
Charon jeziora wiezie i napawa zdrojem
Niepomnym, że ty nie wiesz nic o płaszcu mojem?
Czy człowieka zrzuciwszy i myśli dziewicze,
Wzięłaś na się postawę i piórka słowicze?

(My fair Orszula, where have you fled?)

²⁷ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, 126, 134.

²⁸ Eckhard Kessler, “The Intellective Soul,” *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* ed. Charles Schmitt et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 499-500.

Are you above the celestial spheres, numbered
Among angelic hosts? Are you in Paradise?
Or are you taken to the Fortunate Isles?
Does Charon guide you over disconsolate lakes
Offering draughts from the erasing stream,
So you can't know my tears?
Or, shedding human shape and youthful dreams,
Have you assumed a nightingale's form and wing?)²⁹

Moving away from the Stoic and Epicurean considerations, Kochanowski turned to Plato with these exhortations to Orszula.³⁰ In pondering where she had “fled”, Kochanowski considered possible fates of her soul. Had she passed through “the celestial spheres” of the cosmos to join the “angelic hosts” in “Paradise”? Was she, unaware of her father's grief, still traveling over “disconsolate lakes” with Charon, the boatman of the underworld, to reach “the Fortunate Isles”? Or, had she shed “human shape and youthful dreams” and taken “a nightingale's form and wings”? Reflecting these possible “travels” of Orszula, Kochanowski considered Platonic conception of the soul's immortality. An important cornerstone of its thought, Plato's notion of a universal hierarchy where the immortal soul ascends back to “its true end” after death marked Platonic philosophy from the more materialistic views of other philosophical schools of antiquity concerning the soul. In the eyes of most Platonists and their later “descendants”, the Neoplatonists, the continuation of the soul after death was a philosophical provable fact that was critical to

²⁹ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 22-23.

³⁰ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 543.

interpretations of the Platonic schemes of universal forms and intelligible forms.³¹ Plato's views on the soul proved extremely influential on among many ancient thinkers, such as Cicero, and many early Church Fathers, most notably St. Augustine, as well as later on medieval thinkers and the humanists.³² During his humanistic studies in his youth, he had studied Plato's works quite thoroughly with his Cracovian master, Jan of Trzciany. Plato's own descriptions of a universal spiritual hierarchy and the soul's ascent through it as described in his *Phaedrus* were familiar topics to Kochanowski, as were the philosophical writings of the leading Renaissance Platonist, Marsilio Ficino.³³

As its dominant figure, Ficino had shaped largely Renaissance Platonism's approach to grief and consolation, providing its philosophical basis with his masterpiece, the *Platonic Theology*.³⁴ A synthesis of Platonic and Neoplatonic thought, as well as incorporating elements from Christian patristic and medieval sources, Ficino's *Platonic Theology* focused on the immortality of the soul as its central and unifying theme. For Ficino, both man's dignity and purpose in life rested on this notion. What defined this purpose for man then? Ficino argued that inspired contemplation was in fact man's main purpose in life. Contemplation was "a spiritual experience" that began when man detached his mind "from the outside world," and turned his thoughts and energies towards the eternal Idea.³⁵ Through contemplation, humanity's soul would raise itself up through the ascending hierarchy of reality and return to its true end, God.³⁶ In this sense, the immortality of the soul was a critical part of Ficino's Platonism, for it justified "his

³¹ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 142.

³² Brian P. Copenhaver and Charles B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 127-128.

³³ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 543-544.

³⁴ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 142.

³⁵ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, 130.

³⁶ Copenhaver and Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, 149-150. Also McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 142

interpretation of human existence as a continuing effort of contemplation.”³⁷ In carrying over this idea to the topic of consolation, Ficino considered excessive grief in humanity as a “failure to escape the corporeal for the spiritual, the temporal for the eternal.”³⁸ The expression of inconsolable grief was a sign that a person had turned his or her own contemplation away from the higher “good” of God to the lesser “good” of material concerns. Inconsolable grief thus jeopardized the very future of man’s soul.

Ficino proposed the bereaved should take comfort in knowing that the deceased has reached a better state of existence, for “the soul has an innate anxiety to return to its true end, a longing to transcend the distractions of the corporeal state and to regain the beatitude of its proper immortal essence.”³⁹ In returning to its “true end,” the deceased’s soul achieved the greatest good possible: full communion with God. Likewise, the loss of the deceased should also not trouble the bereaved because the eternal essence of all souls allowed both of them to engage in “consoling spiritual contact.”⁴⁰ Ficino’s focus of these spiritual aspects formed the core of Platonic consolation and inevitably found their way into the consolations of many humanists.⁴¹ Yet Ficino’s advice did not dispel Kochanowski’s anxiety over Orszula.

Czyś po śmierci tam poszła, kędyś pierwwej była,
Niześ sie na mą ciężką żałość urodziła?
Gdziekolwiek jest, jeśliś jest, lituj mej żałości,
A nie możesz li w onej dawnej swej całości,

³⁷ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, 130.

³⁸ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 142.

³⁹ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 142.

⁴⁰ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 146.

⁴¹ King, *The Death of The Child*, 153.

Pociesz mię, jako możesz, a staw sie przede mną
Lubo snem, lubo cieniem, lub marą nিকczemną.

(Or in death have you returned
To where you dwelt before you caused my pain?
Wherever you are, if you are, take pity on my grief,
And if you cannot in the flesh,
Console me and appear
As dream, shade, or vision.)⁴²

Kochanowski begged Orszula to come to him in the form of a “dream, shade, or vision,” and relieved his anxieties over her fate. Only her reassurance of the afterlife could ease his pain. Yet, his despair and grief prompted serious doubt in this possibility. The unanswerable question, “Did Orszula’s soul really survive death?”, lingered. The pivotal moment of his doubting anxiety rested on the words, “wherever you are, if you are, take pity on my grief.”⁴³ Drawing from one of Petrarch’s letters to Cicero, Kochanowski showed the inability of Platonism to console with his “if you are” remark. The idea of communing with the souls of the dead had not yielded any proof of her existence, only miserable silence. The philosophical explanations that had justified the reality of a universal hierarchy of forms and the immortality of soul for Ficino and the Platonists became all the more doubtful for him. The significance of these few words would be immense in Kochanowski’s search for consolation. By calling the notion of the

⁴² Kochanowski, *Treny*, 22-23. The line irregularities in the English version are due to the translator’s stylistic choices, though the original meaning has not changed.

⁴³ Pirie, “*Lamentationes*,” 108.

soul's immortality into doubt, he had questioned the one of basic tenets of his Christian faith, an act of blatant heresy.⁴⁴ Yet, Kochanowski did not seem concerned with the potentially significant spiritual and religious consequences of his doubts. Instead, he continued undauntedly against Cicero, even as hope for relief seemed to slip away.

⁴⁴ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 544.

Four: “An Eternal Treasure”—the Renaissance Concept of *Virtus*

The failure of Platonism had shown exposed a flaw of Cicero’s wisdom, but it had also plunged Kochanowski even further into philosophical despair over his grief.¹ What other “remedy” could the humanists offer Kochanowski for his endless anguish? There was something still, *virtus*. Kochanowski had known and worshipped the idea of *virtus*, acquainting himself courtesy of Cicero. But, in his time of grief, could this time-honored idea be of any use to Kochanowski? Unfortunately, *virtus* would also fail the sorrowful Kochanowski just as Platonism had.

