

Karolina Kurzak

**Noble Faces and Beautiful Souls:
Luxury in J. I. Kraszewski's *The Countess Cosel***

In an entry found in the 1898 edition of the *Polish General Encyclopedia* the term 'luxury' ('zbytek') is defined in the following way:

Luxury is what is called the overuse of opulent attire, grandiose habitations, valuable ornaments, large numbers of retainers, expensive food and beverages, and so on, and yet not due to need but for the sake of boasting before others and out of a desire to shine in the world. Luxury in this sense is reprehensible, because it arises from vanity, which is a sin, and raises unfounded pride, because the accumulation of frivolous earthly goods is not a measure of human value, but rather a harmful contagion, which destroys both physically and morally those who give themselves thoughtlessly to luxury. How we define what should be called a luxury has differed during the ages and will be different for different peoples, groups of society, and individuals. A savage might regard a furnished and decorated house as a luxury, but for us this is a need, in the same way as a clean shirt and well-cooked food. A person who earns money and uses those earnings to live more comfortably is not someone who yields to luxury. Quite the contrary, a decent occupation which allows a person, in accordance with their earnings, to improve their standard of living – to eat better, to dress cleanly, and to keep a spacious, clean and beautiful house, is not only a good thing, but one of the stimulations of human progress, which multiplies the strength of a nation.¹

In terms of the history of the idea of luxury, the above exposition is noteworthy for the way in which it registers the influence of the eighteenth century's 'luxury debates' through its confident defence of what is known as the 'modern' reinterpretation of luxury. Echoes of the pejorative 'pre-modern' or 'classical' understanding are certainly present, however the language of progress and a civilised or civilising capitalism quickly takes over.²

¹ *Encyklopedia zbiór wiadomości z wszystkich gałęzi wiedzy*, Tom II (Lwów: Macierz Polska, 1898), 1007. This translation is my own.

² Inquiries into the history of the idea of luxury include: John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical*

As John Sekora shows in his pioneering study on the concept of luxury in Western thought, luxury, in the pre-modern sense, referred not only to a type of sin, but also to the very nature and effects of immorality and impiety itself. A transgression against reason and a subversion of natural order, luxury was thought of as being both a cause and an innate part of the process of the ruin, not just of individuals, but of whole societies, states and civilisations.³

This ‘classical’ interpretation of luxury, reinforced by what Christopher Berry describes as the ‘Christian contribution’,⁴ appears to have enjoyed an unprecedented currency among eighteenth century observers of contemporary culture and society, most notably among those who were unsympathetic to the developments associated with the rise of capitalism and modernity. Not surprisingly, luxury also featured prominently among the concerns of those who defended innovation and change; it was, as Maxine Berg notes, ‘no less than the keyword of the period, a central term in the language of cultural transformation’.⁵ The outcome of the debate was the

Investigation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); E. Ross, *The Debate on Luxury in Eighteenth-Century France: A Study in the Language of Opposition to Change* (PhD University of Chicago, 1975); Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, eds., *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); and Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, eds., *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods* (New York: Palgrave, 2003). Most recent are Till Wahnbaeck, *Luxury and Public Happiness: Political Economy in the Italian Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); E. J. Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce and Luxury* (New York: Palgrave, 2004); and Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Early inquiries into luxury which assume the modern definition include: H. Baudrillart, *Histoire du luxe privé et public, depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours*, 2nd ed., 4 vols (Paris, 1880-81); Emile de Laveleye, *Luxury* (London, 1891); Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class* [1899] (New York: Dover Publications, 1994); Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* [1913], trans. W. R. Dittmar (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967).

³ Sekora, 23-63.

⁴ Berry, 87; see also Sekora's discussion of this, 39-51.

⁵ Berg and Eger, 1. Sekora likewise argues that ‘luxury was the single most significant social and political idea of eighteenth-century England’ (9), and Paul Langford has

displacement of a once vital concept that had possessed a prominent place in classical and Christian conceptualisations of both ‘self’ and ‘society’ by the more or less neutral and commercial usage of the term that is predominant today.⁶

In what follows, insights into the history of the idea of luxury will be used as the basis for a reading of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski’s *Hrabina Cosel* (*The Countess Cosel*, 1873), a historical romance set in the court of Augustus II, the first of the two Saxon Kings of Poland, at the turn of the eighteenth century.⁷ While much of the scholarship on luxury is grounded in analyses of English and French history, the influence of the luxury debates may also be traced in the intellectual and cultural milieu of both late eighteenth and nineteenth century Poland, and I seek here to examine closely one literary text where this influence is apparent.⁸

suggested that ‘a history of luxury and attitudes to luxury would come very close to being a history of the eighteenth century’. Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 3.

⁶ Sekora, 2.

⁷ Page references to the novel will be listed in parentheses at the end of the relevant sentence or quotation (English translation first, Polish original second) using the following two editions of the novel: J. I. Kraszewski, *The Countess Cosel: A Romance of History in the Times of Augustus the Strong* [1873], trans. S. C. de Soissons (London: Downey and Co., 1901); J. I. Kraszewski, *Hrabina Cosel* [1873] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Kurpisz, 2001). Where there exists a meaningful discrepancy between the original and the de Soissons translation, or if I have quoted a word or phrase that does not appear in the translation, I will give my own translation and cite the original in a footnote.

⁸ The research detailed here has evolved out of a broader project which aims to address the question of luxury in the Polish context. Kraszewski returned to the theme of luxury in a number of other historical novels; in particular, those relating to the eighteenth century (of which there are about 50 – a sizeable proportion of his estimated 600 volume output). (For further details about the size and makeup of Kraszewski’s oeuvre see *Józef Ignacy Kraszewski: Zarys bibliograficzny*, oprac. S. Stupkiewicz, I. Śliwińska, i W. Roszkowska-Sykałowa [Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1966], 5-6, 41-149.) Of the large body of criticism dedicated to Kraszewski and his historical novels, Magdalena Rudkowska’s article on Kraszewski’s representation of Poland’s last king, Stanisław August Poniatowski, should be mentioned here for its attention to what Rudkowska identifies as the themes of decay, despair and decline in Kraszewski’s

In addition to its resistance to the modern reinterpretation of luxury, what is significant about this text is the way in which it highlights how the ‘classical’ discourse on luxury could be used to advance a set of cultural and political ideals closely tied to the concept and history of nobility in Poland. As scholars like Berry, Sekora, and Katie Scott have demonstrated, Western European classical discourse on luxury served to promote, if not the interests of a particular class, then a ‘noble ideology’⁹ deeply hostile to both modern progress and monarchism.¹⁰ In Poland in the eighteenth century, the unusually extensive rights and privileges that had traditionally been retained by the nobility, the numerousness of the nobility, its supposedly democratic character and history of effective resistance to centralised authority were all either hailed, in ‘civic-humanist’ terms, as an unrivalled example of virtue in

work. While Rudkowska interprets these themes from the perspective of literary modernism, that is, she relates them to a late nineteenth century concept of decadence and argues that many of the traits usually associated with this movement have a universal quality, my argument with respect to *The Countess Cosel* is that, on the contrary, the interpretation of luxury that it espouses is historically specific. Furthermore, while luxury consumption plays a relatively minor role in Rudkowska’s analysis; that is, she sees Kraszewski’s characters’ intemperance and materialism primarily as an effect of a deeper sense of impotence and despair, which is in turn a response to the state of national and historical decline that they see around them, I follow Sekora and others in assuming that luxury, in the pre-modern sense, was understood to be the *cause* of the undoing of people and nations. In other words, Rudkowska simply assumes the modern definition of luxury, and therefore cannot but give it a marginal role. Magdalena Rudkowska, ‘Stanisław August Poniatowski: Dekadencja władzy? Obraz ostatniego króla Polski w twórczości Józefa Ignacego Kraszewskiego’, *Ruch Literacki* (XLII: 4, 2001).

