



'A flower of an exile': International Political Networks in Anna Birkbeck's Album

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Anna Birkbeck's album contains a rousing poem about the Polish independence cause by Polish author, translator, and exile Stanisław Egbert Koźmian. By contextualizing this seemingly unusual political entry, inter-album connections are revealed, offering insights into networks of European political exiles and insurrectionists in London in the 1820s and 1830s. This analysis shows how the medium of the album could use feminine tropes to carry political meanings, acting as a repository of family values and reflecting the causes supported by the Birkbecks and their circles.



On 26 February 1837, Polish author, translator, and exile Stanisław Egbert Koźmian contributed a rousing sonnet about the Polish independence cause to Anna Birkbeck's album (*Figs 1 and 2*).¹ Titled 'Do Anny Birkbeck' ('To Anna Birkbeck'), written in Polish, and followed by a prose version in English, this poem appears among more typical entries for an early nineteenth-century album: original and transcribed poetry; watercolours by well-known authors and artists as well as family friends; tributes to Anna's husband Dr George Birkbeck, founder of the London Mechanics' Institution; pasted-in tickets; and autographs.² By looking at this seemingly unusual entry in the context of a curated collection, I will examine its inter-album connections and offer insights into networks of European political exiles and insurrectionists associated with the Birkbeck family, showing how feminine tropes can carry political meanings.³

Much has been said about the album as a feminine endeavour.⁴ In scholarship, albums are often characterized as 'feminine paraphernalia', 'part of a [...] culture of femininity', 'a feminine practice', and 'a feminized subculture'.⁵ Yet many, if not most,

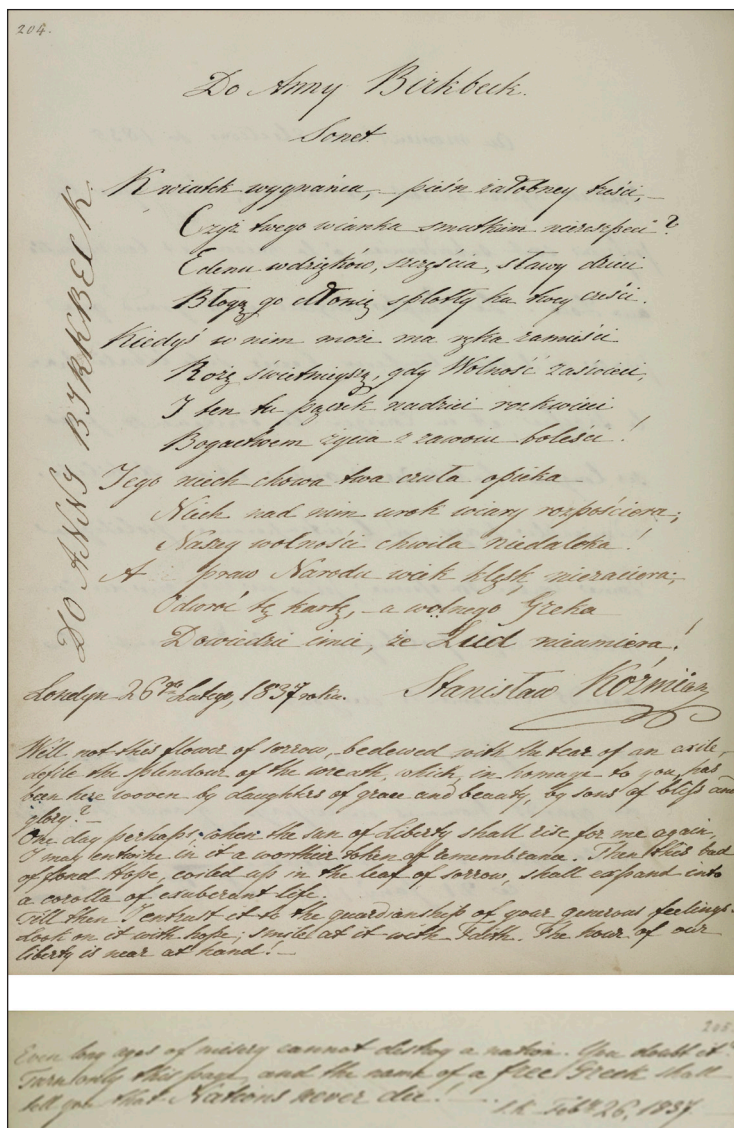
¹ 'Stanisław Egbert Koźmian', *Internetowy Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, 1970 <<http://www.ipsb.nina.gov.pl/a/biografia/stanislaw-egbert-kozman>> [accessed 26 August 2024]. See Appendix for a transcript and translation of the poem. Stanisław Egbert Koźmian (1811–1885) studied law in Warsaw. During the 1830 Polish uprising he composed patriotic sonnets as well as taking part in the fighting, for which he was imprisoned, and later exiled for almost two decades. Koźmian arrived in the UK in 1833 and went on to translate English poetry into Polish, translating authors such as Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, Burns, and others, as well as seven Shakespearean plays that had never been translated into Polish before.

