Threnody VIII

Orszula! Your death has left a void in our home,
As your lingering afterglow fills each room.
Dear child, our hurt is made worse by the memory
Of the sweet little soul who brought us such joy.

Kochanowski’s lament for the death of his little daughter at
the age of thirty months is eloquent and striking. It reveals a
humanist poet, a learned man, overcome by grief for a daugh-
ter, not only a child, whose social consequence in that era was
small, but a female, whose consequence was smaller yet. To
underscore his pain, the poet chooses (and freely adapts) the
genre of the threnody, for which he must reach into Greek
antiquity.

Margaret L. King
Professor of History Emerita,
Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, CUNY

Although a number of versions of Kochanowski’s Threnodies
have been published in English in recent years, Barry Keane’s
version is undoubtedly the best English translation of this
masterpiece of Polish Renaissance poetry. The accompanying
scholarly commentary only completes this achievement, eluci-
dating as it does the Classical traditions in which Kochanowski
wished to place his most personal work.

Piotr Wilczek,
author of Polish Renaissance Literature (2005),
Professor of the University of Warsaw