⁹ Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 226.

¹⁰ As Scott demonstrates, the French nobility of the eighteenth century was as hostile toward the crown as it was toward the nouveaux-riches, the latter having been ‘deliberately multiplied by Louis XIV’s increasingly desperate fiscal policies’ (213). In England, the historical prevalence of civic humanism, or ‘the mode of political thinking [that] took the classical republic to be the most perfect form of government’, meant that the threat to aristocracy (‘rule by a “few” – the best (*aristoi*) – with a view to the public good’) had always been perceived to exist in the luxury of monarchs and commoners alike. Clery, 5-9; Berry, 85.

governance, or denounced as an impediment to Enlightened progress and the source of what would prove by the century's end to be an irreversible state of political ruin and decline (Enlightenment in this context was thus dually motivated, and precisely because of the nature of the influence held by the nobility reform was premised, somewhat paradoxically, on the widening of the powers of the monarchy).¹¹ Later, in the post-partition period, as Enlightenment gave way to Romanticism, and 'tradition' was once again united to the concept of the 'nation', so too, the values and virtues of the nobility were remembered, albeit now as part of a primitivist critique of Western bourgeois culture: rather than standing for the time-honoured institutions of a pre-revolutionary Europe, the Old Polish gentry was now admired principally for the way in which its historic 'love of freedom' was connected to the 'spiritual traditions' of the ancient Slavs.¹²

This is overwhelmingly the case in *The Countess Cosel*, where Kraszewski recounts the struggle against despotism by the nobility as part of a romantic reading of national history. Augustus II, as he is presented in the novel, is the most tyrannical of despots and the suffering of the novel's heroine, Anna Hoym (the Countess Cosel) at his hands, and her long imprisonment in a Saxon jail, serves patently as an allegory for the captivity of the Polish nation under partition. Strong use is made of the concept of martyrdom, which was already familiar to Kraszewski's readers as part of the Romantic response to the 'national question'.¹³ Adding to this, the historical conflict between the crown and the nobility that was a feature of the reign of Augustus II¹⁴ is intimated throughout the novel. When Augustus orders the arrests of the nobles of Luzyce, for instance, ('Nothing is more important', he says, 'than breaking their power') he instructs his soldiers to 'tell them not to

¹¹ Jerzy Lukowski, *The Partitions of Poland 1772, 1793, 1795* (London: Longman, 1999), 6-7; Jerzy Lukowski, *Liberty's Folly: The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century, 1697-1795* (London: Routledge, 1991), 1, 8.

¹² Andrzej Walicki, *Russia, Poland, and the Universal Regeneration: Studies on Russian and Polish Thought of the Romantic Epoch* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 12-13, 27.

¹³ Jerzy Jedlicki, *A Suburb of Europe: Nineteenth Century Polish Approaches to Western Civilization* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), x-xi.

¹⁴ Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 657.

follow the example of the Polish nobles, for I will not suffer anything of that kind from my own subjects' (80, 66). A further connection, which places this critique of absolutism within the context of a broader discussion of national, and even civilisational, distinctions, is made between Anna's plight and the oppression and 'slavery' (166, 142) of the Wends, a group of western Slavs who quite famously resisted German conquest and Christianisation during the early Middle Ages.¹⁵ Their story is related to her during a chance encounter with an old Wendish woman, who contrasts the essential 'goodness' and simple freedom of her ancestors ('we came with bread, salt and song') with the 'iron, fire and slaughter' of their conquerors (164, 140). Augustus, it should be added, was surnamed 'The Strong', because of his remarkable ability to break iron and horseshoes just as easily as the 'resistance' of men (97, 79).

Rather than just tyranny, however, what defines Augustus is his vanity, pride, debauchery and love of luxury, and the discourse of a classical attack upon luxury – of a sort that one might have expected to find in an eighteenth century source – pervades the narrative. Certainly, according to the classical understanding of luxury, despotism was considered an intrinsic element or consequence of luxury, though one concept is broader than the other, and my argument with regard to the novel is that Augustus represents the abuses of capitalism and modernity as much as he does those of monarchy. Moreover, while the anti-modern sentiment of such an attack upon luxury in many ways complements the novel's Romantic and Slavophile orientation as just outlined, it is also in tension with it in significant ways. Indeed, if there is a sense in the novel that the particular noble tradition that is being celebrated does not belong to the heritage of pre-revolutionary Western Europe, then this is primarily because Western Europe is presented as having deserted morality – here, specifically, the morality of its feudal tradition – for the sake of progress. Within the novel it is individualism, not aristocracy, which is deplored, and with it the Europe that, having nourished individualism in the form of both absolutism and capitalism, embraced corruption and allowed for the disintegration of the pre-modern social ideal of 'Hierarchy',¹⁶ and the classical

¹⁵ Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3-7.

¹⁶ Sekora, 23-63.

ethic that sustained it. In the light of the novel's deployment of a classical discourse on luxury, its 'romanticism' is revealed as a politics that defines itself as a natural heir to the anti-Enlightenment discourses of the eighteenth century.