The classical notion of *virtus* (virtue) was a favored and frequent topic in the writings of the humanists. Kochanowski’s understanding of *virtus*’ relationship to grief had been formed from his reading of ancient authors.² Despite its currency in their works and philosophical discussions, the humanists had no clear consensus on the merits of practicing *virtus*, nor what precisely constituted it, nor even what its relation was in relation to religion.³ The interpreters of different classical philosophical traditions of the Renaissance had examined *virtus*, offering praise and criticism. Some humanists, such as Leonardo Bruni and Pietro Pomponazzi, celebrated *virtus* as the key to living a proper and meaningful life. Others such as Lorenzo Valla and Juan Luis Vives ridiculed *virtus* instead, calling it an unattainable and impractical goal for humanity to strive for at all.⁴ The place of *virtus* in these different philosophical traditions rested on what they

¹ Pirie, “*Lamentationes*,” 108.

² Teresa Halikowska-Smith, “Kochanowski’s Humanist Philosophy of Life as Reflected in His *Pieśni*” in *Jan Kochanowski in Glasgow*, ed. Donald Pirie (Glasgow: Campania, 1985), 49-50.

³ Kraye, “Moral Philosophy,” 325.

⁴ Kraye, “Moral Philosophy,” 339-341.

considered as man's *summum bonum* (supreme good). In this regard, the notion of *virtus* held a central place in Stoicism and Aristotelianism.

Yet these philosophical traditions understood *virtus* in different ways by humanist interpreters. Nowhere is this better seen than with Aristotelians, for whom happiness was humanity's supreme good in life. Happiness "consisted in the good and proper exercise of man's rational faculty or...the activity of man's soul in accordance with virtue..."⁵

Drawing from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, many of these interpreters, like Aristotle, believed that a perfect attainment of happiness consisted of a balance of the spiritual, emotional, and material concerns through "a life-long activity in accordance with virtue supplemented by sufficient bodily and external goods."⁶

Considering the immense complexity surrounding this balancing act between the spiritual and material, the notion of *virtus* did not consist of one specific action for Aristotle and his followers, but rather as an aggregate of "the best and most perfect of the [intellective and moral] virtues" that came from both the rational and irrational parts of man's soul.⁷ Intellective virtues were derived from the rational part of man's soul, and therefore, in Aristotle's eyes, considered as always good, regardless of how much man practiced them, because they were "self-sufficient" from external concerns of the world. On the other hand, moral virtues, which stemmed from the irrational part, were "disposition[s] to observe the mean to both actions and emotions."⁸ Humanity's failure to maintain this mean in exercising a moral virtue, either in excess or in scarcity, was

⁵ Krayer, "Moral Philosophy," 330.

⁶ Krayer, "Moral Philosophy," 330.

⁷ Krayer, "Moral Philosophy," 332-333.

⁸ Krayer, "Moral Philosophy," 338-339. In Aristotle's view, the intellective virtues were science, art practical wisdom or prudence, intelligence, and theoretical wisdom or contemplation of the divine. The moral virtues were courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, magnanimity, appropriate ambition, gentleness, affability, truthfulness, wittiness, modesty, and justice. See Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.7.1-15.

considered as a vice, the opposite of virtue.⁹ Above all, Aristotle believed that contemplation of divine was the best and most perfect virtue and that man should strive to attain it. Though Aristotle acknowledged that only a few could achieve happiness solely through contemplation and the other intellectual virtues, he thought that every man could “reach perfect active or moral happiness” through the practice of moral virtues.¹⁰

Followers and commentators of Aristotle’s view on intellectual and moral virtues generally “accepted and expounded his view, forming the basis for its wide diffusion in both philosophical and popular literature.”¹¹ Nonetheless, Aristotle’s division of *virtus* into these two categories also spurred criticism among Renaissance Aristotelians. Likewise, Aristotle’s belief that the greatest virtue was the contemplation of celestial and divine objects incited a great deal of speculation among them, as well as non-Aristotelians too.¹² Questions surfaced over Aristotle’s criteria on judging the quality of virtues, the application of these virtues to man’s condition in the world, and most importantly, the validity of Aristotle’s emphasis on the contemplative over the active life.¹³

Though “there was still a core of allegiance to Aristotle’ among these Renaissance Aristotelians, “there was also disagreement on fundamental issues” such as this one.¹⁴ In this respect, Aristotelianism did not form a single unified entity in the Renaissance, but instead was composed of many different “Renaissance ‘Aristotelianisms’.”¹⁵ Amid these

⁹ Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.8.1-3.

¹⁰ Krayer, “Moral Philosophy,” 336-337.

¹¹ Krayer, “Moral Philosophy,” 342.

¹² Copenhaver and Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, 82.

¹³ For further treatment of specific individuals’ responses to Aristotle’s approach to *virtus*, see Krayer, “Moral Philosophy,” 332-342.

¹⁴ Charles B. Schmitt, “Towards a Reassessment of Renaissance Aristotelianism” in *Studies in Renaissance Philosophy and Science: V* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981), 160.

¹⁵ Schmitt, “Renaissance Aristotelianism,” 160.

numerous and intricate controversies on Aristotle's notion of *virtus*, it is not surprising that many humanists who could be called Aristotelians, such as Pomponazzi and Nifo, took up many eclectic philosophical views from both scholastic and classical traditions on this point.¹⁶ To many, like Pomponazzi, Stoicism offered a more appealing approach to *virtus*.

The Stoics also placed a great deal of importance on the role of *virtus* in their understanding of what humanity's *summum bonum* was. However, for the Stoics, *virtus* was the only supreme good of humanity, with vice being the only evil. *Virtus* consisted of "following nature, which [the Stoics] regarded as the immanent manifestation of divine reason."¹⁷ All other things, such as bodily and external concerns, the Stoics considered as morally indifferent and unimportant to man's happiness. Instead of hindering it, the misfortunes of humanity, they believed, "provided an ideal opportunity for developing and displaying the internal virtue which alone determined human happiness."¹⁸ But, how would humanity's emotions play into its practice of *virtus* amidst these trials and tribulations? To this, the Stoics replied that immunity to the emotional consequences of these misfortunes was the key to humanity's pursuit of *virtus*. Yet, proponents of Stoicism did not advocate total emotionlessness or impassivity on man's part. Rather, they emphasized that the expression of rational emotions, such as joy and precaution, were in line with the pursuit of *virtus*, whereas the expression of irrational ones, like fear or distress, hindered this pursuit, for these emotions stemmed from passion, not reason.¹⁹

¹⁶ Copenhaver and Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, 76.

¹⁷ Kraye, "Moral Philosophy," 360.

¹⁸ Kraye, "Moral Philosophy," 360.

¹⁹ William J. Bouwsma, "The Two Faces of Humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought," in *A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 32-33.

