Decisive moments in the development of art, those turning-points in the history of artistic trends, appear in the background of the essential changes in all spheres of life. Of course, these changes have multiple causes, which may be explained by numerous theories and opinions. Artists themselves are the originators of new trends in art, but critics occupy a highly important position in that process. The normal function of critics to interpret and evaluate works of art in order to establish links between the artist and the public, becomes considerably broadened and acquires a special meaning in crucial times. At such moments, critics take on the role of harbingers of a new artistic program, providing theoretical explanations for new phenomena and creative motivations.

More than once, critics have made artists aware of the intrinsic meaning of their art as well as their aims and new perspectives on the further development of art. In societies in which artistic life is relatively undeveloped, critics face even more complicated tasks connected with the specific circumstances within the country. Critics shoulder the entire burden of the fight for new values and, to a great extent, the future of young artists and the success of new art depends on them. The fulfillment of such tasks was the lot of Polish art critics during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

During the period of the Partitions, Poland was not present on any world map. Russified and Germanized Polish society was devoid of its own institutions and was able to express itself with relative freedom only in the domain of the arts. It was through artistic language that the Polish people manifested their will to survive and to regain independence. In that language they also created the vision of a future Poland, from which they derived the strength to continue their battle.

In the middle of the last century, when Romantic literature was in decline and Positivist ideas came into prominence, the attention of ideologists was directed toward painters and sculptors. Applying the same criteria to literary and artistic problems alike, they considered content, as the expression of the

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spirit, to be the only meaningful factor. Art works were judged according to subject matter alone and value was placed on content that inspired patriotic feeling.

These views were voiced at a time when vital new Realist tendencies began to have an influence on Polish art. Young painters began to wonder about the countryside, partly in search of folk motifs, but they were also drawn to the light and color of the open air. During the 1850s, a Polish school of landscape and genre painting emerged that paralleled the Barbizon movement in France. These artists began to take an interest in formal problems and to look for individual means of expression. There was a ripening awareness of the possibility of creating a Polish art with its own distinct character but one which, at the same time, could achieve an international standard. The early efforts of this generation of artists were, however, not well-received, either by the critics or the general public.

Following the failure of the January Uprising of 1863-64 and its aftermath of persecution, there was a resurgence of interest in developing a national art that found its most eloquent form in the history painting of Jan Matejko, who created a magnificent vision of Poland's past which fascinated the nation. During the ensuing period, history painting reigned supreme and a categorical imperative was handed down to painters and sculptors, whereby the sole duty of art was to serve the vital interests of the nation in captivity.¹

Consequently, a difficult dilemma arose for Polish artists, who were obliged to choose between the motherland and art. Matejko offered an unequivocal solution in his famous statement, addressed to the students of the Kraków Academy of Art: "I can not work as I would like. I do not compose and paint in order to achieve what I understand to be the conditions of artistic perfection in painting. I have more important things than that in mind; the expression of a personage or expressiveness of a group is more significant for me than the neatness of a line or beauty of the composition."²

At this time, a new generation of young artists emerged, who had been educated in European academic centers, where they had acquired a knowledge of new tendencies and artistic phenomena. They rejected the ideas of Matejko and turned to purely technical problems. To a great extent, it was these artists who brought about essential changes in Polish artistic life. The program of Naturalist art formulated by them constituted a crucial event in the history of Polish art, which quickened the pace of its evolution. In comparison with other European countries, Romanticism, Naturalism, and Im-

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¹. See Maurycy Mochnacki, "O literaturze polskiej w wieku dziewiętnastym," Biblioteka Narodowa, 56, No. 1 (Kraków, 1928), 46 passim.