In Berry's analysis, the distinction between the classical and the modern interpretations of luxury turns on the fact that the classical interpretation went hand in hand with a sense of history in which the idea of progress was as yet absent from concepts of social virtue and civilised humanity. According to the essentially Aristotelian 'teleological framework' which 'pervad[ed] all... discussions of luxury' from antiquity until the eighteenth century, the goals of individuals and society were fixed according to eternal laws, and the basic measure of humanity was the ability to comprehend and to abide by these laws. Luxury assumed pride of place in 'accounts of the decline into depravity' because it was linked to desire, and desire was a threat to reason, and hence, order.¹⁷ As Sekora writes,

The antithesis of luxury is not simplicity but obedience, the beginning and end of morality.... The entire *raison d'être* of human law, religion, and philosophy is to regain, as far as humanly possible, the harmony of Creation, to restore the principles of Necessity and Hierarchy that sustained it.... As Aristotle, Cicero, Grotius, and Aquinas were to phrase it, natural law defines that which it is man's nature to observe. Thus it is also reason's law, plain to all rational creatures – nature's simple, universal plan. It ordains Necessity. As Necessity is made explicit by the Law, so too is Hierarchy.¹⁸

In its emphasis on the subservience of humanity to a higher order, and hence to both Necessity and Hierarchy, the classical view of luxury gave license to a 'cyclical' view of history, a paternalistic concept of authority, and a morality based on obedience and self-restraint.¹⁹ The salience of the role of the 'natural legislator', or landowning citizen, in the classical tradition was given by the fact of his freedom from labour and hence mundane constraints; his unique capacity for reason; and thus his natural pre-eminence, but also duty, within the social and greater order.²⁰ Luxury is what allowed those who

¹⁷ Berry, 155, 54, 232-233.

¹⁸ Sekora, 27.

¹⁹ Clery, 3-7.

²⁰ Sekora, 29-39.

identified themselves as natural legislators in the eighteenth century to view the increased circulation of money, the prominence of fashion in culture, and the changes to political authority in their society as a threat not simply to their individual power, but to the future of their country, and indeed, to the very ground on which they based their understanding of the role of mankind in the world.²¹

The conflict between the old morality and the new society was spelled out in Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1732). 'To be at once well-bred and sincere', wrote Mandeville, 'is no less than a contradiction: and therefore while Man advances in his Knowledge, and his Manners are polish'd, we must expect to see at the same time his Desires enlarg'd, his Appetites refin'd, and his Vices increas'd'.²² As Mandeville presented it, he and his contemporaries were faced with a deep dilemma: either to be virtuous, ill-bred, weak, and impoverished as a society, or sinful, civilised, powerful and wealthy. Without denying, as Berry notes, that luxury was indeed a vice, Mandeville rejected every other conventional argument against it – that it weakens individuals; that it describes the processes 'by which Nations become an easy Prey to the first Invaders'; and that needs are fixed.²³

Given the clear 'Benefits' of commerce, it was hardly necessary to dispute luxury's status as a vice, and in this sense Mandeville's argument gives an insight into the process by which the 'civic humanism' of the classical tradition gradually, as E. J. Clery notes, 'gave rise in the course of the century to a "commercial" humanism', in which the ability to meet ever expanding and ever more refined needs became the measure of human achievement in the cultivation of civility and virtue.²⁴ Adam Smith argued in 1776 that the 'desire of bettering our condition [is] a desire ... which comes with us from the womb and never leaves us till we go into the grave' and that commercial societies provide the best opportunity for the realisation of this distinctly human wish

²¹ Sekora, 1-19, 63-109.

²² Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1732), Vol. 1, ed. F. Kaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924; reprint 1966), 185.

²³ Berry, 126-134; Mandeville, 115.

²⁴ Clery, 5.

and capacity for ‘improvement’.²⁵ The ‘Wanton Desires’ of Mandeville’s discourse were gradually neutralised, in other words, as luxuries became ‘comforts’ and ‘refinements’, and as their trade and consumption was identified as the key to civilisation, power and the ‘wealth of nations’.²⁶ It was not that the body was now being favoured over the mind, or rationality being subverted, but that luxury was no longer defined as a threat to the ‘public good’ and could thus be legitimised (hence luxuries became the ‘wants of the mind’).²⁷ The ‘demoralisation’ of luxury allowed not only for the separation of commerce from the old ‘ethical order’, however, but for the elaboration of a new ‘economic interpretation of history’.²⁸

The impact of this redefinition can be clearly seen in the fact that by the nineteenth century wealth was generally seen as a prerequisite for luxury, and consequently, it was the upper rather than lower classes who tended to be the focus of any discussion of luxury.²⁹ (Certainly, the distinction between ‘ancient’, ‘aristocratic’ and ‘unproductive’ luxury, and the ‘new’ or ‘modern’ ‘comforts’ and ‘conveniences’ or ‘semi-luxuries’ had been a critical element of the pro-modern defence of luxury.)³⁰ Hence, as Sekora observes, to a writer like Thackeray, who saw luxury as a pervasive tendency among the ruling classes, but one exclusive to them, luxury was ‘a vice of limited scope’.³¹ The association of luxury with culture and simplicity with nature, in contrast to the classical view which linked reason and civility with restraint and simplicity, while luxury and immoderation were related to savagery and the demands of the body, was also entirely new.³² One could be civilised or savage; refined and opulent, or unrefined; but not civilised and unrefined. The denunciation of luxury *in favour* of the rudeness of nature, as in Rousseau, reflected an

²⁵ Berry, 153.

²⁶ As Berry notes, ‘Hume’s essay “Of Luxury” [was] first published in 1752 but re-titled “Of Refinement in the Arts” in 1760’, 142.

²⁷ Berry, 232-233; Nicolas Barbon quoted in Edward Hundert, ‘Mandeville, Rousseau and the Political Economy of Fantasy’, in Berg and Eger (2003), 31.

²⁸ Berry, 4; Clery, 3.

²⁹ Sekora, 16-19.

³⁰ Berg and Eger, 9.

³¹ Sekora, 18-19.

³² Sekora, xi-xii.

acceptance of the Enlightenment theory of progress, or ‘progressive history’,³³ if not of its optimism.

Such associations are not absent from Kraszewski’s text,³⁴ however, the classical understanding of luxury is very clearly predominant. One of the main consequences of Augustus’ sensualism and excess as it is presented in the novel is that it destroys not only his own vigour and wholesomeness, but also that of his country. The period of the Great Northern War (1700-1710) in which the novel is set was one of extreme political and military volatility for Saxony and Poland. The losses incurred in this time, not the least of which was a treaty which gave Russia effective power over the Polish state, laid the foundations for the eventual demise of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth under the partitions.³⁵ The many military disappointments over which Augustus presided are mentioned throughout and continually connected, often via juxtaposition, to the King’s insatiable thirst for opulence and beautiful women; for instance, ‘During the war, and all the bloody horrors that accompanied it, Augustus remained still the same;...he lost kingdoms, but he conquered hearts’ (126, 107). This is also the case at the very outset of the novel when Augustus is introduced in the following way: ‘Throughout the whole of Europe he was famed for the brilliance of his court. There were none that could surpass him in magnificence, refinement of taste, and lordly prodigality. This year, however, Augustus had been defeated’ (1-2, 7).

Like the notion that luxury posed a threat to the security and strength of nations, the connection between women and luxury was vital to the classical understanding of luxury. As Clery notes,

³³ Clery, 3.