Yet, the Stoic notion of *virtus* “was not a path to some higher goal but rather was itself the sole and self-sufficient aim of humanity’s existence.”²⁰ Through a delicate and difficult balance of these tenets, the Stoic could hope to achieve his desired goals of *virtus* and happiness, though only in his or her earthly life. Though considered quite rigorous and limiting even in antiquity, Stoicism and its notion of *virtus* did exert considerable influence in the ancient world, as well as later in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Given its emphasis on the importance of *virtus*, Stoicism also drew many comparisons to Aristotelianism from both ancient and Renaissance writers and thinkers. Indeed, many shared Cicero’s belief “that the Stoics had taken over Peripatetic ethics wholesale, merely adopting different names for the same concepts.”²¹ These thinkers saw their similarity in highlighting the importance of *virtus* to man’s pursuit of the greatest good. Yet, others noted that the Stoics’ view of *virtus* focused solely on the spiritual concerns of humanity and ignored its bodily ones, whereas Aristotelians’ view attempted to balance both of them. Much like Aristotle’s view, the Stoics’ notion of *virtus* and its relationship to humanity would also become the subject of a substantial amount of discussion and criticism from many humanists during the course of their study and application of classical thought from ancient texts.²²

Although the humanists’ work on ancient texts uncovered previously lost Greek sources on Stoicism, such as the Greek philosopher Epictetus, Renaissance thinkers formed their knowledge of Stoicism primarily from the Latin works of Seneca and Cicero.²³ Cicero’s *De finibus* and *De officiis* proved particularly influential on the

²⁰ Kraye, “Moral Philosophy,” 360.

²¹ Kraye, “Moral Philosophy,” 363.

²² Kraye, “Moral Philosophy,” 360.

²³ Bouwsma, “The Two Faces of Humanism,” 29-31.

humanists' understanding of Stoicism and *virtus*. Again, the weight of Cicero's philosophical eclecticism among the humanists shaped their approach to Stoicism, as it had with other philosophical traditions.²⁴ Based on their individual readings and knowledge of ancient works, as well as their religious understanding, these humanists' precise understanding or misunderstanding of Stoic philosophy in many ways determined their disposition, whether favorable or not, towards it.

On other hand, those Renaissance and humanist thinkers who disputed the Stoics' promises of happiness believed *virtus* in itself was not sufficient to ensure humanity's happiness because it was simply too harsh, rigid, and unattainable for humanity. Some humanists, such as Montaigne, argued that humanity's emotions were a natural part of him, and could not be separable from his actions.²⁵ These emotions, in cases such as courage and pity, were in fact essential in fostering and leading him to *virtus*. For these humanists, the Aristotelian approach was more moderate and feasible for humanity.²⁶ Lorenzo Valla, who also found the Aristotelians' view unsavourable, claimed that the Stoics' view of *virtus* as its own reward rested on "empty rhetoric" and "a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature," while, in the same time, it ignored the humanity's Christian purpose to seek "the perfect happiness of the next life."²⁷ For these humanists, humanity was capable of achieving extraordinary things, but not impossible ones.

Admirers of Stoicism, on the other hand, disagreed. Those humanists, who admired the Stoic view of *virtus*, like Petrarch, praised its stress on eliminating the irrational and unnecessary emotions that only misled humanity into vice. Angelo

²⁴ Copenhaver and Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, 197-200.

²⁵ Krayer, "Moral Philosophy," 365-367.

²⁶ King, *The Death of The Child*, 183.

²⁷ Krayer, "Moral Philosophy," 363, 369.

Poliziano, another humanist supporter of Stoic tenets, argued that the Stoic indifference to such emotions as grief and anxiety for the sake of *virtus*, though extremely difficult, was certainly “not beyond man’s capacities.”²⁸ Incorporating Stoicism into his Aristotelianism, Pietro Pomponazzi further expounded the importance of *virtus* to the dignity of man. Discarding the ideal of contemplation and the possibility of humanity’s knowledge of the divine, Pomponazzi maintained that *virtus* was the greatest ideal that man could hope to know and attain during his present life, in process stressing the importance of his active life.²⁹ Although knowledge of the immortality of the soul was not provable philosophically, and must be taken as an article of faith in Pomponazzi’s view, humanity could still find satisfaction and purpose in its present existence through *virtus*.³⁰ Thus, humanity’s dignity and place in the universe, combined with *virtus*, allowed it to overcome any material misfortunes and emotional tribulations, even the agonies of grief. Naturally, humanist consolers did not hesitate in also incorporating the notion of *virtus* into the philosophical “arsenal” of their consolations.

How did these humanists console the bereaved with *virtus*? The consequences of grief, they argued simply, caused the bereaved to stray from *virtus* and its intended good. Instead, the bereaved should utilize the benefits of *virtus* in coping with and eliminating the pain and sorrow of their grief. Quite often, they would justify these points by including Stoic views towards grief almost always in their consolation.³¹ From a Stoic perspective, the expression of grief was a vice that stemmed from the irrational and sensual emotions of humanity, hence deviated from nature and was not pertinent to

²⁸ Kraye, “Moral Philosophy,” 364.

²⁹ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, 136-137.

³⁰ Copenhaver and Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, 108-109.

³¹ King, *The Death of The Child*, 184.

humanity's pursuit of *virtus*.³² Consequently, the bereaved must block out and ignore grief as a test of true *virtus*. Petrarch, echoing this Stoic belief in many of his letters and works, especially his *De remediis utriusque fortune*, urged those grieving to remember “the importance of arming the mind with fortitude and courage, turning from the sensual,” for man’s “sobs and laments do not come from nature, but only from...cowardice.”³³ Likewise, these “Stoic” consolers emphasized that death was an inevitable part of existence, one decreed by both nature and the will of God, and thus it was futile for humanity to grieve.³⁴ Since it also came from nature, *virtus* simply could not exist with grief and sorrow. Hence, the solution to grief was simple: “bear and forebear” all for virtue.³⁵ For the Stoic, there could not be any middle ground in grief.

Those looking for a more “moderate” approach to consoling grief than what Stoicism had to offer could turn to the Peripatetics. Since “emotions were natural, indeed essential to human beings,” the Peripatetics allowed the bereaved to express grief as a natural response to balancing the needs of the body with those of the soul.³⁶ Although coming from the irrational part of man, grief was a natural response to a rational and “good” emotion, profound love for the deceased. By “weeping” moderately, the bereaved could find “a remedy for the mitigation and amelioration of sorrow and sadness” and eventually return to the virtuous mean.³⁷ However, grief did have its limits for the Peripatetics. An excessive or immoderate amount of grief was an obvious sign that one

³² Bouwsma, “The Two Faces of Humanism,” 41.

³³ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 40-41.

³⁴ King, *The Death of The Child*, 182.

³⁵ Krayer, “Moral Philosophy,” 364.

³⁶ King, *The Death of The Child*, 182.

³⁷ King, *The Death of The Child*, 183.

had strayed from his or her pursuit of *virtus*. By remaining inconsolably sorrowful, the bereaved would also jeopardize their ultimate goal, happiness.