² Stanisław Koźmian, 'Do Anny Birkbeck', *The Album of Anna Birkbeck*, Birkbeck, University of London, pp. 204–05. Samantha Matthews lists some of the more typical forms found in albums: 'sketches, cartoons, botanical paintings and portraits [...] original light verse, prose tributes and transcribed quotations [...] cut-paper work and snippets from newspapers and magazines', in Samantha Matthews, 'Album Culture: Begging for Scraps', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Romanticism and the Arts*, ed. by Maureen McCue and Sophie Thomas, Edinburgh Companions to Literature and the Humanities (Edinburgh University Press, 2023), pp. 429–49 (p. 431).

³ I am grateful to Dr Luisa Calè for her encouragement and generous notes on drafts of this article, Professor Eliza Borkowska of SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Poland for the beautiful translation of Koźmian's words, Franciszek Sliwinski for his help with the transcription of the sonnet and interpretation of other Polish-language sources, and the anonymous peer reviewer for their thought-provoking notes. I am thankful to my 2023 Summer Term cohort on the MA Victorian Studies at Birkbeck, University of London with whom I had many constructive discussions about entries in Anna Birkbeck's album.

⁴ Patrizia Di Bello, 'Mrs Birkbeck's Album: The Hand-written and the Printed in Early Nineteenth-Century Feminine Culture', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 1 (2005), doi:[10.16995/ntn.435](https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.435); Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (Ashgate, 2007); Lindsey Eckert, *The Limits of Familiarity: Authorship and Romantic Readers* (Bucknell University Press, 2022), pp. 130–59; Deidre Lynch, 'Paper Slips: Album, Archiving, Accident', *Studies in Romanticism*, 57.1 (2018), pp. 87–119, doi:[10.1353/srm.2018.0004](https://doi.org/10.1353/srm.2018.0004); Samantha Matthews, *Album Verses and Romantic Literary Culture: Poetry, Manuscript, Print, 1780–1850* (Oxford University Press, 2020), doi:[10.1093/oso/9780198857945.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198857945.001.0001); Victoria Mills, 'The Album as Museum? A Response to Patrizia di Bello on an Interdisciplinary Approach to Mrs Birkbeck's Album', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 2 (2006), doi:[10.16995/ntn.445](https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.445).

⁵ Samantha Matthews, 'Album', *Victorian Review*, 34.1 (2008), pp. 13–17 (p. 13), doi:[10.1353/vcr.2008.0005](https://doi.org/10.1353/vcr.2008.0005); Di Bello, 'Mrs Birkbeck's Album', pp. 8–9; Matthews, 'Album Culture', p. 429; Matthews, *Album Verses and Romantic Literary Culture*, pp. 2–3.



Figs 1 and 2: Stanisław Koźmian, 'Do Anny Birkbeck: Sonet', in *The Album of Anna Birkbeck*, pp. 204, 205 (detail). See Appendix for a transcript and translation of the poem.

of the contributors in this period were men.⁶ Koźmian's sonnet performs some of the conventions and expectations placed on album poems, such as expressing feelings of gratitude and friendship towards the album owner and activating many of the commonplaces of the feminine album poem, such as references to flowers and wreaths:

⁶ This is discussed in many of the texts in note 4, as well as by Jeannette Acevedo Rivera (in a primarily Spanish and French context, but this statement applies to Britain as well): 'women were consumers who owned albums and gathered entries, and men were producers who contributed to them', from Jeannette Acevedo Rivera, "'One should never write in albums": Analyzing Nineteenth-Century Albums as Social Networks', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 44.3 (2022), pp. 241–63 (p. 242), doi:10.1080/08905495.2022.2084958.

‘A flower of an exile, a mournful song, | Will it not defile your wreath with sadness?’⁷ The familiar image of the wreath functions as a symbol for both the elegance and the miscellaneity of the album form, to which his sonnet is a subdued addition (in the English prose, a ‘flower of sorrow’). This self-referential tone is not unusual in album poems, which often take the album itself as their subject, and is one of the ways in which Koźmian situates himself in relation to other entries.⁸ However, it complicates the feminine, floral imagery: the album wreath is woven by both ‘daughters of grace and beauty’ and ‘sons of bliss and glory’, and its rousing political message is not diluted.

A rose is prominent on the title page of the album and a recurring image throughout,⁹ but in Koźmian’s writing it becomes a symbol of liberation:

Someday, when Freedom shines, maybe my hand
Will fit in it a Rose of more splendour,
And this bud of hope will bloom
With a wealth of life from a wreath of sorrows!¹⁰

Entries in albums owned by women associated with well-known men were sometimes used as a way to reach those men, using the woman as mediator as well as subject and recipient of contributions.¹¹ Messages openly addressed to George rather than to Anna Birkbeck, or addressing her only to praise him, can be found throughout the album.¹² However, this does not mean that Koźmian’s political message is covertly aimed at the men reading the album. The poem’s mode of address appeals to a feminine reader in the second person, using the trope of the bud of hope to plead on behalf of Polish independence: ‘Let your tender care look after it | Let the charm of faith spread over it’.¹³ Koźmian’s addressee is endowed with feminine qualities that match the feminine

⁷ *The Album of Anna Birkbeck*, p. 204. Hereafter, all references to Koźmian’s entry in the album will refer to pp. 204–05. The original reads: ‘Kwiatek wygnańca, pieśń żałobney treści, | Czyż twego wianka smutkiem niezeszpeci?’. The transcription and translation used in this article are included in the Appendix and were generously checked and amended by Professor Eliza Borkowska, SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Poland.

