Central European Cultures 5, no. 1 (2025): 159–179
doi.org/10.47075/CEC.2025-1.08

CEC | Central European Cultures

Images of Crisis in the Lyric Poetry by Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (1595–1640)

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Received 14 December 2024 | Accepted 25 February 2025 | Published online 14 July 2025

Abstract. Almost all the poetic output of Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (1595–1640) is a response to a crisis, whether external—political or religious—or arising from his personal experience. It spans a strong commitment, a call for action (e.g. a fight against the Turks) and an attempt to achieve independence from the vagaries of Fortune.

This paper deals with the imagery used by Sarbiewski to describe crisis in selected odes and epodes of his collection *Lyricorum libri IV. Epodon Liber Unus alterq[ue] Epigrammatum.* One of the examples is his use of the motif of flight over the earth. From a celestial perspective, maintaining distance, the *poeta-vates* observes and describes the tragedy happening on the stage of the *theatrum mundi*. The view is so poignant, and at the same time his desire of being with God in heaven is so strong, that he prefers not to come back to earth.

Another example of imagery is the use of aquatic metaphors. The poet, for example, develops a vision of the Flood, which is a consequence of a moral crisis and at the same time a radical attempt (not necessarily successful) to solve it. Drawing inspiration from both the Bible and the works of classical authors (for instance, he likes to use the figure of the *adynaton*), Sarbiewski creates his own reinterpretation and actualisation of the deluge as an image of the crisis affecting civilisation and of the cataclysm destroying nature.

Keywords: crisis, flight, flood, *concors discordia*, Horace, Noah, Sarbiewski

Introduction

Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewki (Matthias Casimir Sarbievius) was a Polish Jesuit who became famous and gained the glorious titles of Sarmatian and Christian Horace for his poetic works, which were collected in the volume *Lyricorum Libri IV. Epodon Liber Unus Alterq[ue] Epigrammatum* and published many times in various places in Europe in the seventeenth century. At the same time, he wrote treatises on poetics in which he analysed mainly epic, lyric and epigram. He also was a teacher at Jesuit

colleges and the Academy of Vilna, and then became the preacher of the King of Poland Władysław IV Vasa.[1]

Sarbiewski lived in troubled times, when Europe was torn apart by the Thirty Years' War and religious conflicts, and the Ottomans threat was growing. There was thus an awareness of deep crisis and a feeling of living in a cruel and bloody 'iron age', and that the world was heading for annihilation. The prevailing mood was therefore pessimism and catastrophism, with a sense of the futility of life and the world. This was expressed in European literature, which often featured vanity motifs, as well as complaints about the present times or even disgust with the world dominated by evil. These themes can be clearly seen in the works of the Jesuits, e.g. in the epigrams of Bernardus Bauhusius, whom Sarbiewski highly valued and quoted in his famous treatise on punchline: *De acuto et arguto, sive Seneca et Martialis*.[2]

These experiences and feelings were not alien to Sarbiewski and are reflected in his writings. Almost all of his poetic creation, indeed, comes in response to a crisis, whether external—political or social, or internal, emerging from a personal experience. The poet is divided between commitment, a call to action (for example, to fight against the Turks) and an attempt to distance himself, to free himself from the vagaries of Fortune.

This first attitude, a call to action, is already suggested by the titles of some of the poems, e.g. *Ad principes Europae*: *De recuperando Orientis Imperio* (I 6) or *Ad principes Romani Imperii*: *De recuperandis Graeciae provinciis* (I 12). These works are discussed by Aleksander Mikołajczak in his book *Studia Sarbieviana*.[3] On the other hand, Józef Warszawski writes about the experience of crisis in the poet's personal life during his stay in Rome.[4] And Piotr Urbański in his analyses draws attention to elements of neo-Stoic philosophy and Ignatian spirituality as ways of distancing the Jesuit from the problems of the world.[5] In her monograph, Elwira Buszewicz analyses the politically engaged works but also notes that Fortuna often appears in Sarbiewski's poems as a sinister figure bringing various disasters in both social and private dimensions.[6]

Let us have a look at some of the poetic images that Sarbiewski uses to represent crisis in his collection of poems *Lyricorum Libri IV. Epodon Liber Unus*. And let us start by recalling that he also wrote, in one of his treatises on poetics entitled

1 For more information about the life and works of Sarbiewski, see Stawecka, *Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski prozaik i poeta*.

2 Sarbiewski, *Praecepta*, 4, 17, 18, 19.

3 Mikołajczak, *Studia Sarbieviana*, 103–17.

4 Warszawski, *Dramat rzymski*.

5 Urbański, *Theologia fabulosa*, 97–114; Urbański, "Between Ignatianism and Stoicism," 173–89. See also: Bobiatyński, "Horacjańskie źródła," 191–210.