As an ardent follower of Cicero, Kochanowski placed exceptional importance on the notion of *virtus*. Quite expectedly, he had learned and formed his understanding of *virtus* primarily from his readings of Cicero. Holding it above all others “gifts” from the ancients, *virtus* occupied the most important place in his philosophical, moral, and religious understanding of the world.³⁸ Additionally, Francesco Robortello, one of his Paduan masters, could have also shaped Kochanowski’s strong attachment to this classical notion during his studies. Famous for his literary scholarship, especially his commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Robortello was well known among the students of Padua for strong emphasis on grammatical correctness and eloquence, as well as for his high opinion of himself as a humanist.³⁹ Also, he was an adherent to the Stoic notion of *virtus* and would not have hesitated in inserting his philosophical perspectives into his lectures on poetry.⁴⁰ Though he did hold the professorship of moral philosophy in Padua until 1561 (after Kochanowski had already left Padua), Robortello could have contributed to the infusion and emphasis of the Stoic notion of *virtus* into Kochanowski’s poetry later on.⁴¹

Naturally, Kochanowski came to praise this ancient ideal almost ubiquitously throughout his poetic works.⁴² In his *Pieśni*, written only a few years before *Treny*, he presented exactly how important *virtus* was not only to him, but also to all of mankind:

³⁸ Weintraub, “Kochanowski’s Renaissance Manifesto,” 418. Grzeszczuk, “Cycero w ‘Trenach’,” 105.

³⁹ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 448.

⁴⁰ Kot, “Jana Kochanowskiego podroże i studia,” 224-225.

⁴¹ Grendler, *Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, 400.

⁴² Grzeszczuk, “Cycero w ‘Trenach’,” 106-107.

Cnota - skarb wieczny, cnota - klenot drogi,
Tegoć nie wydrze nieprzyjaciel srogi,
Nie spali ogień, nie zabierze woda;
Nad wszystkim inszym panuje Przygoda.

(Virtue, an eternal treasure; virtue, the greatest good.

A jewel no ruthless rogue could easily take,
Nor fire burn, nor wild waters sweep;
A constant guardian in any adventure one undertakes.)⁴³

Echoing a dominant Stoic theme from Cicero's works here, such as the *De finibus* and the *Paradoxa stoicorum*, Kochanowski believed that *virtus* (in Polish, *cnota*) was the greatest good that humanity could hope to achieve, for it resisted all misfortune and tribulations that life might bring.⁴⁴ Following Cicero's advice, he believed that *virtus* was attained through the careful study and deliberate application of philosophy.⁴⁵ Indeed, Kochanowski held the tenets of Stoicism in high regard, and put them into practice in his own life. For him, the Stoics' emphasis on *virtus* dictated the most proper and useful way to lead one's life. Kochanowski, however, was by no means a "cold-hearted" Stoic ascetic. "The Stoic ethics" of Kochanowski "had a strong Ciceronian tinge."⁴⁶ Like Cicero, he picked aspects of Stoicism that appealed to him, including them with other philosophical tenets that he liked. Throughout his earlier works, especially *Fraszki* and

⁴³ Jan Kochanowski, *Pieśni in Dzieła Wybrane*, eds. Wojciech Rzehak and Anna Popławska (Krakow: Wydawnictwo GREG), 39. No date available. Translation mine.

⁴⁴ Grzeszczuk, "'Treny' Jana Kochanowskiego," 70-71.

⁴⁵ Grzeszczuk, "'Treny' Jana Kochanowskiego," 71.

⁴⁶ Weintraub, "Kochanowski's Renaissance Manifesto," 418.

Pieśni, Kochanowski praised, in quite Epicurean fashion, the joy of laughter and gentle frivolity with friends, the blissful pain of love and lust, as well as the pleasures of food and drinks.⁴⁷ On a less material level, he also highlighted the emotional pleasure that came from the admiration of the physical beauty of the world. Though he advocated these un-Stoic activities, Kochanowski urged also quite explicitly the need for moderation while engaging in them.⁴⁸ This was where *virtus* would come in as an aid and guide. For the material enjoyments of life, Kochanowski seemed to take on a very “Peripatetic” approach to *virtus*, underscoring the necessity of following the moral mean in “indulging” in these activities. These things would remain “goods,” so long as they were done with the proper temperament.

The practice of moderation was an ideal that had permeated through the philosophies and literature of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Kochanowski also incorporated other influences into his approach to moderation as well.⁴⁹ Horace, one of Kochanowski’s beloved Latin poets, had stressed in his *Odes* the importance of “the Golden Mean” in enjoying the physical pleasures of life. Additionally, other Renaissance and humanist thinkers, such as Ficino, had considered moderation as one of most important universal values for man.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, when it came to more “abstract” applications of moral virtues, Kochanowski’s eclectic understanding of *virtus* turned with full force to the Stoics.

Kochanowski’s notion of *virtus* reserved the Stoics’ insistence on emotional passivity for feelings that he considered as negative and harmful. In following this two-

⁴⁷ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 350-351

⁴⁸ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 354.

⁴⁹ Halikowska-Smith, “Kochanowski’s Humanist Philosophy,” 49.

⁵⁰ Halikowska-Smith, “Kochanowski’s Humanist Philosophy,” 50.

fold understanding of *virtus*, Kochanowski believed that humanity would developed a greater sense of piety and fulfillment that would lead it the ultimate goal of happiness, God.⁵¹ For him, vices were any emotions that caused humanity to depart from this path, as well as to engage in actions that were harmful to it and others. Jealousy, greed, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance, and religious intolerance were among the many vices, in Kochanowski's eyes, that the Stoic notion of *virtus* would purge from its devoted followers.⁵² Equally, the most painful or adversities like death and grief or even the best of fortunes such riches and health would not disturb the well-being of the virtuous man that Kochanowski had envisioned in his reading of Cicero. The benefits of *virtus* would be the keys that allowed any man, from the highest noble to the simplest peasant, to overcome even the worst of all tragedies.

Yet, Kochanowski realized with his daughter's death "the gulf between philosophy and real life," and wrote bitterly as his notion of *virtus* crumpled before the agonies of his grief:⁵³

'Fraszka cnota'—powiedział Brutus porażony.

Fraszka, kto sie przypatrzy, fraszka z każdej strony.

Kogo kiedy pobożność jego ratowała?

Kogo dobroć przypadku złego uchowała?

(Virtue: a trifle!—stricken Brutus found.

A trifle, if you see it in the round.

⁵¹ Halikowska-Smith, "Kochanowski's Humanist Philosophy," 52.

⁵² Grzeszczuk, "Przy pogrzebie rzecz—Konspekt intelektualny *Trenów*," 140.

⁵³ Halikowska-Smith, "Kochanowski's Humanist Philosophy," 53.

Has piety ever brought salvation?

A lurking foe entangles men's affairs

With no distinction between good and bad.)⁵⁴

Virtus became utterly a “trifle.” Hit with the full irony of his situation now, all of his former praise of *virtus* as a “treasure” became muted, and all of his effort to follow it, wasted. How did he defend the harsh irony of his point here? Had *virtus* deceived her followers before him? Had her high ideals failed them just as they had failed Kochanowski? Yes, it had, Kochanowski realized. *Virtus* had also failed the virtuous Marcus Brutus, the assassin of Caesar and a friend of Cicero. The ever-faithful Roman republican would now serve as Kochanowski's companion in misery.⁵⁵ Brutus, like Kochanowski, had too placed his faith in *virtus*, allowing it to guide his emotions and actions towards a proper and morally rewarding life. A model of virtuous living, Brutus himself had garnered the admiration of his fellow peers. So strong was Brutus' dedication and faith in *virtus* that it convinced him of the “good” in ending the tyranny of his close friend, Julius Caesar. But, in the end, *virtus* did not reward him for his faithfulness. Instead, it had heaped every kind of disgrace and misery on Brutus. His “piety” had not carried with it moral “salvation” that he had sought. Just as it had failed Brutus, now *virtus* had also failed Kochanowski. Why had *virtus* let both him and Brutus down? The reason, Kochanowski recognized, was very simple, for it applied to all who sought *virtus*:

Nieznajomy wróg jakiś miesza ludzkie rzeczy,

Nie mając ani dobrych, ani złych na pieczy.