⁸ Matthews, *Album Verses and Romantic Literary Culture*, p. 15. For the recurring motif of the wreath in other poems in Anna Birkbeck’s album, see pp. 29, 35–36, 77, 95, 123, 165.

⁹ For the recurring image of the rose in Anna Birkbeck’s album, see pp. 5, 6, 37–38, 78, 85, 90, 98, 101, 106, 111, 153.

¹⁰ The original reads: ‘Kiedyś w nim może ma ręka zamieści | Rożę świetniejszą, gdy Wolność zaświeci, | I ten tu pączek nadziei rozkwieci | Bogactwem życia z zawoiu boleści!’.

¹¹ See, for example, Matthews, *Album Verses and Romantic Literary Culture*, p. 21, in relation to the Wordsworth circle’s daughters.

¹² See, for example, ‘To George Birkbeck M.D.’, p. 137; and ‘To Birkbeck the literary & scientific world will ever be indebted’, p. 146.

¹³ The original reads: ‘Jego niech chowa twa czuła opieka | Niech nad nim urok wiary rozpościera’.

floral imagery used to carry political content and entrust the flower of Liberty ‘coiled up in the leaf of sorrow [...] to the guardianship of your generous feelings’.

Koźmian’s appeal calls attention to the Birkbecks’ real-life interactions with the Polish exile community, and familiarity and support of the Polish independence cause. As early as 1832, just after the failed Polish uprising that displaced Koźmian and many other exiles, the *Mechanics’ Magazine*, closely associated with Birkbeck’s London Mechanics’ Institution, asked, ‘who is there that longs not for the time when unhappy Poland shall be free?’¹⁴ This rhetorical question suggests an implied familiarity with the events of Eastern Europe. The Polish cause attracted the type of radical, progressive thinkers that surrounded the Birkbeck family, who often gathered around European independence movements. Norman Davies argues that liberals took on the cause as a ‘cheap crusade in distant parts’, a way of showing support for their ideals in a conveniently unthreatening non-domestic setting.¹⁵ However, there is evidence that the Birkbeck family was actively involved in the Polish cause beyond the general sympathy that might have been expected by their social and cultural circles.

George Birkbeck was a member of the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland.¹⁶ Founded in 1832 by Scottish poet Thomas Campbell, the association set out to ‘assist in the diffusion of information respecting the rights and conditions of Poland’ and provide ‘assistance to Polish political exiles’.¹⁷ Birkbeck remained involved with the cause until his death and, according to one biographer, at his funeral ‘exiles from a foreign land, the unhappy Poles, whom he had greatly befriended, attended to mourn a benefactor lost’.¹⁸ The Birkbecks’ eldest son William Lloyd acted as honorary chair of the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland, leaving a significant sum to it in his will.¹⁹ Their daughter Anna Margaret co-published books and articles about Eastern Europe with her Hungarian husband; her involvement fulfils the engagement expressed in Koźmian’s emphatic: ‘The hour of our liberty is near at hand! Even long ages of misery cannot

¹⁴ J. C. R., ‘Francis Moore and the Useful Knowledge Society’, in *Mechanics’ Magazine, Museum, Register, Journal, and Gazette*, 18 February 1832, pp. 363–66 (p. 365).

¹⁵ Norman Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland*, rev. edn, 2 vols (Oxford University Press, 2005), II: 1795 to the Present, p. 26.

¹⁶ Matthew Lee, ‘Birkbeck, George (1776–1841)’, *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004, rev. 2016), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/2454. The DNB mentions that Birkbeck joined in 1832 but he is not listed in the *Address of the Literary Polish Association to the People of Great Britain* (Literary Association of the Friends of Poland, 1832). See entry in British Library <<https://access.bl.uk>> [accessed 30 June 2023].

¹⁷ Geoffrey Carnall, ‘Campbell, Thomas (1777–1844)’, *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004, rev. 2021), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/4534; Józef Gula, *The Roman Catholic Church in the History of the Polish Exiled Community in Great Britain* (School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1993), p. 6.

¹⁸ John George Godard, *George Birkbeck, the Pioneer of Popular Education: A Memoir and a Review* (Bemrose, 1884), p. 175.

¹⁹ ‘Births, Deaths, Marriages and Obituaries’, *Morning Post*, 31 August 1888, p. 3.

destroy a nation.’²⁰ The Birkbecks’ intergenerational engagement in Eastern European politics confirms the role of the album as a repository of family values.