6 Buszewicz, *Sarmacki Horacy i jego liryka*, 181–91, 237–46, 255–62.

Characteres lyrici, seu Horatius et Pindarus, that poetry should use images, or various 'fictions' *(fictiones)*, which should be exceptional *(mirabiles)* and unusual *(rarae)* especially in lyric poetry.[7]

The image of the flight

One of these 'fictions' is the flight above the earth. In analysing this motif in his aforementioned treatise *Characteres lyrici*, *seu Horatius et Pindarus,* Sarbiewski recalls Horace's famous ode *Non usitata*… (II. 20). The Jesuit frequently uses the image of flight in his own works,[8] where he either transforms himself into a swan and flies with his own wings—thus imitating Horace—or flies on the back of a Pegasus or is carried away by a cloud. Such a flight is usually initiated by a Muse, who accompanies him and guarantees a safe landing at the end of the journey. The poet-traveller also often describes his journey, telling what he sees from above, mentioning many geographical names. In these poems, the motif of flight serves above all to underline the power of poetic inspiration; it illustrates the optimistic conviction that poetry is capable of mastering space and time.[9]

Sarbiewski also uses the image of flight in his ode entitled *E rebus humanis excessus* (II. 5). As we shall see soon, he describes a journey, but of a somewhat different nature, departing from the Horatian model. The very first lines of the ode already show that the world and human affairs are left behind, and give information about the start of the flight:

"Humana linquo: tollite praepetem
Nubesque ventique. Ut mihi devii
Montes resedere, et volanti
Regna procul, populosque vastus

Subegit aer! Iam radiantia
Delubra Divum, iam mihi regiae
Turres recessere, et relictae in
Exiguum tenuantur urbes;" (v. 1–8)[10]

7 "Communiter enim magis sunt ideales actiones et – ut ita dicam – abstractae et a communi usu abhorrentes actiones in fictione lyrica, magis etiam mirabiles et rarae. Quis enim verbi gratia volantem poetam vidit aut pauperem Horatium aedificantem monumentum situ piramidum altius?" Sarbiewski, *Praecepta poetica*, 60.

8 See: Łukaszewicz-Chantry, *Trzy nieba,* 11–148; Urban-Godziek, *Horacjańskie inspiracje*, 72–100.

9 See: Łukaszewicz-Chantry, *Trzy nieba,* 11–71.

10 The quoted fragments of Sarbiewski's poems come from the edition: Sarbiewski, *Lyrica*.

"Lift me up quickly on your wings,
Ye Clouds, and Winds; I leave all earthly things;
How Devious Hills give way to mee!
And the vast ayre brings under, as I fly,
Kingdomes and populous states! see how
The Glyst'ring Temples of the Gods doe bow;
The glorious Tow'rs of Princes, and
Forsaken townes, shrunke into nothing, stand."[11]

The description of the take-off is very dynamic, emphasized by the repetition of the adverb *iam*. The traveller is surprised by the speed with which the buildings and entire cities beneath his feet are receding and getting smaller. He is carried higher and higher, but his gaze remains directed downwards, and he feels deep compassion for what he sees on Earth. He says with sadness that the fate of men is changing, uncertain and pathetic:

"Totasque qua se cumque ferunt vagae
Despecto gentes. O lacrymabilis
Incerta fortunae! o fluentum
Principia interitusque rerum!" (v. 9–12)

"And as I downward looke, I spy
Whole Nations every where all scattred lye.
Oh the sad change that Fortune brings!
The rise and fall of transitory things!"

In the following stanzas, he lists examples of the misery and deep crisis afflicting mankind. The poet begins by deploring the ephemeral nature of human works:

"Hic ducta primis oppida moenibus
Minantur in caelum: hic veteres ruunt
Murique turresque: hic supinas
Paene cinis sepelivit arces." (v. 13–16)

"Here walled townes that threatned Heav'n,
Now old and ruin'd, with the earth lye even:
Here stately Pallaces, that thrust
Their heads i'th'ayre, lye buried all in dust."

11 Translated by Georg Hils: Hils, *The Odes of Casimire*, 19. The Ode II 5 has been translated into English and paraphrased many times. Twelve of these translations (or paraphrases) are presented in the work on Sarbiewski's reception in England: Fordoński and Urbański, *Casimir Britanicus*, passim. I have chosen Hils' translation (printed in 1646), which is almost contemporary with Sarbiewski's work and is the most faithful to the original.

Achievements man was proud of, the symbols of his greatness and his craft, are falling into ruin. Castles, towers, walls turn to rubble and are covered with ashes. All human works are doomed to destruction. The observer then turns his gaze to another place. He sees that the climate is favourable, but that people are blindly rushing to war. In another place, peace reigns, but a terrible plague is spreading:

"Hic mite caelum, sed rapidae ruunt
In bella gentes: hic placida sedent
In pace, sed late quietos
Dira lues populatur agros." (v. 17–20)

"Here the Ayre Temp'rate is and mild,
But the fierce people rush to warres, most wild:
Here in a joyfull peace they rest,
But Direfull Murraines their quiet fields lay wast."