³⁴ For instance, there are a small number of passages in the novel where luxury is opposed to either poverty or nature. In one, the ‘revelry’ of ‘elegantly dressed’ women at a Dresden fair is contrasted with the ‘misery’ and destitution of the ‘mass’ or poor people who are ‘obliged’ to simply ‘look on’ (231, 226). In another, the ‘quietude of nature’ and the ‘simplicity’ of village life are contrasted with the commotion and ‘splendour’ of a royal feast (325, 317). (Note that the terms ‘szaleństwo’ [‘revelry’ or ‘madness’], ‘nędza’ [‘misery’], and ‘masa’ [‘mass’] appear only in the original text, and that the term used for ‘splendour’ is ‘wspaniałość’.)

³⁵ Davies, 657-60.

‘Effeminacy’ . . . is employed as the sum of a complex of derogatory ideas also gendered ‘feminine’, including corruption, weakness, cowardice, luxury, immorality and the unbridled play of passions. The ‘effeminate’ man is not by definition homosexual, but may be hyper-sexual. . . . His manners towards women may be excessively gallant, while secretly, he sneers at them What is crucial is the emphasis on his degraded nature, his unfitnes to fulfil the appropriate manly civic role.³⁶

Certainly, it is not just Augustus’ life which is ‘ruled’ by women (‘beauty appeals to his senses, and his senses always subdue him’ [75. 62]), but the magnificent court itself – whether by women like the Princess Teschen, who vie for Augustus’ fleeting attentions, or those like the Countess Reuss, who control the court beauties and therefore the King himself.

In terms of the distinctly anti-modern character of the novel’s indictment of luxury this setting of the novel is especially relevant. In his *Luxury and Capitalism* (1913) the German sociologist Werner Sombart read the cultural formation of the court in the early modern period as the birthplace of modern capitalism. The connection between women and luxury was central to Sombart’s thesis. In his view, the ‘triumph of illicit love’ or the ‘purely hedonistic aesthetic conception of woman’ in the early modern period, and hence the role of profligate women within the increasingly moneyed culture of the major European courts, was at the very heart of the foundation of modern capitalism.³⁷ No less important was the bourgeois imitation of aristocratic consumption – in particular, the imitation of noblewomen’s fashion by the wives of the merchants who prospered as a result of the consumption of these royal courts. Sombart’s emphasis on fashion, the de-moralisation of luxury and desire, and the role of women in the genesis of a ‘polite’ and ultimately consumerist society is familiar. Clery has shown how the eighteenth century’s debate on luxury was ‘fundamentally informed by the category of gender’ and that, along with luxury, it was the ‘growing status and influence’ of women that was ‘variously condemned as cause and symptom of national decline, or celebrated as an index of increasing refinement or civility’.³⁸ What Smith,

³⁶ Clery, 10.

³⁷ Sombart, 42, 48.

³⁸ Clery, 1.

from this perspective, offered was an ‘Enlightenment theory of feminization’.³⁹ The point is that the courtly culture of the early modern period was for Sombart synonymous with this process of feminization – and, certainly, ‘politeness’ itself, as Paul Langford notes, ‘was a logical consequence of commerce. . . . Though it involved much emulation and admiration of aristocrats, it did not imply an essentially aristocratic society’.⁴⁰

Against the backdrop of life at Augustus’ court the novel follows the arrival at Dresden of Anna Hoym, who is an inordinately beautiful and scrupulously devout young woman; her romance with the King and ‘reign’ (95, 77) as his mistress – a role she consents to in the belief that she has won the King’s love and commitment; and finally, her heartbreak, disillusion and struggle against him. The conflict between Anna and the King arises from the fact that Anna takes seriously not only the relationship, but the written promise of marriage which she manages to secure from him during their courtship. (That is, she refuses, in Sombart’s terms, to accept ‘unsanctioned and uninstitutionalised love’.)⁴¹ Neither the relationship nor the contract is held in much esteem by Augustus, who replaces her, as he has always done, with another, as soon as she ‘[loses] for him the charm of novelty’ (189, 175). Her valiant refusal to return the note upon request enrages him and delivers her to her miserable fate.

Anna’s status as an object of ‘aesthetic hedonistic appreciation’ is never in doubt. As the ‘[most] beautiful woman . . . in the whole of Europe’ (13, 16), she is the court’s ‘most precious jewel’ (236, 230), an until now ‘hid[den]’ ‘treasure’ (15, 17). The ‘perfection’ (13, 16) of her beauty makes her the ultimate luxury, one that, as Augustus says, simply ‘must be [his]’ (93, 76). For Anna, however, ‘capricious love’ (77, 63) of the sort that is practised by Augustus and, no less, his selfishness and urge to consume are abhorrent. While she never denies that her beauty is something of value – not just aesthetic, but also moral and monetary value – and that it should be complemented and surrounded by other ‘costly’ (93, 75) items, it is not a commodity to be purchased for private pleasure by those who can afford it.

³⁹ Clery, 3.

⁴⁰ Langford, 4-5.

⁴¹ Sombart, 43.

Rather, beauty should take its public place as a symbol of the values of a social order where consumption is determined by need and where need is determined by status.

In other words, Anna subscribes to what Katie Scott, in her study of eighteenth century French interior decoration, identifies as a pre-modern attitude to consumption. Central to this view is an assumption regarding the naturalness of a perfect fit between appearance and identity, or splendour and rank. The vice of luxury, generally associated with the disruption of social and natural order, or the neglect of Hierarchy and Necessity, could thus be located, more specifically, in the mismatch between expenditure and status. Scott demonstrates how, in the eighteenth century, the hijacking of the symbols of status by 'illegitimate spenders' rendered the 'relationship between appearance and status ... strained and self-conscious'. Kraszewski's novel registers, while simultaneously attempting to contain, this crisis in the 'transparent social order'.⁴²

According to the classical perception of luxury, it was not possible for Augustus, as a ruler, to be too extravagant in his spending, since 'magnificence' was his rightful domain.⁴³ However, he could still be guilty of luxury, because the proper nature of his privilege lay not in the pleasures, powers and rights he enjoyed as an individual but rather in his participation in a structure that was based on the limitation of personal ambition for the sake of the common good. While luxury was generally perceived to be most prevalent among the lower orders of society,⁴⁴ the potential for avarice, self-indulgence and ambition – all expressions of luxury as 'wealth [used] to serve personal satisfactions' – was no smaller and the effects no less destabilising whether the perpetrator was a political leader or a tradesman.⁴⁵

Augustus himself is very clear about the desirability of a perfect match between his own splendour and rank. The King's ostentatious luxury and his physical strength are frequently remarked on together, for in Augustus' mind, at least, the two are inextricably bound. This faith in the ability of his clothes

⁴² Scott, 81-83.

⁴³ Scott, 81-83.

⁴⁴ Sekora, 52.