Koźmian’s choice of Polish is in itself a political statement, at a time when the language was threatened by partitioning powers trying to impose Russian or German as the official language of Poland.²¹ The English prose translation beneath the poem demonstrates that there was no expectation that album readers would understand Polish, suggesting that the choice of a bilingual entry is a deliberate statement. While a political entry may be notable in a British album, messages of this type were not uncommon in Polish albums of the same period: Justyna Beinek argues that Polish albums provided ‘a forum for imagining elements of national identity and for discussing the concept of the nation–state’.²² Themes of exile dominated contributions. The Polish language, with its associations with insurrectionary politics, stood for the ideal of a Polish ‘homeland’, making up for the shortcomings of politics.²³

Along with the language itself, Polish literature was key to shaping national identity and attracting support abroad. It is not incidental that the group that might have introduced Koźmian to the Birkbecks was a ‘Literary Association’ founded by a poet.²⁴ In advocating the patriotic cause, Koźmian echoed Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz’s *The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation* (1832). Album readers might have been familiar with Mickiewicz’s work through its translation in English, published only a year after the original.²⁵ Mickiewicz’s presence is particularly felt in the ending: after images of the wreath tainted by tears and the ‘flower of sorrow’, the poem turns from an almost elegiac tone to a patriotic conclusion: in the Polish, ‘the People do not die!’; and in the English prose, ‘Nations never die!’²⁶ Compare this to Mickiewicz’s ‘the Polish nation is not dead! Its body, indeed, is in the tomb, but its SOUL has ascended from the surface of the earth.’²⁷ While the album sonnet lacks the

²⁰ Bernard Porter, *The Refugee Question in Mid-Victorian Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 67.

²¹ Davies, II, p. 16.

²² Justyna Anna Beinek, ‘The Album in the Age of Russian and Polish Romanticism: Memory, Nation, Authorship’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard University, 2001), p. iv.

²³ Davies, II, pp. 203, 16–17.

²⁴ Koźmian had close ties with the association, helping distribute funds, giving speeches at their meetings, and even publicly defending them when its reputation was brought into question in the press. See ‘Stanisław Egbert Koźmian’, *Internetowy Polski Słownik Biograficzny*; Literary Association of the Friends of Poland and Reform Club, *Report of the Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Meeting of the London Literary Association of the Friends of Poland Held May 3, 1839* (Wilczewski, 1839), *The Making of the Modern World* <<https://www.gale.com/primary-sources/the-making-of-the-modern-world>> [accessed 26 August 2024]; ‘Advertisements & Notices – The Poles’, *Morning Chronicle*, 15 November 1838.

²⁵ Adam Mickiewicz, *The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation* (Ridgway, 1833), p. 20.

²⁶ The original reads: ‘że Lud nieumiera!’.

²⁷ Mickiewicz, *The Books and the Pilgrimage*, p. 20. In the original: ‘Bo naród polski nieumarł, ciało jego leży w grobie, a

overt religious imagery of *The Books and the Pilgrimage*, the reverberations of that work in this album sonnet reflect one way in which Koźmian and other exiles used Polish literature to further knowledge of the independence cause.

Another album contributor, politician and writer John Bowring, had led in the dissemination of Polish verse by publishing an anthology of his English translations in the late 1820s, working on it with Lach Szyrma, the secretary of the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland.²⁸ Bowring had little understanding of the Polish language, and instead relied on paraphrased summaries by Szyrma on which he based his poetic translations.²⁹ Bowring's translations were quoted in *Polonia*, the short-lived monthly magazine of the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland, and were praised elsewhere by some Polish exiles for having 'given to his countrymen a fine idea of the grand imagination of the Polish poets' with his 'elegant translations'.³⁰ Koźmian was less generous and judged the translations 'somewhat spiritless', although he was complimentary about one of the poems.³¹ Writing in Polish, as well as distributing works of Polish literature in translation, was as much of a political statement as the content of the writing itself.

Many Polish exiles combined their political activities with writing, publishing, and lecturing on the history and literature of Poland. Koźmian himself wrote two detailed pieces on the literature of Poland in the *Athenaeum* in 1838.³² In 1836 and 1837 the London Mechanics' Institution hosted several lectures 'On the Literature of Poland' and 'On the History of Poland' by a Mr Zaba.³³ Polish exile, author, and lecturer Napoleon Feliks Żaba had co-written and published an almost 300-page 'account of Poland', *The Polish Exile*, in English in 1833, and travelled the country giving 'deeply interesting and eloquent' lectures on Polish topics, 'delivered with extraordinary power', and

dusza jego zstąpiła z ziemi': Adam Mickiewicz, *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* (Pinard, 1832), p. 23 <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=Th8VAAAAQAAJ&pg=GBS.PA4&hl=en_GB> [accessed 26 August 2024].

²⁸ Arthur Prudden Coleman, 'John Bowring and the Poetry of the Slavs', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 84.3 (1941), pp. 431–59 (p. 436).

²⁹ Coleman, p. 437.

³⁰ 'Home Intelligence: Hull Literary Polish Society', *Polonia; or, Monthly Reports on Polish Affairs*, August 1832, pp. 35–38 (pp. 35–36) <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=UrAEAAAAQAAJ&hl=en_GB> [accessed 26 August 2024]; *The Polish Exile, Being an Historical, Statistical, Political, and Literary Account of Poland*, ed. by N. F. Zaba and P. Zaleski (printed by Collie, 1833), p. 215.