In yet another place, the frightened inhabitants are taking up arms and await an imminent attack by the enemy. The following stanzas describe the many battles of the wars, on land and on water. The reasons for war are varied, sometimes derisory. The sight of fighting provokes a strong reaction in the observer. Full of indignation, he calls on men to stop multiplying, like barbarians, death by sword, fire and naval disasters:

"[…] Sistite barbari,
Ferroque, neu simplex, et igni, et
Naufragio geminate fatum." (v. 46–48)

"Forbeare, cruell men to multiply
With fire, Sword wrack your single destiny."

Vilifying men who, while they are all doomed to die anyway, devise new ways of killing and multiply the causes of death, is a well-known motif. It was used, among others, by Lucretius (*De rerum natura*, V. 988–1010), and is also taken up by Sarbiewski. The Jesuit also describes the consequences of this behaviour. It leads to universal extermination. This is presented in the form of a global tomb with an epitaph stating that here are buried a king and his people, an entire kingdom:

"Unaque tandem funditus obruunt
Cives ruina. Stat tacitus cinis,
Cui serus inscribat viator:
«Cum populo iacet hic et ipso

Cum Rege regnum.»" […] (v. 53–57)

"Where in one Ruine wee may see
The dying people all o'rewhelmed lye.
The silent dust remaines, to let
The weary Pilgrim this Inscription set
(In after times, at hee goes by)
King, Kingdome, People here entombed lye."

These verses may be an allusion to Ausonius' epitaph for King Priam (*Priamo*, epith. XXIII), and thus an evocation of the Trojan War as a universal symbol of destruction, which was readily used in Sarbiewski's time.

The next scene shows another plague: the flood. The cities with their tallest buildings—temples, royal castles and towers—have been submerged by the waters, and all of man's possessions are drifting on the waves:

"[…] Quid memorem super-
infusa totis aequora portubus
Urbes inundare, et repente
Tecta Deum sonuisse fluctu,

Regumque turres, et pelago casas
Iam iam latentes? iam video procul
Mercesque differri, et natantem
Oceano fluitare gazam." (v. 57–64)

"What should I name the raging Seas,
Whole Havens over-flowing, and with these
I'th' sudden floud whole Cities drown'd
The shaken Temples of the Gods that found?

Kings Pallaces what should I name
Now sunke i'th' deepe, small Cottages i'th' same?
Vast wealth I see swept downe with th' tyde
Rich treasure in the Ocean floting glyde."

The traveller concludes with a bitter reflection on a world that seems doomed to destroy itself in a bloody struggle until the ultimate day of the end of the world arrives. On this bloody stage, Libitina, the goddess of death and funerals, reigns supreme, orchestrating the theatre of this world, a kind of "amphithéâtre sanglant". She is the one who stages the show, bringing disaster, war and discord to the stage. The setting is dominated by ruins, ashes and tombs:

"Alterna rerum militat efficax
In damna mundus. Cladibus instruit

Bellisque rixisque et ruinis
Sanguineam Libitina scenam,

Suprema donec stelligerum dies
Claudat theatrum. Quid morer hactenus
Viator aurarum et serenas
Sole domos aditurus usque

Humana mirer? […]" (v. 65–73)

"The active world t'each others harmes
Doth daily fight, and the pale Goddesse armes
The bloudy scene with slaughters, warrs,
With utter ruins, and with deadly jarrs;

Thus there's no *Exit* of our woes,
Till the last day the Theater shall close,
Why stay I then, when goe I may—
To'a house enlightned by the Suns bright ray?
Shall I still dote on things humane?"

While travelling, the poet describes what he observes. We may have the impression of watching a horror film, a bloody tragedy which unfolds simultaneously in several places like in a medieval theatre, in spaced-out mansions on a simultaneous stage.[12] The characters are not named, nor are the places where the tragedy is set. In other odes by Sarbiewski, the motif of flight is often an opportunity to make a display of knowledge, a learned enumeration of what is seen from above. But here, no proper names are given: we have a global vision of humanity, the crisis is universal.

The flight allows the poet to observe the tragedy from a safe distance: he is not involved, he is a spectator, not an actor. It is certainly a privilege of the 'bard' (as he calls himself *vates*) to be able to hover and observe men from an almost divine perspective. However, the spectator is not indifferent; he comments heartily on what he sees and sympathises with the characters in the tragedy.