⁵⁴ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 24-25.

⁵⁵ Pelc, *Kochanowski.*, 541.

Kędy jego duch więnie, żaden nie uleże:

Praw li, krzyw li, bez braku każdego dosięże.

A my rozumy swoje przedsię udać chcemy.

Hardzi między prostaki, że nic nie umiemy,

Wspinamy się do nieba, Boże tajemnice

Upatrując; ale wzrok śmiertelnej źrzenice

Tępy na to; sny lekkim, sny płoche nas bawią,

Które się nam pobobno nigdy nie wyjawią.

(That spirit blows and none is spared:

Neither the righteous nor the knave.

Hiding our folly, we flaunt our wits

To dazzle simple souls. We climb

To heaven, spying on God's mysteries,

But the sight of mortal eyes

Proves dim. Scant, fleeting dreams

Tease us, their sense unguessed.)⁵⁶

Humanity's prideful arrogance was the source for *virtus*' failure. Having believed that the virtuous would be free from pain and suffering, Kochanowski realized in his grief now that the misfortunes of life spared "neither the righteous nor the knave." Regardless of *virtus*, all of humanity was doomed to suffer and react from the emotions of pain and loss. Since there was nothing that humanity can do to prevent suffering, why had it tried

⁵⁶ Kochanowski. *Treny*. 24-25.

so hard for centuries to overcome it with something called *virtus*? Once more, Kochanowski blamed those who, like himself, foolishly thought that humanity had the capacity to conquer all obstacles of this world. Yet, these men still continued to “climb to heaven,” trying to learn “God’s mysteries” with their philosophical speculations and unrealistic ideals (like *virtus*), all at the urging of Cicero.⁵⁷ Could humanity truly discover any definitive answers or solutions from these activities, or even understand them?

No, Kochanowski answered, for humanity’s comprehension “proves dim” in matters concerning God and nature. *Virtus* had clearly been wrong about guiding man through the troubles of emotional despair. What good did such misguided notions do humanity if they ultimately failed him? Echoing Petrarch’s own earlier qualms concerning man’s ignorance, he added that all things that man did happen to learn were just “scant fleeting dreams,” whose meaning remained “ungessed” to him. Yet, whom was Kochanowski trying to belittle specifically with these anti-intellectual invectives against humanity? Following the spirit of Petrarch’s *On His Own Ignorance*, Kochanowski questioned the flawed expectations that ambitious Renaissance thinkers, like the Aristotelians, held about learning the inner most workings of nature, humanity, and God through the power of philosophy.⁵⁸ Kochanowski’s targets included individuals and groups that had dabbled in these pointless “guessing games” of philosophy, such as the Stoics and their virtuous equanimity or the Platonists and their communion with God. Moreover, Kochanowski’s fellow humanists were as just as much to blame for his pain for cultivating and celebrating this pernicious spirit of man’s superiority through their

⁵⁷ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, pp. 541-542; also Grzeszczuk, “‘Treny’ Jana Kochanowskiego,” p. 76.

⁵⁸ Petrarch dealt with the topic of man’s ignorance and presumption in his work. See Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 542. For Petrarch’s *On His Own Ignorance*, see Ernst Cassirer et al., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), 47-133.

studies.⁵⁹ Only in the firm grip of misfortune did Kochanowski grasp that he had been a part of this humanist falsehood. But now as a victim of his pride, he saw that everything that had held so dear now appeared grossly flawed.⁶⁰ The Stoic promises that he had sought from *virtus* proved empty. All of the wisdom that he had learned from his studies of antiquity seemed false. The beauty of both man and the universe looked ugly and deformed. Kochanowski had shown that Cicero's belief in philosophy was false again. Out of this "rubble" of intense mental turmoil, Kochanowski was left with one thing only:

Żałości, co mi czynisz? Owa już oboje

Mam stracić: i pociechę, i baczenie swoje?

(Despair, what have you done? Am I

To lose both joy and reason?)⁶¹

"Despair" from Orszula's loss still loomed over him. Kochanowski had effectively refuted the value and place of *virtus* in his life. The wisdom of the ancients had not soothed his grief, nor provided any understanding as to why it still lingered. At this point, he asked himself once more why he had not been consoled. Yet, the gap that separated the expected and the actual benefits of Cicero's philosophical advice aggravated him even more, and plunged him into even further doubt and despair. Could he still find fault with Cicero? Was there anything else he could say against his Roman

⁵⁹ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 542.

⁶⁰ Mersereau, Jr., "Jan Kochanowski's 'Laments'," 43-44.

⁶¹ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 24-25.

hero and would his anger still be justified? Could he salvage his humanist worldview? Before he could decide, Kochanowski would have to answer a paramount question that he himself had posed: was all “joy and reason” lost from his life?

Five: The Final Test of “Reason” and “Emotion”

In pondering the potential loss of his “reason,” Kochanowski turned yet again to his memories of Orszula to seek a possible answer. Perhaps, he thought, nostalgic reflections of his dead daughter would return hope to his sunken state. Kochanowski’s recollections of Orszula had only reaffirmed and showed how severe his grief and despair had become up to this point. Kochanowski once more returned to praising Orszula’s character, reminding him as well as others, of how the strength of her character as a daughter had spurred both his intense love and grief.

Żaden ociec podobno barziej nie miłował
Dziecięcia, zaden barziej nad mię nie żałował
A też ledwie sie kiedy dziecię urodziło
Co by łaski rodziców swych tak godne było:

(No father loved his daughter more,
Nor mourned her more than I do mine;
But was there ever such a child
So worthy of her parents’ care?¹)

In his eyes, “no father” had “loved” nor “mourned” his daughter as much as Kochanowski has in *Treny*. Of course, his claim here was poetic license obviously, but also completely consistent with his development of a profound sense of self-pity that

¹ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 26-27.

justified his reaction.² Lamenting even further, he listed her filial virtues, her piety, her parental obedience, and her *panieńskie* (maidenly and domestic) ways that Orszula had exhibited even in her young age.³ Death had forever removed the promise of a truly upright and noble woman from Orszula. How could anyone, especially the humanists, not grieve to the same extent as Kochanowski had for such a loss? Despite remembering these qualities of his daughter, he still could not find “joy” in these memories, realizing that her loss was truly permanent:

Bo już nigdy nie wznidziesz ani przed mojema
Wiekom wiecznie zakwitniesz smutnemi oczema.

(Burying my hopes
In saddest ground;
For never will you rise,
Never bloom
Before my grieving eyes.)⁴

The permanence of Orszula’s loss continued to plague him with constant hopelessness. “Joy,” now he claimed, had become an impossibility for him when she had departed.⁵

² Mersereau, Jr., “Jan Kochanowski’s ‘Laments,’” 41.

³ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 26-27.