³¹ Stanislas Koźmian, 'Literature of the Nineteenth Century: Poland', *Athenaeum*, 28 July 1838, pp. 532–38 (p. 533).

³² Stanislas Koźmian, 'Literature of the Nineteenth Century: Poland', *Athenaeum*, 14 July 1838, pp. 491–95; 28 July 1838, pp. 532–36. In his survey Koźmian comments on album contributor and Greek Committee secretary John Bowring (28 July 1838, p. 533).

³³ London Mechanics' Institution, 'Minutes of the Quarterly General Meetings of the London Mechanics' Institution, 1824–1858, 4 vols, II: 1831–1840' (1831), pp. 366, 381, 418, University of London, Birkbeck Library Archives and Special Collections, BBK/1/2/2.

‘an elegance and correctness very rarely attained by a foreigner’.³⁴ No comparable classes teaching the history and literature of other non-British cultures are recorded in the London Mechanics’ Institution minutes in this period, suggesting that it was a deliberate decision by Birkbeck and the institution to organize these lectures to show support for the Polish independence cause through the dissemination of its literature and history.³⁵ Birkbeck’s fame as a ‘friend to the Poles’ further confirms Koźmian’s sonnet’s significance as a political entry in the album.³⁶

A broader look at the album reveals further connections to the Polish cause. The page following Koźmian’s entry features another Polish exile expressing gratitude: Tadeusz Skrzydlewski, who can be found alongside Koźmian and Żaba as a signatory in a letter addressed to the ‘Editor of the Morning Chronicle’ in November 1838. The letter, simply titled ‘The Poles’, sets out to defend the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland against a police report alleging that the association failed to provide financial support to exiles in need.³⁷ The defence in the press is emphatic in expressing a ‘deep sense of gratitude [...] particularly to [the association’s] Vice-President, Lord Dudley Stuart’.³⁸ Lord Stuart features in Anna Birkbeck’s scrapbook, a few pages after an image of another signatory to the letter, Charles Szulczewski,³⁹ in a portrait dated 1837 and inscribed ‘The Poles to their Friend’.⁴⁰ Lord Stuart was a true believer in the Polish independence cause and died while on a ‘Polish mission’ to Sweden, where he went to plead with the Prince Royal to join the Western League to aid the Polish reconstruction, against his doctor’s advice.⁴¹ Despite the tireless dedication of individuals, some doubts were cast on the political effectiveness of organizations such as the Literary Association in achieving

³⁴ *The Polish Exile*, ed. by Żaba and Zaleski. Quotations are from ‘The Polish Exiles’, *Leeds Mercury*, 13 June 1835. While there is no first name recorded in the London Mechanics’ Institution meeting minutes, and there were several ‘Zabas’ in London at the time, given Napoleon Feliks Żaba’s expertise and connections, he seems a likely fit – it is also probable that the other ‘Zabas’ found in various publications of the time would have been his relatives, as he is recorded as having been exiled ‘with his four brothers’. A ‘J. Zaba’ is one of the signatories in a letter in the *London Dispatch*, along with Koźmian: Gen. Dwernicki and others, ‘The Polish Exile in England’, *London Dispatch*, 16 October 1836, p. 39. It is possible that this ‘J. Zaba’ was Juliusz, who Napoleon Feliks addresses as his cousin in this letter: ‘List Żaby Napoleona Feliksa do Juliusza Żaby’, PAN Biblioteka Kórnicka, 1863 <<https://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra/publication/247746/edition/218679>> [accessed 26 August 2024].

³⁵ French, and later German, were taught as languages, but not their history or literature. French language appears to have been a regular offering, with the minutes recording Mr Ragon taking over from Mr Pinchen in the September 1836 minutes. German was introduced in 1838 with a new class formed by Dr Michelson. See London Mechanics’ Institution, ‘Minutes’, pp. 366, 381, 418, 430.

³⁶ Godard, p. 195.

³⁷ ‘Advertisements & Notices – The Poles’, ‘Police Intelligence – Monday’, *Morning Chronicle*, 6 November 1838.

³⁸ ‘The Poles’, *The Times*, 1 December 1838, p. 3.

³⁹ *The Scrapbook of Anna Birkbeck*, Birkbeck, University of London, [n.d.], p. 26; ‘The Poles’, *The Times*, 1 December 1838, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *The Scrapbook of Anna Birkbeck*, p. 15.

⁴¹ J. A. Teslar, ‘Unpublished Letters of Adam Czartoryski and Władysław Zamoyski to Lord Dudley C. Stuart and the Earl of Harrowby, 1832–1861’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 29.72 (1950), pp. 153–76 (p. 156).

real change and engendering support in the House of Commons, sometimes even by friends of the association such as Koźmian and Żaba.⁴² They joined a formal committee of Polish exiles in London, the Komitetu Ogółu Emigracji Polskiej w Londynie (General Polish Emigration Committee in London) founded in 1836, and in their first English-language address in the press they condemned that too little had been achieved to advance the Polish cause in Britain. However, they optimistically set out to ‘animate and combine the sympathies of the British nation in behalf of their country [sic]’.⁴³ One reason for this optimism was the influence of British support in a victorious European independence fight in the previous decade — that of the Greeks.