12 On the other hand, Norwegian researcher Maren-Sofie Röstvig sees the ascent to higher spheres shown in this ode of Sarbiewski as a purification of the soul from the harmful influences of the 'seven planets'. In fact, the *septem sidera* are not mentioned explicitly in this ode, but their presence is somehow suggested by the mention of various manifestations of evil on earth, which are supposed to be caused by the pernicious influence of the planets. This interpretation, however, is not based on the original text, but on an English translation (Hils, *The Odes of Casimire*), in which the traces of Hermetic concepts are much more clearly marked than in Sarbiewski's text. See: Röstvig, *Casimire Sarbiewski*, 447–49.

The vision is so depressing that the traveller does not want to return to earth; he wants to continue his flight to heaven:

"[…] Tollite praepetem
Festina vatem, tollite nubila
Qua solis et lunae labores
Caeruleo vehit aethra campo." (v. 73–76)

"Lift up your longing Priest, yee Clouds, oh deigne
Lift m'up where th'aire a splendour yeilds
Lights the sun's chariot through the azure fields."

And this is what happens: the clouds and winds lift him even higher. We can assume that in the end, the hero leaves the air (*aer*), i.e. the sphere where, according to the ancients, everything is changing and destructible, and which belongs to the sublunary world.[13] Above the air is the perfect ether (*aether*), towards which the traveller is now ascending.

The view changes too. In the beginning, we had buildings that gradually became little dots but were still visible. Now they have disappeared from view and the whole world becomes a small dot:

"Ludor? sequaces aut subeunt latus
Feruntque venti? Iamque iterum mihi
Et regna decrevere, et immensae
Ante oculos periere gentes;

Suoque semper terra minor globo
Iam iamque cerni difficilis, suum
Vanescit in punctum? […]" (v. 77–83)

"Am I deceived? or doe I see
The following winds on their wings mounting me,
And now againe Great kingdomes lye
Whole Nations perishing before mine eye?

The earth which alwayes lesse hath beene
Then's Globe, and now, just now can scarce be seene,
Into it's point doth vanish, see!"

Flying to such an altitude is no longer following the path of Horace. It seems to be rather inspired by the *Somnium Scipionis* and Scipio's journey to the stars. It is in this dialogue by Cicero that, probably for the first time in ancient literature, the

13 Cicero, *De re publica,* VI. 17; Lewis, *Odrzucony obraz,* 14–17.

Earth was presented as a small point observed from the *stellatum*.[14] Boethius offers a similar vision of the Earth and the cosmos in his ode *Sunt etenim pennae uolucres mihi*, in the *De consolatione philosophiae* (IV. 1). He adds that at the end of the flight, at the very top of the celestial vault, is the Being who governs the entire cosmos. This is the path followed by Sarbiewski. He ascends to the Absolute, into which he wishes to merge:

"[…] O refusum
Numinis Oceanum! o carentem

Mortalitatis portubus insulam!
O clausa nullis marginibus freta!
Haurite anhelantem, et perenni
Sarbivium glomerate fluctu." (v. 83–88)

"Oh the brim'd Ocean of the Deitie!
Oh Glorious Island richly free
From the cold Harbours of mortality!
Yee boundlesse Seas, with endlesse flouds of rest
Girt round *Sarbinius* your panting Priest."

At this point, it is worth recalling that in his treatise devoted to the ancient mythology, *Dii gentium*, Sarbiewski attempts to define God as "immeasurable and infinite sea of being" (*essendi pelagus immensum et interminum*).[15] He also uses similar aquatic metaphors in one of his poems, when he writes about the last moments of the life of the Jesuit saint Stanislaus Kostka (beatified during Sarbiewski's lifetime, in 1606). At the moment of his death, Kostka experienced total submersion in God:

"Fontique rerum immersus, et intimo
Divinitatis naufragus in mari," (*Poesis posthuma* 5, 65–66)

"Immersed in the fountain of all-being and drowning
in the boundless sea of the Deity,"

Complete and imperishable happiness is achieved when the soul completely sinks and dissolves in God. This happens after death, but it can also be experienced as mystical ecstasy while still living on earth. This desire for mystical sinking into God *(cupio dissolvi)* is characteristic of the spirituality of Sarbiewski's time. Often in the Jesuit's works, there is also a longing for the heavenly homeland and a conviction that life on earth is only a temporary exile, the end of which is a return to the Father's house.

14 "Iam ipsa terra ita mihi parva visa est, ut me imperii nostri, quo quasi punctum eius attingimus, paeniteret." Cicero, *De re publica*, VI. 16.

