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## MEDIEVAL INSPIRATIONS IN CYPRIAN NORWID'S POETRY

In fragment twelve of the poetic treatise *Rzecz o wolności słowa* (*On the Freedom of Speech*) Norwid placed this polemical and ironic stanza:

Bawi mię, gdy dziennikarz albo publicysta  
Klnie średniowieczną ciemność, z której wciąż korzysta.  
Ta ciemnota musiała nieźle być użyta,  
Gdy się jak świeca topi, a przy niej się czyta.  
Ciemnota – która mimo niezgrabne praktyki,  
Stworzyła Arcydzieła – stworzyła J ę z y k i !

[III, 607, 608]<sup>1</sup>

Despite appearances of objective ascertainment suggested by impersonal verb forms, it is difficult not to see the emotional confession, not only “we still read it” but moreover, I, the author, use this light and do it consciously, unlike journalists, who do not think about the tradition in which they are unwittingly submerged. The motifs of “darkness”, “candle” and “reading” have been stressed and connected with the theme of the medieval period. A question

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<sup>1</sup> Cyprian Norwid, *Pisma wszystkie*, ed. by Juliusz W. Gomulicki, v. I-XI, Warszawa 1971-1976. If not marked otherwise, all quotations are from this edition. The Roman number signifies the volume number, the Arabic number the page number.” I am amused when a journalist/curses the Medieval past, which he still makes use of./ This stark ignorance must have been studied avidly/When the candle is almost gone and we still read it./Ignorance, which despite of coarse practises,/Created Masterpieces and created Languages.”

arises: is it a unique association, or maybe reading props were used by Norwid more often to refer to the Middle Ages? Before I try to check it, I will start with the literary and historical retrospection which allows us to present the background for this particular theme.

The medieval motifs in Norwid's poetry are not central and key ones—in contrast, for example with Ancient or Biblical motifs. This secondary importance results in a situation where Norwid scholars select and analyse them either in editorial commentaries or in the context of interpretations of individual texts, and only rarely as a more general theme.<sup>2</sup> The spreading of and certain lack of focus of these motifs in Norwid's poetry may also be the result of the situation that Norwid inherited problems of the Polish reception of the Middle Ages, which had been expressed as early as the literary criticism of the early Romantic period.

Pre-romantics and Romantics from Germany, Britain and France already in their early programme manifestos pointed to the Middle Ages as a primary, fundamental tradition. There were a few reasons for this. Firstly, the opposition to the Enlightenment was stressed, the period during which the heritage of the Middle Ages had been attacked particularly vehemently and when the opinion about the “Dark Centuries” had been strengthened. Moreover, it was part of the attempt to bring a spiritual dimension back to culture, which was connected with pointing to close ties between religion and art, as well as treating both of them as “mirrors which reflect the world of the spirit”. It was also connected with the wish to return to the foundations of European Christian universalism,<sup>3</sup> aesthetic fascination with the Gothic style in architecture and gloomy Gothic motifs in literature, and looking for ethical standards in the attitudes

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<sup>2</sup> Texts on motifs from Dante in Norwid's writings are an exception. C.f. Agnieszka Kuciak, “Norwid wobec Dantego”, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 1996, LXXXVII, (3), 47-59; Agnieszka Kuciak, “Dante romantyków: recepcja «Boskiej Komedii» u Mickiewicza, Słowackiego, Krasińskiego i Norwida”, *Poznań 2003*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf., for example, Novalis *Chrześcijaństwo albo Europa* (trans. by Krystyna Krzemieniowa), win *Manifesty romantyzmu 1790-1830: Anglia, Niemcy, Francja*, ed. by . Alina Kowalczykowa, Warszawa 1995, 209-228.

of knights, wandering artists, hermits, alchemists, etc. Medieval tradition was considered to be a natural expression of the North, which was explained, for example, by the connection between the architecture of Gothic cathedrals with the character of northern forests. The aesthetic qualities which were held in high esteem included: haughtiness, awe, and the gloomy mysteries of the world. All these elements were revealed in the indigenous, mostly Germanic, tradition, or to use a wider term—in the tradition of Goths.

This standard, however, was not perceived as indigenous from the perspective of Polish culture. This was pointed out by Kazimierz Brodziński as well as by his Romantic opponent Maurycy Mochnacki, who in his programme treatise suggested giving up the rule of originality so close to him to start borrowing from the Scandinavians and Germans, because there were not enough strong emotions, frenzy and darkness of medieval mysteries in Polish tradition. He wrote that "the Middle Ages was a truly poetic period in Europe's history. These old walls, these Gothic towers, the ruins of which still cause our amazement, witnesses of political anarchy and violence, were once inhabited by people who used their arms for God, honour and the defence of innocence. The religious enthusiasm exhorted them to actions which we are not capable of in our cold times."<sup>4</sup> The historical peak of this enthusiasm had the form of the Crusades, but in Polish tradition this heroic standard was also somehow diluted: the component of Slavic meekness, understood in Herder's terms, disintegrated the austere and monumental vision of the Middle Ages. The meagre participation of Polish knights in the Crusades did not allow us to treat this experience as a Polish variant of 'the spirit of the Middle Ages', while the term 'order of knights' was associated more with the conflict between Poland and the order of Teutonic