The connection between Polish and Greek independence is embodied in the materiality of the album: Koźmian urges the reader to ‘turn only this page’ to reveal the contribution of ‘a free Greek’, proof that ‘the rights of the Nation are not erased by the age of defeat’.⁴⁴ Overleaf, the album contains entries by Spyridon Trikoupis (in French, untranslated) and, on the previous page, his wife Aikaterini Trikoupis (in Greek, untranslated). At the time of his contribution to the album in 1835, Trikoupis was the Greek ambassador to London, after serving as the first prime minister of the independent Hellenic Kingdom.⁴⁵ His laudatory entry about the ‘great men in wisdom and in patriotism’ populating Britain illuminates another political connection within the album and the Birkbecks’ social circles.⁴⁶ In the 1820s the Greek cause had united many of the same radical, progressive thinkers who were rallying around the Polish cause in the 1830s, and other album entries reveal their continued connections with the family. Another contributor to the album, Leicester Stanhope, fought in Greece and worked on establishing a free press there.⁴⁷ Stanhope was involved with the Greek Committee, which operated from the Crown and Anchor Tavern, where the London Mechanics’ Institution was also founded in the same year in 1823.⁴⁸ John Bowring, also a contributor to the album and already mentioned in relation to his role in the dissemination of Polish literature, was a key figure in both, as one of the founders of the London Mechanics’ Institution and the secretary of the Greek Committee.⁴⁹

⁴² Davies notes that even when the House of Commons was persuaded in July 1833 by representatives of the Literary Association and ‘unanimously passed a vote of censure on Russia’s conduct’, ‘nothing more was done’ (II, p. 242).

⁴³ Dwernicki and others.

⁴⁴ The original reads: ‘Naszey wolności chwila niedaleka! | A praw Narodu wiek klęsk niezaciera’.

⁴⁵ ‘Mission’s History’, *Embassy of Greece in London* <<https://www.mfa.gr/uk/en/the-embassy/history/missions-history.html>> [accessed 27 August 2024].

⁴⁶ *The Album of Anna Birkbeck*, p. 203. The original reads: ‘grands hommes en sagesse et en patriotisme’.

⁴⁷ Leicester Stanhope, ‘Letter of the Hon. Leicester Stanhope to the Editor of Blackwood’s Magazine’, *Oriental Herald and Journal of General Literature*, 7.22 (1825), pp. 113–16.

⁴⁸ Joanna Bourke, *Birkbeck: 200 Years of Radical Learning for Working People* (Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 13–14.

⁴⁹ Gerald Stone, ‘Bowring, Sir John (1792–1872)’, *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004, rev. 2009), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/3087.

The Trikoupis were also connected with another album contributor, Mary Shelley, through Aikaterini's brother and Spyridon's political partner, Alexandros Mavrokordatos. One of the political leaders of the Greek Revolution, Mavrokordatos had taught Mary Shelley Greek and Ancient Greek in Pisa in the early 1820s in exchange for English lessons.⁵⁰ Here too, as with the Polish a decade later, a link was formed between support for the Greek cause and its history and literature. References to Greek mythology are present in Mary Shelley's unpublished poem 'The Death of Love', also included in the album.⁵¹ Percy Shelley dedicated his *Hellas* (1822), inspired by Aeschylus' tragedy *Persae*, to Mavrokordatos, openly discussing the Greek cause in its preface.⁵² Throughout his time in Pisa, Mavrokordatos passed on any news of developments in Greece directly to Mary Shelley, rather than to the men in the Pisa circle.⁵³ The expectation that she would share the news with others does not mean that she was simply the messenger. The emerging nation states of Europe were an arena in which women could be politically active, 'arguing that it was part of a mission to bring liberalism and British values to the emergent new nations'.⁵⁴ Both the Shelleys became increasingly involved with the cause, supporting what has been labelled a 'propaganda campaign' for the British public, orchestrated by Mavrokordatos.⁵⁵ Conversely, Mavrokordatos' movement towards liberalism, distancing himself politically from Russia and turning to Britain, may have been a direct result of the influence of the Shelleys.⁵⁶

Given the numerous connections to the Greek cause, it may seem surprising that the album features a contribution from the Turkish ambassador, Mustafa Reşid Pasha, signing with his title and alternative spelling, Mustapha Rechid Bey, in 1837.⁵⁷ Pasha was on the opposing side to the Greeks the Birkbecks' circle supported in the 1820s, when as a young

⁵⁰ Roderick Beaton, *Byron's War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 68; Maria Schoina, 'Grubbing at "Greek Roots": Mary Shelley's Greek Learning', *Keats-Shelley Review*, 33.1 (2019), pp. 96–109 (p. 99), doi:10.1080/09524142.2019.1611271; George Th. Mavrogordatos, 'The "English Party" in Greece, 1821–1940: From Alexandros Mavrokordatos to Ioannis Metaxas', p. 1 <https://www.academia.edu/2585306/The_English_Party_in_Greece_1821_1940_From_Alexandros_Mavrokordatos_to_Ioannis_Metaxas> [accessed 27 August 2024].