⁴⁵ See Berry's discussion of 'Roman luxury', 84-86.

and possessions to convey specific meanings is expressed in an episode which takes place after Charles XII of Sweden has forced the King to resign the Polish crown and the ‘shameful’ treaty of Altranstadt (1706) has been signed (127, 108): ‘On the 15th December [Augustus II] rode to Leipzig to see Charles XII, for the King was convinced that if his stern adversary saw the serenity of his face and his greatness, he would grant him better terms’ (128, 108).⁴⁶ The failed outcome of this meeting was inevitable: as Kraszewski continues, ‘There could not have been a greater contrast than that presented by these two enemies. Charles XII looked like a Puritan, Augustus like a courtier of Louis XIV’ (128, 109).

In the terms of the classical interpretation of luxury, Augustus’ error lies neither in his faith in the merits of Hierarchy, nor in his confidence in the transparency of the symbols he uses to represent his status, but in his hypocrisy and slavish attachment to the physical nature of objects. As Scott illustrates, pre-modern ideas about luxury and consumption found firm expression in aesthetic theories predicated on the classical ideals of simplicity, harmony and grace – or ‘that which puts each thing in its place and removes all which is not appropriate to the thing’.⁴⁷ The idea that physical beauty is an embodiment of the purity and balance of moral beauty⁴⁸ is one dear to Augustus, who tells Anna, in an attempt to persuade her of the righteousness of his own pursuit of her, ‘Beauty of face indicates beauty of soul’ (69, 58). The irony of this comment is clear; however it is not the sentiment itself, but rather the speaker’s lack of sincerity which is being criticised.

At the same time, Augustus’ overestimation of the power of his own splendour – whether with respect to his clothing or his ‘god-like face’ (8, 12), – contributes to the sense in which the King stands as a caricature of precisely the naivety of seeing virtue in beauty and power in dress. The image of Augustus clashing with Charles XII on the battlefield – the former ‘covered in velvet and lace’ and ‘clad in golden armour’, the latter ‘a severe and merciless

⁴⁶ ‘Wielkość’, which I have translated as ‘greatness’ and which could also be translated as ‘grandeur’, is the term used in the original.

⁴⁷ Jacques-François Blondel (1705-1774) is quoted in Scott, 82.

⁴⁸ John Armstrong, *The Secret Power of Beauty: Why Happiness is in the Eye of the Beholder* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 70-80.

soldier, with hair cut short and wearing enormous boots that reached higher than his knees' (124, 103) – recalls a statement made by Peregrine Worsthorne in reference to the British Empire, and the 1956 Suez 'fiasco' more specifically: 'What is the point of maintaining a Queen Empress without an Empire to rule over? Everything about the British class system begins to look foolish and tacky when related to a second class power on the decline'.⁴⁹ 'Foolish and tacky' seems to be the precise phrase that Kraszewski is pointing to with respect to his portrait of Augustus II, and while the context of political failure is critical to this, what we have, as in Worsthorne's account, is a vision, not so much of the horrors of corruption and a loss of military strength, but rather of the comic impotence of a man whose dated style and outmoded assumptions are out of step with the modern world.

Certainly, the contrast between Dresden and Berlin that is made throughout the novel suggests that it is a lack of progress, not of virtue, which is Augustus' real weakness. As convinced as Augustus is of the value of his own lavish displays of wealth and refinement, it seems that Berlin has no wish to compete with Dresden – at least not where Augustus' exorbitant expenditure on luxuries is concerned. 'The customs [there]', Kraszewski writes, 'were Spartan... the cooking was bourgeois; [and] no one thought of court balls' (251, 248). Consequently, Frederick's army, which, in stark contrast to that of Augustus, is the main beneficiary of the 'strict economy' that is 'applied to other things', is 'the most interesting thing in Berlin' – 'an example of the perfection that the mechanics of militarism can reach' (238, 233).

The novel's emphasis on the asceticism and power of Frederick's Berlin owes much to ideas which were circulating in Germany at the time when the novel was written. The mercantilism of Prussian economic policy during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is well known in the history of economics as an offshoot of the theories of the English writer Thomas Mun (1571-1641), one of the precursors of the eighteenth century debate on luxury who, invoking the classical understanding of luxury, stressed the danger in high levels of consumption of foreign imports and called for the imposition of legal statutes

⁴⁹ Quoted in David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2001), 172.

to protect against it.⁵⁰ Whereas Smith, in his attack on the classical indictment of luxury, pointed to the ‘fallacy’ at the heart of the ‘positive balance of trade theory’, nineteenth century economic historians like Gustav Schmoller highlighted the ‘rationality’ and importance of mercantilism, as expressed in the Prussian model, ‘as a process of state-making during a specific historical epoch’.⁵¹

The ‘modern’ character of the neo-stoicism espoused by the Prussians is very much in evidence in the novel. Their response to the lavishness of Augustus’ court is not primarily one of moral outrage, but rather of amusement: in Berlin ‘they quietly laughed [at Dresden]’, and ‘nobody took seriously’ the pageantry of the Saxon military (250, 248). Cosel’s own characterisation of Augustus, then, as a ‘hero turned clown’ (244, 240), though it is borne of her indignation and heartbreak at his deceptions, also hints at the suggestion that perhaps a ‘hero’ is really the same thing as a clown.

Kraszewski ultimately rejects such a proposition, and Anna becomes the focus for the novel’s fundamentally conservative rehabilitation of ‘noble ideology’, the key to Anna’s role being given by the fact that she serves as an endorsement of Augustus’ world-view at the same time as she reveals his failure to live up to his own professed ideals. The novel’s focus on Anna is thus predicated on her distance from the modern world of Frederick’s Berlin, and the critique of ‘ancient’ or ‘aristocratic’ luxury⁵² which the Prussians’ view of Augustus contains. The novel’s defence of the ideal version of nobility that Anna bows to and represents receives much of its character, however, from the fact that Augustus may indeed be regarded as ‘foolish and tacky’, for Cosel’s virtue proceeds from the fact that she must, as a result of her forced impoverishment, and can reject his style, if not its function as a source of ‘noble distinction’.

Katie Scott’s study of the rococo is pertinent here. As she shows, one of the main responses of the French nobility in the eighteenth century to the

⁵⁰ Berry, 102-7; Lars G. Magnusson, ‘Mercantilism’ in Warren J. Samuels, Jeff E. Biddle, and John B. Davis (eds.), *A Companion to the History of Economic Thought* (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 46-7.

⁵¹ Magnusson, 47-8.