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<sup>4</sup> Maurycy Mochnacki, *O duchu i źródłach poezji w Polsce*, in Idem, *Pisma krytyczne i polityczne*, ed. by Jacek Kubiak, Elżbieta Nowicka, Zbigniew Przychodniak, 1.1, Kraków 1996, s 70.

knights than with the fight for the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> In medieval tradition, and later in Sarmatian tradition, the element of the chivalric code was inextricably connected with the element of the tradition of the landed gentry.<sup>6</sup> Another important aspect was the chronological shift. The period of heroic chivalric fights to defend Christianity and the identity of the political nation happened in Poland in the seventeenth century. The awareness in Polish culture that the chivalric code from the Middle Ages had been realized in Poland in an original way, dawned only in the seventeenth century and was universal at the threshold of Romanticism. For example, Mickiewicz's Gustaw, in the fourth part of *The Forefathers' Eve*, recollected his youthful initiation into literature and history:

And in the woods we'd play at hide and seek.  
 I met Homer and Tasso beneath those trees,  
 And with king John relieved the Viennese.  
 At night, beneath a pagan mood of blood  
 My mates and I fought for the holy Rood.  
 Beyond those hills loomed the Teutonic Knights;  
 Here, I disposed my legions for the flight;  
 Our wooden swords now Polish damascene;  
 We rushed into the fray with wild careen,  
 Thrusting and slashing till on all sides lay  
 Turbans and Turkish heads snipped in the fray;  
 "The field is ours!" victoriously we'd cheer  
 While riderless the Arab steed sped clear.  
 That hill, for us, was where the Muslim tents  
 Were pitched; thence did we chase them. Then, by chance,

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<sup>5</sup> Cf., Janusz Ruskowski, *Adam Mickiewicz i ostatnia krucjata. Studium romantycznego millenaryzmu*, Wrocław 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Zofia Dambek argues that Norwid carefully separated these two themes in Polish tradition and ascribed different values to them: he approved of the chivalric ethos and was critical of the landed gentry (Zofia Dambek, *Cyprian Norwid a tradycje szlacheckie*, Poznań 2012).

She once materialised there to watch our games –  
And gone, like that! were Godfrey, John, St. James.<sup>7</sup>

In the last verse of the quoted fragment the motif of Godfrey, the conqueror of Jerusalem in 1099, the hero of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, is placed next to the figure of the Polish King Jan III Sobieski, the victor from Vienna in 1683, as if the tradition of the medieval knights had ended with the Polish variant six centuries later.<sup>8</sup> There are more examples of the perception by Romantic poets of the seventeenth century as a heroic period. Antoni Malczewski, in order to create a picture of old Poland, placed the plot of *Maria* in historical decorations of this century; Zygmunt Krasiński, after his juvenile experiments with the Gothic, at the beginning of his mature period, in *Agaj-Han*, used the theme of Polish interventions in Moscow in the period 1604-1612. The tradition of king Jan III Sobieski was particularly close to Norwid, who was descended from the king on his mother's side.

However, when Norwid, this late Romantic poet, was introducing chivalric motifs as a component of spiritual autobiography associated with seventeenth-century tradition, it was not in relation to the heroic epic translated by Piotr Kochanowski or to the tradition of the Sobieskis. In the poem "Epos-nasza" ("Epic-ours"), similarly to the fragment by Mickiewicz, the starting point of the poetic reflection is a recollection of his reading as a boy, which made him attached to the idea of chivalry.

Z którego dziejów czytać się uczyłem,  
Rycerzu! – piosnkę zaśpiewam i tobie [I 158]<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Adam Mickiewicz, *Forefathers' Eve*, transl. by Charles S. Kraszewski, Glagoslav Publications, London, 2016, 38//

<sup>8</sup> Seventeenth-century Polish translation by Piotr Kochanowski of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* made chivalric epics popular and it was in accord with the vision of Poland as Christian *antemurale*..

<sup>9</sup> "From whose history I learnt to read,/O Knight!—I will sing a song for You too."