⁵¹ *The Album of Anna Birkbeck*, pp. 189–90. On Shelley, Mavrokordatos, and the Greek cause, see Hilary Fraser's article in this issue of 19.

⁵² Percy B. Shelley, *Hellas, a Lyrical Drama* (Ollier, 1822), pp. v, vii.

⁵³ Beaton, p. 75.

⁵⁴ Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Routledge Research in Gender and History, 15 (Routledge, 2013), p. 129.

⁵⁵ Beaton, p. 72.

⁵⁶ Beaton, p. 78. Another figure connected to many album contributors, as well as to the Greek independence cause, is Byron. He was a fervent supporter of the Greek cause, was in Pisa with the Shelleys at the same time as Mavrokordatos, and corresponded with Bowring, then secretary of the Greek Committee, leading to the launch of the British loan for the Greek war. Zdeněk V. David, 'John Bowring and British Liberalism in the Czech National Awakening', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 86.4 (2008), pp. 634–64 (p. 638), doi:10.1353/see.2008.0058.

⁵⁷ *The Album of Anna Birkbeck*, p. 14.

man he worked in various bureaucratic positions for the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁸ In the preface to *Hellas*, Shelley characterized the Ottomans as ‘Turkish tyrant[s]’ and ‘the enemies of domestic happiness, of Christianity and civilization’.⁵⁹ Album contributor and Greek Committee secretary Bowring spoke of the ‘Turkish yoke’ enslaving Greeks and Serbs in the 1820s.⁶⁰ By the late 1830s, however, it had become possible for members of the Turkish embassy to inscribe their name in the album alongside the Greek ambassador and the many members of the London community who had raged against them just over a decade earlier. This shift in attitudes was reflected by the fact that, in addition to the warm album entry, in June 1837 Pasha received an honorary membership to the London Mechanics’ Institution as ‘a distinguished foreigner and a liberal promoter of the Arts and Sciences’.⁶¹ Pasha may have been more readily welcomed by the circles surrounding the Birkbecks and the institution due to his European education and his commitment to modernizing the Ottoman Empire.⁶² The Turkish ambassador’s bilingual contribution — translated into French — is apolitical and more in line with the stereotypical album entry: a somewhat rote message expressing how flattering it is to be asked to sign his name alongside so many illustrious ones, indicating a less personal acquaintance with Anna Birkbeck and her family than Koźmian. His mere presence, however, shows how the album records shifts in the political associations of the social and professional circles the Birkbecks operated in.

More evidence of these international, interconnected networks and of the links between the literary and the political can be found in two seemingly more typical entries by Italian expats Guido Sorelli and Francesco Paolo Bozzelli. Their contributions are pastoral poems, focusing on sweet promises and idyllic happiness between lovers, rather than on explicitly political content.⁶³ However, when considering the identity of the contributors, their inclusion in 1827 points to the seeds of another international political movement that would gain supporters in the Birkbecks’ London circles. Bozzelli (1786–1864) had been a successful lawyer in Naples before being imprisoned and then exiled following the failed insurrections of 1820–21, going on to spend fifteen years in Paris, London, and Brussels before returning to Italy and taking on a prominent position in the moderate liberal party in Naples.⁶⁴ Sorelli (1796–1847) was

⁵⁸ Racz Attila, ‘Ottoman State Reforms from the Eighteenth Century to the Hatt-i-Sharif of Gulhane’, *Studia Iuridica Auctoritate Universitatis Pecs Publicata*, 150 (2012), pp. 237–50 (pp. 247–48).

⁵⁹ Shelley, p. x.

⁶⁰ David, p. 638.

⁶¹ London Mechanics’ Institution, ‘Minutes’, p. 419.

⁶² Attila, p. 247.

⁶³ *The Album of Anna Birkbeck*, pp. 55, 56, 57.

⁶⁴ Guido D’Agostino, ‘Bozzelli, Francesco Paolo’, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 1971 <[https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-paolo-bozzelli_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-paolo-bozzelli_(Dizionario-Biografico))> [accessed 27 August 2024].