15 Sarbiewski, *Dii gentium*, 308.

It is also possible to interpret *E rebus humanis excessus* in the Neoplatonic spirit, especially as a certain interest in this philosophical direction can be seen in Sarbiewski's works (e.g. in *Dii gentium*). The soul, liberated from the body and the world, ascends to the *hyperuranium*, or spiritual reality, indestructible, unchanging, to unite with the Absolute. [16] What is important here is, on the one hand, man's effort to break away from what is earthly, and on the other, the action of the Absolute, which attracts and lifts the soul to itself.[17]

So, the traveller leaves the earthly, the discordant multiplicity of the world, to rise towards the divine unity. He leaves behind a world in crisis, for which he sees no remedy. Notably, this is perhaps the only place in Sarbiewski's entire work where the poet calls himself *Sarbivius* and, doing so, identifies himself with the protagonist of the vision. This is, thus, a sort of signature of the author at the end of the poem. The ode ends with a longing for union with the Absolute, expressed by a man who has reached the end of his journey. But the expected outcome of this longing is not described.[18] This interruption, this way of presenting an expectation without describing its fulfilment, is characteristic of Sarbiewski's poetic expression.[19] Finally, we don't know whether Sarbivius' longing was met, or at least, whether he found a way out of the crisis for himself.

The image of the flood

A second way of representing crisis is to use the image of the flood. In fact, the flood already appeared in the aforementioned ode, as one of the plagues affecting mankind. But it was a rather local phenomenon. However, in two other poems, the flood invades the whole earth. The first is an epode, *Publices Europae calamitates* (Ep. 8),[20] in which Horace is mentioned by name, and Sarbiewski's text can indeed be seen as inspired to some extent by the Roman poet's sixteenth epode: *Altera iam teritur bellis civilibus aetas…* (also the same metre is used).

Like Horace, Sarbiewski begins his epode by complaining about his contemporaries. The diagnosis is similar to that of the ode presented before. People, who are doomed to death anyway, hasten it by waging wars:

16 See: Łukaszewicz-Chantry, *Trzy nieba*, 128–29; Urbański, *Wątki platońskie*, 513–26.

17 Sarbiewski, *Dii gentium*, 120–21, 168–69. See: Łukaszewicz-Chantry, "L'Amor aethereus," 157.

18 According to Piotr Urbański, the end of this ode is pessimistic; see: Urbański, *Theologia fabulosa*, 120–21.

19 Urbański, *Natura i łaska*, 116.

20 According to Mirosław Korolko, this epode was probably written after the death of King Sigismund III Vasa (2 April 1632), see: Sarbiewski, *Lyrica,* 606.

"Nec satis est, nos posse mori, cum fata reposcunt,
Aguntque morbi lucis et vitae reos.
Ipsi etiam exiguum bellis commisimus aevum,
Omnesque ferro rupimus leti moras." (v. 1–4)

"It is not enough that we may die when the fates claim it and diseases pursue the debtors of light and life. We ourselves have yet exposed our short lives to wars and we have broken with a sword all the delays of death."[21]

These deeds of men are illustrated by a horrifying view of rivers reddened with blood. The poet quotes some of them: the Rhône, the Po, the Rhine and the Elbe, rivers marking geographical directions and important points on the map of Europe. This image suggests the universality of the bloodshed: almost the entire continent is affected. The blood also stains the wheat ears that farmers harvest.

In the following verses, the poet deplores the violation of borders and the annexation of other people's land. Instead of the law, the sword reigns. Driven by their greed, men are in a never-ending race for riches, and when they don't find them nearby, they set sail on frail vessels to find an enemy in faraway lands. In addition to the sword, they use other insidious means to kill, such as poison and gunpowder, which can destroy entire fortresses.

This time, the poet does not flee the evil world, but feels part of this community, systematically using the pronoun "we" in his descriptions.[22] Full of bitterness, he also asks God to react. He even proposes a way out of this moral crisis: since everyone seems to enjoy death so much, let God bring it upon humanity, let Him send a flood upon the earth:

"In nos rupta ruant fundo maria omnia ab imo,
Trisulcus in nos ignea missus manu," (v. 37–38)

"Let all the seas gaping from the very depths fall upon us,
let the thunderbolt sent by a fiery hand strike us down,"

His solution is more radical than that of Horace, who called on the moral elite of citizens (*pars melior*) to leave Rome and set sail for the happy islands.

The following verses of Sarbiewski's epode present a vision of the flood expressed in the mode of a wish (optative mode). First of all, he calls for the different seas to merge. Here, the geography is interesting to observe: the Baltic should merge

21 For this poem by Sarbiewski (ep. 8) and the following one (IV 27), I give my own translation consulted with Małgorzata Bieszczanin.

22 Cp. Urbański, *Natura i łaska*, 78.

with the Sicilian Sea, the Scottish Sea with the Spanish Sea, the Black Sea with the Adriatic. In other words, the continent should be flooded from all sides. In the same way, the mountains – highest points of the different parts of the map of the known world – should disappear under the waters. He lists the "Balkans", the Alps and the Atlas, the latter, curiously enough, sinking into the Sea of Azov, to indicate that the water would link the western end of the world to the eastern one.