⁴ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 26-27.

⁵ Mersereau, Jr., “Jan Kochanowski’s ‘Lament,’” 42-43.

Wzięłaś mi, zgoła mówiąc, dusze połowicę,
Ostatek przy mnie został na wieczną tesknicę.

(You took, I vow, half my soul;
The rest you drowned in endless woe.)⁶

Where would this “endless woe” lead Kochanowski? He had feared that he had lost “reason” in his earlier attack on *virtus*. Despair rested on this fear. But, what was this “reason” to him? Though vague within the context of *Treny*, what Kochanowski considered as “reason” was the exact thing he had been criticizing, the philosophical basis of his worldview that humanism had helped shape.⁷ Ironically, the same person who was now the “villain” of *Treny*, Cicero, had once been the pinnacle of “reason.”⁸ The inextinguishable emotions of his grief impelled Kochanowski to put forth his most virulent and personal polemic against Cicero, a culmination of his entire critique against the philosophical dictates of his former hero, testing once more his humanist commitments.

Kochanowski’s inconsolability of his grief fully evoked his wrath towards Cicero to the surface. Again, he stated the same reason for his quarrel with Cicero, but also hint at the costs that he was ready to pay for his unrelenting grief:

Nieszczęściu kwoli a swojej żalości,
Która mię prawie przejmuję do kości,

⁶ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 28-29.

⁷ Weintraub, “Kochanowski’s Renaissance Manifesto,” 421.

⁸ Grzeszczuk, “Cycero w ‘Trenach’,” 107.

Lutnią i wdzięczny rym porzucić muszę,
Ledwe nie duszę.

(In my misfortunes and sorrow,
Which pierce me to the marrow,
I must forsake my lute and scroll,
Perhaps my soul.)⁹

The costs were indeed tremendous: in seeking to understand his “misfortunes and sorrow” for Orszula’s death, he had found no solace in his two most prized possessions, the “lute” of his poetic talents and the “scroll” of his humanist learning. Kochanowski had used his poetry as a vehicle for celebrating philosophical dictates that intrinsically tied to his classical learning before Orszula’s death. But in his reflection of grief, their blatant impotence to console became all too apparent to Kochanowski. His solution was to forsake both of them altogether. Kochanowski the poet and Kochanowski the humanist would become figments of a sorrowful and bitter past.¹⁰ In alluding to his rejection of his most defining roles, he also acknowledged the possibility that he was endangering his soul. Kochanowski’s introduction to the philosophies of antiquity, as well as their Renaissance interpreters, had had a profound effect in shaping and tying his religious understanding of humanity.¹¹ The conundrum that Kochanowski faced in this choice was undoubtedly difficult. Yet, were his remarks just a poetic exaggeration of the severity of

⁹ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 34-35.

¹⁰ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 545.

¹¹ Wiktor Weintraub, “Religia Kochanowskiego a polska kultura renesansowa,” in *Rzecz czarnolesska* (Krakow: Wydawn. Literackie, 1977), 241-242.

his grief, one typical of other humanist consolatory works?¹² Or, were they a definitive declaration of his resolve to “forsake” the very things he had once so cherished?

Żywem, czy mię sen obłudny frasuje?

Który kościanym oknem wylatuje,

A ludzkie myśli tym i owym bawi,

Co błąd na jawi.

(Am I awake? Are these delusive dreams,

Flying through the Ivory Gate,

Beguiling human thoughts,

At waking—nought?)¹³

Kochanowski questioned the rationale of his doubts about humanism. Perhaps, he thought, the harshness of his grief had led him astray in deciding to reject the previous security of his humanism. After all, his knowledge of classical philosophy had long served as his guide to “reason.” Were his strained emotions perhaps deluding his judgment and “beguiling” his thoughts with “delusive dreams” of moral decay? More importantly, did his grief justify the potential outcome of such a bold rejection?

Kochanowski would not allow the philosophical “traps” of Cicero and his humanism to snare him into any further sorrow. “Paradoxically,” Kochanowski used this “moment of

¹² McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 20-21.

¹³ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 34-35.

uncertainty and unclarity” in order to illustrate its own irrational futility and to dispel any traces doubts in him as to what had so deceptively been the “source of his misfortune”¹⁴:

O błędzie ludzki, o szalone dumy,
Jako to łącno pisać się rozumy,
Kiedy po wolej świat mamy, a głowa
Człowieku zdrowa.

W dostatku będąc, ubóstwo chwalemy,
W rozkoszy—żalność lekce szacujemy,
A póki wełny skapej przadce zostaje,
Śmierć nam za jaje.

(Oh human error, foolish pride!
How quick to reason
When things go well,
The head not ill.

Wealthy—we laud the poor,
Content—we sport with sorrow,
While the mean spinner weaves—
Death’s a joke.)¹⁵

¹⁴ Pirie, “*Lamentationes*,” 112.

¹⁵ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 34-35.

Tossing aside the “reason” of antiquity for the last time, Kochanowski blames his and humanity’s pride for his troubles. It had been pride that, in his time of “content,” had lead to believe that the human knowledge could eliminate the adversities that faced humanity. The wisdom of ancient philosophy he had once praised would bring happiness to all, regardless if they were “wealthy” or “poor.”¹⁶ Did not the Stoics, as Kochanowski had cited frequently, that one must bear such troubles without feeling a measure of pain? Similarly, it had also been pride that had fooled him into thinking “Death’s a joke.” Unfortunately, he had already learned the terrible cost that both he and humanity would suffer when tragedy actually came and ancient wisdom disappeared:

Lecz kiedy nędza albo żal przypadnie,
Ali żyć nie tak jako mówić snadie,
A śmierć dopiero w ten czas nam należy,
Gdy już k nam bieży.

(But faced with loss or dearth,
We tangle words and deeds
And notice Death
When she’s too near.)¹⁷

¹⁶ Stanisław Grzeszczuk, “Przy pogrzebie rzecz—konspekt intelektualny *Trenów*,” in *Jan Kochanowski: Interpretacje*, ed. Jan Błoński, (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1985), 138.

¹⁷ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 34-35.

Confronted with the stark reality of Orszula's death, Kochanowski had tangled both "words and deeds," realizing the full extent of human fickleness.¹⁸ When he attempted to console himself, he discovered that his philosophical knowledge provided no salubrious effects. His pursuit of steadfast happiness through philosophy had proved quixotic and vain. Instead of being "Stoic" in resisting them, Kochanowski had fallen into the "foolishness" of his grief and despair. Despite his efforts to emulate him, Kochanowski had nevertheless failed this master Cicero in the end. Or, perhaps it was Cicero's principles that had been flawed when confronted with adversity and loss. Kochanowski's own experience had shown this quite dramatically. But, had these principles also failed others? Indeed, Kochanowski knew that they had already failed another person before:

Przecz z płaczem idziesz, Arpinie wymowny
Z miłej ojczyzny? Wszak niw Rzym budowny,
Ale świat wszystek Miatem jest mądrymu
Widzeniu twemu.

Czemu tak barzo córki swej żałujesz?
Wszak sie ty tylko sromoty wiarujesz;
Insze wszelakie u ciebie przygody
Ledwie nie gody.

(Why weep, fluent Arpinas, when fleeing

¹⁸ Grzeszczuk, "Przy pogrzebie rzecz," 140.