⁵² Berg and Eger, 9.

problem of luxury was to redefine ‘the mimetic preferences of non-nobles as a distinct form of wealthy bad taste’, hence the understanding of the rococo as the ‘(mis)creation’ of a ‘culturally ambitious bourgeoisie’, which Scott contends emerged only toward the middle of the eighteenth century. The rococo was rejected not because it was, to begin with, an imitation of aristocratic taste but rather because it was imitated.⁵³ Fakery and false glitter came to be expressed as innate characteristics of the style, and rococo came to define everything that ‘classical, or good, taste’, and likewise, ‘nobility’, was not.⁵⁴ By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, two materials which had hitherto been prized for their ability to function as symbols of noble prestige – gold and mirrors – had lost their appeal in the eyes of many critics and connoisseurs, for whom they now served only as a reminder of the differences between ‘beauty’ and ‘richness’.⁵⁵ Whereas in the early part of the century the prohibitive cost of very large mirrors especially meant that they were a stable and important feature of the homes of the highest elite, towards the middle of the century, critics began to seize on the mirror as ‘sign of the times’ and ‘a metaphor for the specular values (of desire, gain, duplicity, emptiness, of something in nothing) that were essential to the projection of a commercial society and yet the source of its numerous maledictions’.⁵⁶ The preference for portraits over history painting was, like the taste for mirrors, a symptom of plutocratic ‘pomp and vanity’.⁵⁷ Thus, while there would have been nothing unusual about Augustus II owning a large set of portraits of himself (135, 115), or a substantial collection of large mirrors at a time when such a collection would still have constituted a ‘costly mark of distinction’,⁵⁸ Kraszewski’s decision to focus on this, and moreover, on the nature of the interiors of the King’s castle as ones that continually reflect light, sparkle and shine, was hardly an uncalculated one.⁵⁹

⁵³ Scott, 231-2, 239.

⁵⁴ Scott, 263.

⁵⁵ Scott, 239.

⁵⁶ Scott, 31-2, 254.

⁵⁷ Scott, 239.

⁵⁸ Scott, 31.

⁵⁹ See, for instance, 3, 8.

Augustus' preference for the vulgarly lavish and the highly ornate is contrasted with the always modest and restrained good taste of the 'silent' and 'dignified' (68, 57) Anna – for instance, the 'French villa' in which she lives before she comes to Dresden is described as having been 'ornamented [only] as well as its modest size permitted' (18, 20). Moreover, while her own beauty seems utterly to overwhelm those around her, she herself is noted as being completely unmoved by the 'dazzling splendour' of the Dresden court; indeed, she is, at least initially, deeply suspicious of both it and Augustus' superficial charms (68, 57). It is not a love of democracy that drives this suspicion and indifference – Anna holds herself 'with the majesty of a Queen' (64, 54)⁶⁰ and refuses, once she does become the King's lover, to be treated as anything less than an 'absolute sovereign' (140, 119) – but rather 'her noble pride of virtue; her indignation at corruption; [and] her contempt for lying and intrigue' (19, 21-22). Thus when the King does betray her, her response is one of pain and anger combined with shock and confusion: 'The King's character seemed to be a monstrous conundrum. She recollected... the proofs of his attachment to her ... and could not understand how he could change' (239, 234). It is not just the scale of his deceit that so confounds Anna, nor is her anguish borne from a merely private sense of injury. As she says to one of the king's messengers, 'No one can make my misfortune greater. You are mistaken if you think that I regret the loss of palaces, aggrandisement and graces. No! I suffer because I have lost my faith in a human heart' (244, 240).⁶¹ That the contrast is between 'palaces and graces' and a 'human heart' is not accidental. It is the very fact that the two may be separated – that aristocratic displays of wealth and refinement, such as those favoured by Augustus, might now have no meaning at all – that is the problem: 'I thought that there were hearts, souls, consciences; that love was not lechery, that promises ought to be kept, that the king's words were holy. All that was only my illusion' (243, 239). Yet even in her realisation that Augustus does not possess something that she comprehends as the 'soul of a hero' (233, 228), and her disappointment that the King 'has [no heart] in that breast glittering with diamonds; [that] he is as cold as are the stones' (258, 255), Anna never questions the idea that there should be a match

⁶⁰ The original phrase is 'majestatem królowej'.

⁶¹ The original phrase is 'pałaców, znaczenia i łaski'.

between inner virtue and exterior grace, but rather laments the moral havoc wrought by the absence of such a connection.

The counterfeit brilliance of Augustus' 'shining majesty' (72, 60) is thus set against the genuine 'glory' of Anna's 'reign' as the 'second Queen' of the Dresden court (122-3, 102). Augustus' prediction that '[his] new love will be very costly' and that 'such a diamond must naturally be surrounded by gold' (93, 75)⁶² is proved correct. The same woman who at one time claimed that she 'despise[d]' the 'life of the court' and that it had no 'attraction' for her (32, 32) is reported only a short time later as leading a 'life of luxury' (107)⁶³ and acting on an 'insatiable desire for splendour' (171, 148).⁶⁴ This seeming paradox serves to highlight the difference between legitimate and illegitimate spending. Augustus' comment about Anna's costliness, though it is made somewhat cynically in reference to her stubbornness and pride, as well as to her superlative beauty that makes her an object for purchase by Augustus, exemplifies the way in which a connection between beauty and value is often remarked on in the novel. For Anna knows well her own worth, not just to Augustus personally but within and to society as a whole, and her spending patterns as the King's mistress are a straightforward reflection of this.

With her expulsion from Dresden and her eventual imprisonment Anna is stripped of her possessions and lives out the rest of her days in confinement and privation. As Scott demonstrates, the growing consciousness of the problem of money's power to imitate true greatness led to an idealisation of poverty amongst the nobility in the second half of the eighteenth century. It was not the poverty of the masses that aroused this sympathy and interest, but rather, the romance of the poor or plainly dressed nobleman or woman, whose status was nevertheless transparent.⁶⁵ We may note with reference now to Kraszewski, that while Anna spends only the latter parts of the novel in rough circumstances, her humble 'servant' Zaklika, the novel's other hero, endures a lifetime of noble impoverishment (140, 120). Despite being so withered that

⁶² The second sentence is only included in the original text. It reads, 'Taki brylant musi być koniecznie w złoto oprawnym'.

⁶³ The original quotation is 'nie zmieniły bynajmniej życia Cosel, nie zmniejszyły zbytków'.

⁶⁴ The original phrase is 'nienasyconą żądzą przepychu'.

⁶⁵ Scott, 234.

the Prussian soldiers do not even bother to enslave him ('he would have cost too much to feed up' [261, 257]), he still has his 'old name', and in the eyes of his Polish compatriots at least, that was 'of itself a good recommendation' (299, 288).

The issue was clearly not money per se. Just as the rejection of the rococo in favour of a more restrained classical aesthetics served to distinguish the tastes of the nobility from those of the bourgeoisie, but also to claim innate superiority for those exhibiting this natural capacity for good taste and good sense, so the idealisation of poverty was an assertion of cultural power in relation to matters of fashion and taste, as well as an affirmation of the naturalness of this power and the constancy and readability of noble identity – indeed against the potential for deception and distortion now associated with clothing and other appurtenances of wealth.