The world is to become an immense flooded plain, a vast watery abyss. Mountains and rivers are to disappear and lose their names. It is like a return to the beginning, to the original state of the world, when the waters were not yet separated from the lands. The loss of proper names is also significant. When Sarbiewski writes about the creation of the world in his treatise on epic poetry *De perfecta poesi, sive Vergilius et Homerus*, he says that to give names is to draw things out of nothingness in order to make them exist.[23] In the flood, however, the process is reversed: existence is transformed into nothingness.

Here, let us take a look again at *Dii gentium*. In it, the Jesuit presents an interesting image of Apollo playing the zither. In accordance with the principles adopted in the treatise, Sarbiewski interprets this image as an allegory. Apollo's zither is supposed to signify harmony, which God uses to preserve the world. With his playing and his song, God orders and unifies diversity. As the Jesuit writes: "and he ordered the Universe rhythmically and harmonically, and brought the discord of the elements to the order of concord, so that the whole world became harmony to him."[24] In this way, all the elements are in their place, where they remain confined. For example, water, although free, is confined by the land that surrounds it.[25] The Flood is therefore a dramatic disruption of this universal, divine harmony. Instead of order, there is total chaos and destruction.

Moved by this vision of the cataclysm, the poet asks God to save an innocent *(pium nepotem)*, a new Deucalion, so that humanity can be reborn. Convinced that he will be heard that God will have mercy, he already imagines the sky clearing and the mountains and whole lands slowly emerging from the water.

The next episode offers a vision of a golden age. It is probably inspired by Horace's description of the happy islands (the *beata arva* of epode 16), but it is more extended, full of familiar motifs: perpetual spring, lush vegetation, land producing abundant crops that will not be destroyed by the scorching sun or violent winds. The

23 Sarbiewski, *De perfecta poesi*, 2–4; See: Łukaszewicz-Chantry, "Only a Poet Never Lies", 65–66.

24 "…universum numerose concinneque exornavit, et elementorum dissensionem in ordinem redegit consonantiae, ut ei totus mundus fieret harmonia." Sarbiewski, *Dii gentium*, 266.

25 "et mare quidam dimisit solutum, ei autem, ut terram invaderet, prohibuit," Sarbiewski, *Dii gentium*, 266.

water is crystal clear, the rivers are flowing with wine and milk. They contrast with the aforementioned rivers reddened with blood, and with the flood as a whole: this time, the rivers remain in their beds, they are calm and beneficial.

Within this setting, a new generation of human beings will live, whose behaviour will also be in contrast to what happened before the flood. From now on, the earth will be common, without borders. People will be able to live modestly, without ostentation. Their piety will be sincere, and their worship will be marked by simplicity, without opulent temples, in the open air, a simple stone serving as an altar. There will be no more wars or maritime expeditions, iron will only be used for agriculture and gold will remain buried deep in the ground.

However, this vision, the poet thinks, could be too idealistic.[26] Nevertheless, he hopes for some kind of renewal and places his hope in the rulers. He hopes that kings will stop fighting, that they will be the first to usher in a period of peace. He then calls on rulers to respect the law and let themselves be guided by justice. He believes that wise and good princes can find a way out of the crisis, he hopes that a better age will finally dawn, as promised by the inspired Horace:

"Quidquid id est, tamen arma pii deponite reges;
Nudate primi publicum ferro latus.
Primi animos, primi socias coniugite dextras,
Et vester omnes alliget gentes amor.
[…]
Non placeat virtus pretio, non curia censu,
Non infideli septa maiestas metu.
Iura voluptati sanctum praescribat honestum,
Piasque leges utili iustum ferat.
Sic, olim quod Musa gravis promisit Horati,
Praestabit aevum certior regum fides." (v. 125–28; 135–40)

"Whatever it may happen, you pious kings lay down your weapons and be the first to publicly doff your swords. Be the first to join your minds and hands in friendship. Let your love unite all peoples. […] Let purchased virtue or a court based on wealth give us no pleasure, nor grandeur be surrounded by unfaithful fear. Let sacred honesty dictate laws for what is delightful and righteousness give pious rules to that which is useful. And then the unfailing faith of the kings will bring the age that Horace's venerable Muse once promised."

26 See: Urbański, *Natura i łaska*, 109–10.

The vision of the flood is again represented in the ode *Noe vaticinium. Luxuriam praeteriti et idololatriam futuri saeculi dequeritur* (IV. 27).[27] This time, the title suggests biblical inspiration. The hero of the ode is Noah, who is depicted drifting on his ark, looking around and grieving the world submerged by the waters. The poet quotes the lament of the biblical hero as it is supposed to have been said:

"Demersa late saecula cum Noe
Enavigaret, naufraga dicitur
E puppe prospexisse regna,
Et male iam pelago latentes

Flevisse terras: […]" (v. 1–5)

"When Noah sailed over the world entirely flooded, he is said to have viewed from the stern the destroyed kingdoms and to have mourned the lands finally emerging from the sea."