From home—if not just towering Rome

But the whole world lies

Beneath your learned eyes?

Why do you mourn your daughter so?

Since you only fear disgrace,

Your other perturbations—

But a celebration!)¹⁹

The same principles that Cicero had advocated to others in their times of adversity, loss, and, most especially, grief, had failed him too, Kochanowski replied. Cicero had said that a “learned” Stoic man was at home anywhere in the world; hence he should not fear exile or the loss of his home.²⁰ Still, when “Arpinas” had been banished from the homely comforts of “towering” Rome, did he not “weep” bitterly in spite of his wisdom. But for Kochanowski, this personal failing was still petty. Enraged, he jabbed at Cicero with another example of his personal failures that was even more painful, one they both shared tragically: the death of a daughter. When Cicero’s beloved daughter Tullia died, he too had wept bitterly. But, caustically, Kochanowski asked, “Why do you mourn your daughter so?” Did not Cicero “fear” the “disgrace” and vice that came those who could not control their emotions? Did not Cicero’s belief in the immortality of Tullia’s soul give him solace? Perhaps, both Kochanowski and Cicero had not reacted so differently to the death of their daughters. Nonetheless, Kochanowski still continued to

¹⁹ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 34-35.

²⁰ Grzeszczuk, “‘*Treny*’ Jana Kochanowskiego,” 87.

belittle Cicero for calling the miserable “perturbations” of life “but a celebration!” Cicero’s evident hypocrisy would carry Kochanowski’s own disillusionment and pen to a new level of spite.²¹

Śmierc, mówisz, straszna tylko niezbożnemu;

Przecześnie tobie umrzeć cnotliwemu

Nie chciało, kiedyś prze dotkliwą mowę

Miał podać głowę?

(‘Death’, you say, ‘scares the wicked’.

Yet, though virtuous, you were loath

To die when your stern debate

Confirmed your fate.)²²

Mockingly, he himself turned now to console Cicero with the “virtuous” Roman’s advice and actions. Reiterating his sentiments on death in his *Tusculan Disputations*, Kochanowski pointed out emphatically that the “wicked” only fear the coming of death.²³ Though brave in challenging Marcus Antonius in “stern debate,” Cicero was “loath” to face the consequences of his own words. Though remembered as fearless Stoic, he had died a coward.²⁴ Had Cicero feared “Death” perhaps because he himself had been

²¹ Grzeszczuk, “Cycero w ‘Trenach’,” 414.

²² Kochanowski, *Treny*, 34-35.

²³ Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 2.4.12

²⁴ Kochanowski probably drew on a work by Asinius Pollio, an enemy of Cicero, for this account of Cicero’s death. For other, more favorable and perhaps accurate accounts of Cicero’s death, see Seneca, *Suasoria* 6.15ff.

“wicked”? Had he, like Kochanowski, failed to resist sorrow and grief, despite all of his *sapientia* and *virtus*? Again, Kochanowski provided Cicero an appropriate response.

Wywiódłeś wszystkim, nie wywiódłeś sobie;
Łacniej rzec, widzę, niż czynić i tobie,
Pióro anielskie; duszę toż w przygodzie,
Co i mnie bodzie.

(You’ve proved to all, but not
Yourself—you too, angelic scribe,
Cannot match deeds to words when your soul,
Like mine, is fouled.)²⁵

Reflecting his larger argument against humanity, Kochanowski revealed that inconsistency was Cicero’s chief failing, much as it had been for him. Their inconsistency in following and keeping the dictates of philosophy had prevented their minds from not being “fouled” by grief.²⁶ All of the philosophical knowledge of humanity would fail it in adversity. Only blatant hypocrisy in “deeds” and words” would remain. With this realization lingering, Kochanowski left his former master a final piece of advice:

Człowiek nie kamień, a jako sie stawi

²⁵ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 35-37

²⁶ Lempicki, “Rzecz o ‘Trenach’,” 216.

Fortuna, takich myśli nas nabawi.
Przeklęte szczęście! Czy snąć gorzej duszy,
Kto rany ruszy?

(Man's not a stone, Fortune dictates
Our thoughts. Accursed fate!
Does the soul smart more
When you rub the sore?)²⁷

Paradoxically rejecting wisdom of antiquity by affirming that “man’s not a stone,” Kochanowski offered Cicero, as well as humanity, a fateful reminder that the well being of humanity rises and falls at the whim of “Fortune.”²⁸ The “accursed fate” of humanity prevented it from resisting the emotions that came from pleasure or pain. Nevertheless, as Kochanowski realized painfully, Cicero and the humanists were the ones guilty of deceiving humanity with their “gifts” of philosophy, falsely telling it to strive for divine perfection. Their efforts only aggravated the “sore” of humanity when death and suffering came. Kochanowski knew that he shared their guilt, and, through suffering too much for having held on to their foolishness, rejected his humanism.

Czasie, pożądnej ojczyźnie niepamięci,
W co ani rozum, ani trafią święci,
Zgój smutne serce, a ten żal surowy

²⁷ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 36-37.

²⁸ Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 3.6.12-13.

Wybij mi z głowy.

(Father of sweet oblivion, Time!

Come where saints and reason fail,

Heal a sad heart and bring relief

From this tormenting grief.)²⁹

His “reason,” his humanism, had failed to console him over Orszula’s death. The emotion of Kochanowski’s grief proved too powerful and incompatible of a foe to overcome. The hostile tension between the two that his grief had created would be irreconcilable and permanent. His devotion to Cicero and the philosophies of antiquity, his “saints,” had only made him agonize over her death more, failing to bring him understanding for her death. Pride blinded him to the reality of the world. Tragically, both had shattered his faith in the dignity of humanity, simply by not alleviating the complete nature of his loss and resulting grief.³⁰

Even as he rejected humanism and Cicero, Kochanowski suffered from “tormenting grief.” He received no solace for tossing his prized “reason” away. Left in the hand of the “father of sweet oblivion,” perhaps only “Time” would “bring relief” and offer something that could “heal” Kochanowski’s “sad heart” at last.

²⁹ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 36-37.

³⁰ Weintraub, “Kochanowski’s Renaissance Manifesto,” 423.

Epilogue:

After bitterly and grievously rejecting his humanism, did Kochanowski find solace for his grief somewhere in *Treny*? Rejecting the philosophical consolations that his humanism offered him, Kochanowski at last looked to his “neglected” Christian faith for repose in the midst of his distress.

A ja zatym łzy niech leję,
Bom stracił wszystkie nadzieje,
By mnie rozum miał ratować,
Bóg sam mocen to hamować.

(So I'll shed tears
Having lost all hope
To be saved by reason.
Only God halts pain.)¹

After losing “all hope” in the “reason” of his humanism, Kochanowski realized that only God could cease his “tears” and “pain” in a sudden moment of faith. In searching deep within himself for his grief’s cure, he recognized that humanity’s “virtue and happiness... [came] entirely from God.”² However, the God of Kochanowski’s *Treny* was quite different from the God of his “Czego chcesz od nas, Panie” (“What do

¹ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 40-41.

² Bouwsma, “The Two Faces of Humanism,” 51.

you do want from us, Lord”). Not surprisingly, personal tragedy was at the heart of this change.³

My nieposłuszne, Panie, dzieci Twoje

W szczęśliwe czasy swoje

Rzadko Cię wspominamy,

Tylko rozkoszy zwykłych używamy.