A stress on the biology of noble identity and on the assumed straightforwardness of reading and interpreting the authentic and unfalsifiable signs of the body forms an important part of Kraszewski's resuscitation of the classical concept of luxury. The influence within the novel of physiognomical thought is not unusual, given the popularity of Johann Caspar Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775) throughout Europe in the late eighteenth century and Lavater's influence on the nineteenth century European novel.⁶⁶ What is remarkable, however, about Kraszewski's use of Lavater is the reverence of his approach and the fidelity of his treatment of Lavater's ideas. Lavater's aim was to revive an old tradition of thinking about the relationship between appearance and character that had fallen into question during the Enlightenment. Adamant with respect to the stability and changelessness of character, and the classical connection between beauty and virtue, and deformity and vice, he advocated a return to the 'true physiognomy' of interpreting fixed facial structures and features, as opposed to what was more properly known as pathognomy, the study of transient expressions and 'moving facial parts'.⁶⁷ Roy Porter has linked Lavater's project to the question

⁶⁶ Graeme Tytler, *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

⁶⁷ Tytler, 7; Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason: How the Enlightenment Transformed the Way We See Our Bodies and Souls* (London: Allen Lane, 2003);

of luxury in the eighteenth century in a way that explains the place of physiognomy in Kraszewski's novel. Porter notes how the 'social pretensions and confusions' associated with fashion and consumption and the 'devaluation of traditional grandeur' in this period 'triggered a frantic search for subtler status signatures which wealth alone could not command', while Lavater's revisionist physiognomy reassuringly accented 'features over which the individual had no manipulative control but which had been created by God and Nature as a legible public language'.⁶⁸

The truthfulness and reliability of legible bodies in *The Countess Cosel* serves as an antidote to the confusion and deceit of the Dresden court, the novel's representation of the latter being couched in the terms of eighteenth century discourses on consumption. Kraszewski's conservative appeal to the traditional connection between consumption and vice is expressed in distinctly Mandevillian terms as a connection between 'politeness' and 'self-interest', or 'civility' and 'insincerity'. The refinement bred in the materialistic or, in Werner Sombart's terms, proto-capitalist world of Augustus' 'magnificent' (1, 7) court is thus precisely what makes it seem, at least initially, so unappealing and 'deceitful' to Anna, who tells the King in her first meeting with him that the court is merely a 'well-played comedy' in which he, as its 'manager', is 'deceived and robbed by everyone', even those who he thinks are honest, for they simply 'know how to administer poison more skilfully than the others' (70, 58). The King assures Anna that he is much better at divining the 'secrets' (70, 59) of courtiers than she might think: aided by an apparently limitless supply of a 'treacherously smooth' Hungarian wine (9, 12), the King delights in 'catching [his courtiers] in a state when [their] mind [can] no longer control their tongue' (12, 15) and entire evenings are focused on games and discussions involving concealment, exposure, play-acting and bitter rivalry. The moral overtones of the novel's depiction of this 'unclean Babylon' (29, 30) are plain: in the spy-ridden world of the court 'each [person] suspected his neighbour; brother was afraid of brother; the husband distrusted the wife; [and]

Penguin, 2004), 255-6; Melissa Percival, *The Appearance of Character: Physiognomy and Facial Expression in Eighteenth Century France* (London: W. S. Maney & Son Ltd for the Modern Humanities Research Association, 1999), 1-40, 159-93.

⁶⁸ Porter, 251, 255.

the father had no confidence in his son' (5, 10). Thus, whereas for Mandeville the base instincts of self-interest, vanity, and personal ambition might have seemed to reflect the 'truth' of human nature – a truth which, contrary to ancient wisdom, could serve to enrich and improve a society – in Kraszewski's novel, these are simply vices, connected to the lamentable world of fashionable goods and material culture.

The episode in which is recounted the alchemist Bottiger's accidental discovery of the secret of porcelain manufacture is significant in this context (146, 151). As Maxine Berg notes, this breakthrough, which was made in Saxony in 1709, was an important moment in the early modern history of European manufacturing and trade.⁶⁹ For Berg, the significance of the role of Asian luxuries in this period goes beyond their status as simply desirable objects in a rapidly expanding marketplace. Mercantilist fear of the over-consumption of imports helped to launch a 'programme of product innovation', the aim and outcome of which was the development of domestic substitutes for foreign luxuries – in particular, what were the 'new' or 'modern', as opposed to 'ancient', luxuries destined for a much wider market of middle class consumers (calicoes, porcelain, lacquerwares and other ornamental goods). The influence of the trade in these goods was vital, Berg argues, to the transformation of 'European, but especially British, consumer markets and technologies' in the period leading up to the Industrial Revolution.⁷⁰ The 'old-fashioned' and erroneous conflation of 'wealth' with 'money' which Smith saw as being at the heart of the mercantilist doctrine and anxiety about over-consumption, and which Richard Jones, in the 1830s, saw as illustrative of 'the almost romantic value which our ancestors set upon the possession of the precious metals',⁷¹ is very much a part of Augustus' world-view as Kraszewski presents it. Bottiger's task originally was to make gold for the King – the need for which is a matter of utmost gravity to the court, for Augustus' inability to curb his spending on foreign luxuries ('Hungarian wine'

⁶⁹ Maxine Berg, 'Asian Luxuries and the Making of the European Consumer Revolution', in Berg and Eger (2003), 241.

⁷⁰ Berg, 229-230; Maxine Berg, 'In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present* 182 (February 2004), 85-142.

⁷¹ Jones is quoted in Magnusson, 47.

[4, 12] and ‘Turkish tents’ [168, 144], for instance) means that the treasury is continually depleted, and hence ‘at times no other subject was mentioned . . . than how gold could be made’ (118, 97). The fact that Bottiger succeeds only in making porcelain seems, however, to make little difference to Augustus, who recognises immediately that in this discovery Saxony ‘had indeed gained a veritable gold mine’ (151, 129). Clearly, it is suggested that Kraszewski’s readers should make much more of this substitution of porcelain for gold – of the new economy for the old – than does Augustus.

Against the backdrop of consumer culture’s inconstancy and emphasis on ‘seeming’ as opposed to ‘being’,⁷² Kraszewski’s characters are perpetually seen reading, judging and looking at each other; ceaselessly seeking ‘proofs’ (220, 216), ‘signs’ (87, 71) and ‘reflections’ of each other’s moods and intentions (17, 19). There is barely a scene or incident in the novel in which one character is not seen fixing or trying to fix the meaning of another’s clothes, gestures, face or words. The novel’s own preoccupation with evidence and visibility is expressed in the device of introducing characters through a description of their faces. ‘Good-looking’ or ‘handsome’ translates directly to ‘noble’, ‘intelligent’ or, at the very least, ‘good’.⁷³ The degeneracy of Anna’s cowardly and unfaithful husband is reflected in his tense and ‘ungainly’ appearance (33),⁷⁴ in much the same way as Anna’s virtue means that she is always ‘beautiful, calm and dignified’ (101, 81). Her face tells us exactly what she is like, enabling, among others, the Jewish banker, Lehman (‘a quiet man with steady black eyes’ [221, 217]), to ‘recognise in [her] a noble character’ (220, 216).⁷⁵ It is not that ugliness simply symbolises vice, but that it is a quality of it, just as beauty in the novel is a function of clarity, honesty, harmony and truth.