a poet and translator of Milton, Petrarch, and Grillparzer. He left Italy in 1821 having been involved with members of the Carbonari, a revolutionary society advancing liberal ideas, in Florence.⁶⁵ In those same years, Italian poet Ugo Foscolo had aimed to ‘promote his national literature and history as a means to future Italian independence’ with his ‘exile journalism’ during his time in London (1816–27).⁶⁶ Sorelli’s autobiography was published by Rolandi, whose shop became a sort of ‘Italian Library’ acting as a meeting place for Italian exiles in London. Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini was a regular visitor to Rolandi’s shop during his time in London in 1837.⁶⁷ There were links between Polish and Italian insurrectionists too: Polish independence fighters had been introduced to the Italian Carbonari during the Napoleonic Wars in Italy, and some, such as Ludwik Mierosławski (1814–1878), joined the Carbonari, as well as starting a Young Poland (Młoda Polska) in the image of Mazzini’s Young Italy.⁶⁸ At least one of the signatories of the first statement of the Polish Committee in London, Adam Sperczyński, belonged to Młoda Polska.⁶⁹ Mazzini went on to organize the People’s International League, founded in 1847, to represent foreign exiles in London, ‘mainly Italians and Poles’. In its founding year album contributor Bowring became chairman of the International League.⁷⁰ Unlike Koźmian’s and Trikoupis’ contributions, Sorelli’s and Bozzelli’s entries do not feature explicit references to their political causes of national independence. However, by following their trajectories, the album can help reconstruct its contributors’ political networks, revealing the Birkbecks’ interest and involvement in a European network in which international connections were continually being forged.

The complex international networks emerging from an examination of Anna Birkbeck’s album reveal the political range and potential of the album entry. Far from being limited to derivative or superficial contributions, members of the Birkbecks’ circles used the album entry to encourage support for their international political causes and strengthen existing involvement. Poems and messages document shifts

⁶⁵ ‘Carbonari’, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2012 <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Carbonari>> [accessed 27 August 2024]; Di Bello, ‘Mrs Birkbeck’s Album’, p. 6; Thomas Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* (Murray, 1830), p. 407 <<https://www.lordbyron.org/monograph.php?doc=ThMoore.1830&select=AD1821>> [accessed 27 August 2024]; Guido Sorelli, *My Confessions to Silvio Pellico: The Autobiography of Guido Sorelli* (Rolandi, 1836), p. 279.

⁶⁶ Will Bowers, *The Italian Idea: Anglo-Italian Radical Literary Culture, 1815–1823* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 59–60, doi:10.1017/9781108590228.

⁶⁷ Stephen Parkin, ‘Italian Printing in London 1553–1900’, in *Foreign-Language Printing in London, 1500–1900*, ed. by Barry Taylor (British Library, 2002), pp. 133–74 (pp. 165–66).

⁶⁸ Davies, II, pp. 26–27.

⁶⁹ Maria J. E. Copson-Niecko, ‘The Polish Political Emigration in the United States 1831–1864’, *Polish Review*, 19.3–4 (1974), pp. 45–82 (p. 57); Dwernicki and others.

⁷⁰ Parkin, p. 165; David, p. 649.

in political associations and record connections even before they become relevant to the public political sphere. They point to a multilingual community, where certain languages — French, Italian, Greek — are assumed not to need translation, while others do. The bilingual Polish and Turkish entries highlight the importance of language and literature in political and national identity by including native tongues the album reader was not expected to understand. In this way, the album acts as a record of the Birkbecks' varied international networks, hosting politically charged contributions and political inflections of feminine tropes that are enhanced, rather than limited, by the medium of the album.

Appendix

Do Anny Birkbeck

Sonet

Kwiatek wygnańca, pieśń żałobney treści,
Czyż twego wianka smutkiem niezeszpeci?
Edenu wdzięków, szczęścia, sławy dzieci
Błogą go dłonię splotły ku twej cześci.

Kiedyś w nim może ma ręka zamieści
Rożę świetniejszą, gdy Wolność zaświeci,
I ten tu pączek nadziei rozkwieci
Bogactwem życia z zawoiu boleści!

Jego niech chowa twa czuła opieka
Niech nad nim urok wiary rozpościera;
Naszey wolności chwila niedaleka!
A praw Narodu wiek klęsk niezaciera;
Odwroć tę kartę, a wolnego Greka
Dowiedzie imie, że Lud nieumiera!

Londyn 26 Lutego 1837 roku

Stanisław Koźmian

Will not this flower of sorrow, bedewed with the tear of an exile, defile the splendour of the wreath, which in homage to you, has been here woven by daughters of grace and beauty, by sons of bliss and glory?

One day perhaps, when the sun of Liberty shall rise for me again, I may entwine in it a worthier token of remembrance. Then this bud of fond Hope, coiled up in the leaf of sorrow, shall expand into a corolla of exuberant life.

Till then, I entrust it to the guardianship of your generous feelings.

Look on it with hope; smile at it with Faith. The hour of our liberty is near at hand!

Even long ages of misery cannot destroy a nation. You doubt it? Turn only this page, and the name of a free Greek shall tell you that Nations never die!

S.K–Feb–y 26, 1837

Translation

To Anna Birkbeck
Sonnet

A flower of an exile, a mournful song,
Will it not defile your wreath with sadness?
The children of Eden's grace, happiness, and fame
Wove it with a joyful hand in your honour.

Someday, when Freedom shines, maybe my hand
Will fit in it a Rose of more splendour,
And this bud of hope will bloom
With a wealth of life from a wreath of sorrows!

Let your tender care look after it
Let the charm of faith spread over it;
Our time for freedom is near!
And the rights of the Nation are not erased by the age of defeat;
Turn this card over, and a free Greek
Will prove that the People do not die!

London 26 February 1837
Stanisław Koźmian

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