First of all, Noah remembers the past: the fire of human iniquity was so great that the waters of the flood were needed to extinguish it. He remembers the grandeur of the past, the imposing buildings now destroyed by the waters. The importance of the cataclysm is conveyed by the image of magnificent palaces that have been submerged and in which marine animals now roam:

"[…] Marmoreis ubi
Urbes coronatae Colossis?
Aut ubi turrigerae potentum

Arces Gigantum? Queis, modo liberi,
Festo choreas agmine plausimus,
Delphines insultant plateis,
Et vacuas spatiosa cete

Ludunt per aulas, ac thalamos pigrae
Pressere phocae; defluit illito
Aurum lacunari, et refixae
Ad pelagus rediere gemmae." (v. 18–28)

"Where are the cities crowned with marble statues? Where are the towering fortresses of the mighty Giants? In the squares where we recently danced freely in a joyful procession, dolphins splash, great fish frolic in empty palaces and languid seals lounge on marriage beds, golden ornaments were

27 It was written in the years 1628–31, See: Sarbiewski, *Lyrica*, 602. For a stylistic analysis of this ode, see: Buszewicz, *Sarmacki Horacy*, 318–19.

washed from the ceiling and detached pearls returned to the sea."

An association with the description of the flood in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* comes to mind. To depict a cataclysm in which the order of nature was turned upside down, the Roman poet used *adynata*: woodland animals (a wolf, sheep and a lion) drift on the waves, while dolphins and seals play in the flooded meadows and woods:

> "et, modo qua graciles gramen carpsere capellae,
> nunc ibi deformes ponunt sua corpora phocae.
> mirantur sub aqua lucos urbesque domosque
> Nereides, silvasque tenent delphines et altis
> incursant ramis agitataque robora pulsant.
> nat lupus inter oves, fulvos vehit unda leones." (Met. I. 299–304)

> "Where lately lean goats browsed shapeless seals play. The Nereids are astonished to see woodlands, houses and whole towns under the water. There are dolphins in the trees: disturbing the upper branches and stirring the oak-trees as they brush against them. Wolves swim among the sheep, and the waves carry tigers and tawny lions." (Trans. by A. S. Kline)[28]

Sarbiewski transposes this image to the world of human civilisation. The dolphins do not frolic among the trees, but in palace halls, and the seals do not lie on the grass, but on beds. The water washes away the golden ornaments and the precious pearls return to the sea. Magnificent columns and monuments, now shattered, disintegrate under the water. Men and all their civilisation have perished in the flood.

After complaining about the past, Noah laments the future and announces a prophecy (*vaticinium*): the flood will end, the sun will shine, and the earth will green again. A golden age will come, a new generation will arise, but later, there will be a new moral degradation. Grandchildren will learn nothing from their grandparents' experience. The following centuries will be worse and worse, and an iron age will arise, bringing wars and crimes again. Worse still, another iniquity will come—idolatry. Noah himself—O sacrilege—will be seen as a benevolent deity who rebuilt the world after the flood. Various peoples will adore him as if he were a god and will give him various names: Sky, Jupiter, Sun, Osiris, Janus:

> "Me Bactra Caelum, me Babylon Iovem,
> Me Susa Solem, me Pharii suum
> Dicent Osirim; me bifrontem
> Ausoniae colet ora Ianum.

28 Ovid, *The Metamorphoses,* trans. by A.S. Kline, https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Metamorph.php

At, o potenti qui regis aethera
Terrasque sceptro, verte, Pater, Pater,
Undasque, terrasque, et trisculum
In caput hoc iaculare telum,

Foedusque iam nunc stragibus obruar
Labantis aevi! Barbaricis ego
Solus supervivam pudenda
Materies titulusque sacris?" (v. 61–72)

"Bactra will name me the Sky, Babylon will call me Jupiter, Susa will address me as the Sun, Egypt will dub me its Osiris, Ausonia will worship me as two-faced Janus.

But you who hold the mighty sceptre over the sky and the earth turn upon me, Father, Father, the waves and the lands, and strike this head with a thunderbolt,

And, filthy, may I be buried beneath the ruins of the perishing age! Am I to be the only one to survive as a shameful object and a cause of idolatry for barbarians?"