...

Miej nas na wodzy, niech nas nie rozpycha

Docześnie rozkosz licha.

Niechaj na Cię pomniemy

Przynamniej w kaźni, gdy w łasce nie chcemy.

(We Your wayward children

When fortunate

Lost in common pleasures

Turn to You but rarely.

...

Hold tight the leash, Lord,

To curb our vain earthly joys;

May we, in torment, seek You

When we will not in Grace.)⁴

³ Weintraub, “Kochanowski’s Renaissance Manifesto,” 414, 424.

In a contrite manner, Kochanowski recognized his part in the chief failing of humanity and the source of his grief. He, like other “wayward children” in “fortunate” times, had “lost” himself in the “common pleasures” that humanity’s arrogance had afforded him. It was his humanism that had bred this false pride, by teaching him to hold up high and praise the dignity of humanity and to look to the achievements of the ancient world for proof and affirmation. Looking to Cicero as his idol, Kochanowski had spared no verse or stanza of his poetry in singing of humanity’s desire to reach perfection and “pleasures” through the study of philosophy.⁵ This view of the world had proven inadequate when the death of his daughter came, and his grief soon followed. His humanism had helped foster a false impression of the Almighty’s role in the fortunes and tribulations of humanity. Kochanowski’s grief brought to the surface the inherent tension between reason and religious faith that the “ambivalence” of his humanism had covered.⁶ He had forgotten that God, not humanity, held “tight the leash” of humanity’s fate. The life, death, and salvation of humanity remained solely in God’s will. Suffering had reminded Kochanowski of that, prompting him to “seek” His grace. Asking the “Lord...to curb” his and all of humanity’s “vain earthly joys,” Kochanowski made his final act of contrition and reaffirmation of faith to his “new” God.⁷

Wielkie przed Tobą są występy moje,

Lecz miłosierdzie Twoje

⁴ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 42-43.

⁵ Weintraub, “Kochanowski’s Renaissance Manifesto,” 412-414.

⁶ Bouwsma, “The Two Faces of Humanism,” 58.

⁷ Weintraub, “Kochanowski’s Renaissance Manifesto,” 423-424.

Przewyssa wszytki złości:
Użyj dziś, Panie, nade mną litości.

(I have greatly erred,
But Your benevolence
Outweighs my sins
Grant me mercy now!)⁸

It was only when Kochanowski had placed himself and the fate of Orszula's soul at the discretion of divine "mercy" that his grief ceased and his personal torment came to an end. His humanism had now become a relic of an almost forgettable past.

Fig. 3. The 1583 Edition of Kochanowski's *Treny*.



Source: Janusz Pelc, *Kochanowski: Szczyt renesansu w literaturze polskiej*

(Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001), 528.

⁸ Kochanowski, *Treny*, 42-43.

Towards the middle of 1583, Jan shed his mourning clothes, bid farewell to his wife, unknowingly pregnant with his only son, and left Czarnolas for the last time. He traveled first to Krakow, where he arranged for the publication of several of his works, including a second printing of *Treny*.⁹ Towards the end of 1583, Kochanowski departed from Krakow with no clear destination in sight. He might have headed eastward to the city of Wilno in Lithuania to organize further publication of his works there. Or, perhaps Kochanowski visited his friend and patron Jan Zamoyski, a fellow humanist and chancellor of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in the new, Renaissance-designed city of Zamosć in southeastern Poland.¹⁰

Perhaps he traveled simply to forget the scarring grief he had experienced in Czarnolas. After *Treny*, he never wrote another work of comparable poetic beauty and elegance, one matching the brilliance that his humanism had helped inspired in his previous compositions. On August 22 of 1584, Kochanowski died suddenly of an apparent heart attack in the southeastern Polish city of Lublin, finally, in the minds of his fellow Christians, joining the little girl who had once inspired the greatest poetic work of the Polish Renaissance.

What does Kochanowski's treatment of humanist consolation in *Treny* mean in the larger context of humanism and the Renaissance? Does his rejection of it, and subsequently his attachment to humanism, imply that Kochanowski was in fact not a

⁹ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 132.

¹⁰ Pelc, *Kochanowski*, 132-133.

member of this cosmopolitan European culture? On the contrary, his critique of humanist consolation, and the issues he raised throughout his work, places Jan Kochanowski firmly within this culture, attesting to his significance to Renaissance humanism in both Poland and Europe as a whole in two very important ways.

Fig. 4. Zygmunt Trembecki's *Kochanowski with Orszula*



Source: Janusz Pelc, *Kochanowski: Szczyt renesansu w literaturze polskiej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001), 538

The *Treny* are a significant contribution to our understanding of the humanist consolatory tradition of the Renaissance. In recording his personal experience of grief and parental bereavement, as well as his search for consolation, Kochanowski revealed himself to be a descendent of and a contributor to the humanist “art of mourning,” which traced its beginnings to Petrarch.¹¹ Also, Kochanowski’s disillusionments with the

¹¹ McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 93.

efficacy of classical philosophy in the humanist consolation in *Treny* reflect similar objections that other major humanists, such as Coluccio Salutati and Giannozzo Manetti, made in their consolatory works. For all three, the impracticality of the ancients' wisdom (Stoic emotional impassivity to suffering above all) had heightened only the pains of human sorrow in trying to explain the unexplainable, the death of a child. Similarly, Kochanowski, Salutati, and Manetti's solutions to grief found themselves a return to a purer form of Christian piety, free from the pollution of philosophy.¹²

In discussing the impact of philosophy and religion on him in *Treny*, Kochanowski echoed a larger debate of the Renaissance since the fourteenth century on the problem of human knowledge, on "the tension between faith and knowledge," and the "relationship between God and the world."¹³ Knowledgeable with the writings and ideas of leading Renaissance thinkers such as Ficino and Pico, Kochanowski, like his humanist predecessors, had also reflected a "nearly unlimited faith in the power of the human mind and in humanistic ideals of life and culture" in his work initially.¹⁴ Philosophy, they all held, shielded humanity from the physical and mental harm of the world. Yet, faced with worldly adversity and suffering, Kochanowski, again much like Pico and Ficino, turned against his philosophical and religious optimism of humanity, ending his humanist career "with renunciation" and "with a resigned return to religious dogma."¹⁵ In a similar fashion, Kochanowski's emphasis on the inability of humanity in practicing philosophy

¹² McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 93-108.

¹³ Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1963), 61-63.

¹⁴ Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, 62.

¹⁵ Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, 62-63. Also see Weintraub, "Kochanowski's Renaissance Manifesto," 420.

consistently in *Treny* mirrored a sentiment in the writings of his contemporary, Michel de Montaigne.¹⁶

Like many of these humanists, as well as others, Kochanowski saw his philosophical convictions in the strength and dignity of humanity crump in the face of adversity. After Orszula's death, his intellectual future with humanism seemed to have died too. Yet, with the *Treny*, his story of grief, consolation, and humanism did not just echo the suffering of a bereaved Polish father, but also a European one as well.

¹⁶ See "That to philosophize is to learn to die," and "Of the inconsistency of our action," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 56-68, 239-244.

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