The lines found in the closing pages of the novel – ‘[Anna] died in 1765, being eighty-five years of age. To the end of her life she preserved traces of her

⁷² Hundert, 29.

⁷³ See, for instance: 109, 86; 148, 126; 308, 298; 57, 49.

⁷⁴ The word ‘niezgrabny’ appears only in the original. See also 58-9, 50; 308, 298.

⁷⁵ The phrase in the original is ‘szlachetny charakter’. See also the response of the Protestant minister Schramm to Anna’s appearance and the profound meanings with respect to character that he can, as it is suggested, instantly intuit from the surface of her body and face (29, 29-30).

great beauty, by which she became so famous' (336, 334) – are not, as they seem, perfunctory, but rather, go to the very heart of the drama detailed in the text. In line with the attention Anna's beauty receives throughout the novel, the most important question raised by her trial is one that a courtier asks a messenger who has just returned from Anna's prison: '[Has] she... lost much of her beauty?' (247, 244). That she is now 'more beautiful than ever' is the main focus of the latter part of the narrative (247, 244). The burgeoning 'faith' which replaces Cosel's initial despair and anger culminates in her decision to remain in her jail, even after Augustus' death, thirty-two years before her own, opens the way for her to regain her freedom (313, 301). This faith is clearly proposed as the reason why she retains her attractiveness until the end of her days: in expanding her virtue, it also deepens her beauty. Moreover, it is a faith based primarily on an acceptance of her poverty and an understanding of its dignity. Visiting her one day in her prison, Zaklika finds her full of courage and inspiration and yet 'robed in such an odd dress that he feared she had lost her reason.... She was beautiful indeed, but quite different from that Cosel who received the Danish King in a robe covered with diamonds' (317-18, 306).

This contrast makes the fact that 'neither prison, nor grief, nor tears' can 'injure [Anna's] charms' more than simply a lesson in the triumph of virtue and courage over worldly power (317, 305). In preserving her beauty, Anna preserves not just her dignity and virtue, but her noble identity. Certainly, from the moment of her arrival at the court, it is Anna's beauty, and not her attire, which identifies her as a noble. Her beauty is described by one admirer as being 'worthy of the throne' (304, 293), and likewise, her 'white hand' is deemed 'worthy to be kissed by kings' (165, 141).⁷⁶ Zaklika too, is described

⁷⁶ Tytler points out that white hands were regularly assumed to indicate high status, and that the notion, generally, that social and indeed ethnic groups can be identified by their shared physical characteristics is Lavaterian (202, 217). Kraszewski's remark elsewhere, for instance, that the Countess Vitzthum 'was tall, as were the majority of the ladies of the Saxon aristocracy' (109, 87) typifies the tradition of associating high social rank with physical height. See Porter, 246-7. Moreover, because Lavater gave close attention in the *Physiognomische Fragmente* to 'non-facial' features, and because 'physiognomical' discussions of this kind are rare in literature before the nineteenth

as ‘good-looking’, though his chief characteristic is an almost supernatural physical strength matching the otherwise peerless brute force of the King himself (22, 23). Both Anna’s beauty and Zaklika’s physical might bear a direct correspondence to features which are used to characterise Augustus as a great and, in a sense, natural monarch: as one of his courtiers declares, ‘Endowed with a godlike face, [and with] Herculean strength’, the King is ‘created to have the world lie at [his] feet’ (8, 12). That Anna’s beauty survives, indeed, thrives, when she has lost all other material markers of rank, confers meaning upon her suffering. The novel’s drama of triumph and dispossession, of faith and disillusion, is organised around the tension between Anna ‘in her full splendour... at the court’ and Anna unadorned, or between two types of stateliness: that which can be faked or bought, and that which cannot. This tension is not easily resolved. The courtier’s inquiry as to whether Anna has lost her beauty is clearly misguided for we know that Anna is so beautiful that she has ‘no need for recourse to artifices’ (44, 40), and yet her own difficulty in swallowing the absence of a ‘royal heart’ (233, 228) beneath Augustus’ immaculately kept facade, suggests that in an ideal world the illusory and transient nature of appearances would not be so readily assumed. The idea that appearances can be misleading is the novel’s lament rather than its lesson: the novel’s rejection of the ostentatious style of courtly culture is advocated as a means, not of celebrating the modern challenge to its authenticity, but of circumventing that challenge.

Anna’s journey from her quiet country villa to the ‘fever’ (54, 47) of the Dresden court is thus essentially a lesson about the dangers of the capitalist values of vanity, individualism, and materialism. Her decision to stay in her prison is a protest against these sins – a refusal to accept the standard set by Augustus. As Anna herself says in a bold proclamation about the meaning of her trial and decision to forget Augustus and her former life, ‘There is no favour in this world; there is only iron, unbreakable, unavoidable necessity. One must submit to it’ (318-19, 307). As was noted at the outset of this discussion, this narrative also contains a rather overt subtext relating to the contemporary struggle for independence. Poland has not and should not allow

century, Tytler argues that their presence in the nineteenth century novel is another measure of Lavater’s influence (216).

itself to be compromised by the values of the modern West, and if a loss of freedom is the price to be paid for virtue then so be it. Yet rather than any essential difference between Poland and the West, what Kraszewski's novel reveals is that, on the contrary, an idea or discourse used extensively throughout the eighteenth century by the French and English nobility to articulate both their opposition to absolutist power and endorsement for the stable ethics of a pre-modern social order was very well suited to the articulation of the values of not only the Polish nobility, but also, it seems, the Polish nation.

The Romantic flourishes and more modern sensibilities that are voiced in the novel, particularly towards its end – for instance, the idea of ‘necessity’ that Anna describes in the speech just mentioned is one which deliberately leaves out the question of hierarchy *within* society, emphasizing above all mankind's subservience to God or a similar universal power⁷⁷ – do less to undermine our sense that the novel's rejection of the refinements of culture was motivated by a desire for a return, not to nature, but to a feudal heritage, than they do to suggest that for Kraszewski, at least, the distinction between Romantic nationalism on one hand and a classical critique of luxury and modernity on the other was either unimportant or imperceptible.

The Countess Cosel not only revives the discourse of a classical attack upon luxury but does so in a manner which unambiguously implies its relevance to an understanding of the present. In this respect, the novel stands as a testament not only to the influence of the luxury debates within the Polish context, but also to the afterlife of the classical concept of luxury in the nineteenth century.

⁷⁷ Sekora argues that the emphasis on social hierarchy was a feature of the Greek view of luxury, less important within the Hebrew tradition (see 23–51). Interestingly, Anna attributes her own understanding of the concept of necessity to her reading of the Old Testament (319, 307).