Sarbiewski discusses the fact that various pagan deities originate from Noah in his aforementioned treatise on mythology *Dii gentium*, where he refers to a theory of Babylonian historian and astronomer Berossos that was popular in his time. According to Sarbiewski, for the pagans, Noah was Saturn or one of his descendants.[29] Elsewhere in this treatise, he adds that Noah was also identified with the Sun, Jupiter, Bacchus and Janus, and concludes that the Greek and Egyptian myths originated with Noah or his descendants.[30] This combination of the two traditions —the biblical and the ancient, pagan—and the attempt to link them by a common chronology is characteristic of this period.[31]

In Sarbiewski's ode, Noah sees, in a prophetic inspiration, that he will be deified by future generations. He would rather die than become the object of a worship. This is why he asks God to annihilate him. Perhaps, by this dramatic means, future idolatry will be avoided.

29 "Saturnus […]. Credibile est iuxta Berosum fuisse ex progenie Noe aut Noam ipsum", Sarbiewski, *Dii gentium*, 48.

30 "Hic se nobis praeclara offert occasio veram aliquam indagandi originem fabularum. Hanc, ni fallor, non levibus inducti argumentis et quantum nobis ex libris, quos habere potuimus, constat, primi manifeste ostendemus fabulas Graecas et Aegyptias ortum traxisse a Noe vel eius posteris.", Sarbiewski, *Dii gentium*, 336.

31 See: Łukaszewicz-Chantry, "*Ciceronianus* czy *Christianus*. Dawni autorzy chrześcijańscy wobec literatury pogańskiej", 180–82.

Noah's lament ends pessimistically. The flood was supposed to be a way out of the crisis, but it turned out to be a short-term and ineffective solution, it did not bring purification and was not a lesson for the following generations. The crisis continues and only gets worse.

Conclusion

On these few selected examples, we could see how Sarbiewski tried to present the moral crisis of his time. The poet was inspired by both ancient and biblical traditions, updating and reinterpreting well-known poetic images such as the flight over land, a view from the sky on the theatre of the world, the Deluge, the golden age. These two traditions (ancient and biblical) are represented by two figures, Horace and Noah, both of whom act as bards and are called *vates*. Sarbiewski, who also calls himself *vates,* thus becomes their heir as an inspired poet who takes on the mission of admonishing his contemporaries.

The flight and the flood present two different images, but at the same time, two different attitudes of the poet to the crisis affecting humanity. In the first, his reaction is to distance himself, to look down on the earth, and even though his gaze is full of sympathy, the *vates* chooses to abandon his fellow mortals and flee the crisis. He is alone in his journey and longs to find happiness in union with God.

In the second image (based on aquatic metaphors), the *vates* sees himself as a member of society, experiencing the evil himself and bearing co-responsibility for it. He also seeks to propose an appropriate remedy. On the one hand, he hopes that the princes will be able to lead the world out of the crisis, that it is possible to end the iron age and return of better times, but on the other, he turns pessimistic and comes to think that the only solution would be a kind of 'reset' of the entire world and humanity.

These two attitudes of Sarbiewski towards the crisis may also have their roots in Ignatian spirituality, in which two ascetic instructions of Ignatius of Loyola are combined and complemented: *indifferentia*, i.e. a certain distance and lack of attachment to created things, and *agere contra*, i.e. actively resisting temptation and evil.[32]

In association with the aforementioned image of Sarbiewski's *Dii gentium*, which shows God-Artist playing the zither and, doing so, uniting opposites and bringing order to the diversity of the universe, the crisis can be interpreted as a breakdown in this universal harmony. Humanity no longer listens to the divine song, and the world's zither no longer makes sweet sounds. There is no longer 'consensual discord'—*concors discordia*—in the world, but unbridled discord, which is

32 See: Urbański, *Theologia fabulosa,* 87.

destroying both nature and the civilisation created by man. The term *concors discordia* is well known in poetics above all as a definition of the punchline, which Sarbiewski proposed in his famous aforementioned treatise *De acuto et arguto, sive Seneca et Martialis*.[33] Let us recall here that the Jesuit, referring to the ancient philosophers, also associated this paradox with the principle governing all reality.[34]

To conclude, let us return to the treatise on poetics mentioned at the beginning, *Characteres lyrici, seu Horatius et Pindarus*. In it, Sarbiewski explains that the purpose of poetry is to instruct indirectly (*oblique docere*), that is, through images. As we have seen, in his own lyrics, he also pursues this goal and tries to move the consciences of his contemporaries through poetic imagery.

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33 "Acutum est oratio continens affinitatem dissentanei et consentanei, seu dicti concors discordia vel discors concordia": Sarbiewski, *Praecepta poetica*, 5. See: Otwinowska, *"Concors discordia* Sarbiewskiego"; Łukaszewicz-Chantry, "Metafizyczne epigramaty Macieja Kazimierza Sarbiewskiego," 190–91.

34 Sarbiewski, *Dii gentium,* 264–66. See: Łukaszewicz-Chantry, "Epigramaty Macieja Kazimierza Sarbiewskiego w świetle jego teorii poetyckiej," 13; Bolewski, "Nascitur una… discors concordia," 107–8.

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