Paradoxically, however, the similarity of the situation makes the differences even more obvious. In Mickiewicz's text an act of reading is only mentioned, the attention of the recollecting 'I' is focused on actions that have resulted from it—playing with colleagues in war, an activity which prepared for future military actions, dreaming of which would be replaced by romantic love, but the trace of which would remain in the boy's experience. Norwid's recollection is focused mostly on the act of reading, and the reading of *Don Quixote* does not lead to the imitation of chivalric deeds in the games he played with his colleagues. The protagonist of this poem is a very literary figure indeed: a gentleman from La Mancha from the book by Miguel Cervantes confronting in his wanderings the ideals taken from chivalric romances with reality. The lyric 'I' is identified with the condition of an errant knight chasing an ideal. The title "Epic-ours" points to some community, some 'we', which is not unambiguous. 'We' is mostly Don Quixote and I—remembering the reading in childhood, but another interpretation is also possible, a generational one, referring to the generations of 'errant cavaliers', sharing with the poet the fate of exiles. Or maybe this community is even wider and extends to all who in the name of old heroic ideals are ready to ignore the real limitations of their own biographical and historical time. None of these interpretations is impossible, and at the same time each interpretation unleashes irony, stressing the deformation of chivalric ideals. Therefore the experience of the medieval values reaches the poet through an act of double mediation—Don Quixote shaped his existence on the basis of chivalric romances, and the lyric 'I' of Norwid's poem follows in the path of the protagonist of Cervantes's novel. This double remove stresses the inaccessibility of the 'spirit of the Middle Ages' accented through the poetic transposition of time into space.

...a my – kawalery **błądne**,  
 Bez giermków, z wstęgą na piersi czerwona,  
 Przez mokre lasy, przez lasy żółędne,  
 Ciągniemy przędzę z dala zaczepioną:

U przekreślonych szyb żelazną kratą,  
U najeżonych bram wściekłą armatą...

[1,160]<sup>10</sup>

Imitation of the past reveals the grotesque and humorous side, but it does not cross out the tragedy of a knight looking for truth. The dissonance between the Middle Ages and the contemporaneity of the nineteenth century, revealed thanks to Gothic metaphors, seems to exclude the possibility of the re-enactment of old cultural ideals. The attempts to repeat them lead to heroic gestures of lonely protagonists but at the same time reveal their opposite side—errantry. In his lectures about Juliusz Słowacki Norwid called Don Quixote “possessed by past things”, (VI, 454) and this expression is filled with both empathy and critical distance.



[Polona, sygn. F.46/SZ.11]

At the same time, however, the mask of an errant knight in the stylizations of the subject of Norwid’s poems turned out to be surprisingly durable. It appeared in different periods of his career, and it was fostered by turbulent political events. Norwid’s historical and philosophical considerations resulted from it. Just before the January uprising of 1863 Norwid wrote a poem, “*Na zapytanie: Czemu w konfederatce? Odpowiedź*” (“*An Answer to the Question: Why in a Confederate’s Cap*”). The very title of the poem pointed to the occasion

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<sup>10</sup> “And we—errant cavaliers,/Without squires, with a red band on the chest,  
Through wet forests, through forests of acorns,/We pull a yarn attached far away,  
Near windows with iron bars,/Near gates with furious cannons...”

which spurred the writing of it, which was explained in Norwid's exchange of letters with Lucja Rautenstrach from the turn of 1862. Norwid added his photo in the confederate cap to one of the letters sent to her in the autumn.

Probably in order to stress his solidarity with participants of political patriotic manifestations which were taking place at that time in Warsaw. He did not receive a reply for a long time, so he asked if his letter had arrived, to which the addressee of the letter angrily expressed her dislike for the way Norwid looked in the photo.

You must know, kind sir, that your first letter of which you are so concerned, reached me all right, and that Romcio [Giedroyć] took this photo from me. I did not defend it very much, as I did not like it. God gave you a brush, a chisel and a pen, but your very posture shows that God did not destine you to be a soldier, and therefore this bellicose countenance in the photo seemed to me like an artistic anomaly—as if someone presented me Dante eating a garlic sausage, or Pygmalion with a shotgun on his back.<sup>11</sup>

Norwid replied to her with a poem, putting this conversation in the context of history and philosophy. In this poem he explained the symbol of a 'confederate hat' worn by Polish insurgents, in which Norwid saw three different levels: of the Piast dynasty, chivalric and Christian:

[...]

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Amarantową włożyłem na skronie Konfederatkę,  
Bo jest to czapka, którą Piast w koronie Miał za podkładkę.

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I nie dbam wcale, że już zapomniano,  
Skąd ona idzie?  
Ani dlaczego spospolitowano Tę rzecz – o! wstydzie.

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<sup>11</sup> *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Cypriana Norwida*, Poznań 2007, v. II: 1861-1883 (Zofia Trojanowiczowa, Elżbieta Lijewska with the help of Małgorzata Pluta), 56.



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A jednak widać, że znam klejnot wielki Rzeczpospolitej,  
Skoro przenoszę ponad wieniec wszelki – Z b a r a n k a w i t y !<sup>12</sup>

The range of symbolic associations evoked may seem to be unclear because of the elliptic character of this poem. In general they suggest that the chivalric ethos and the medieval values are connected with the insurgent moods in Poland. This interpretation is also supported by a fragment from Norwid's letter to Joanna Kuczyńska, in which he commented on his debate with Łucja Rautenschtrauch in this way:

The Lady accused me of not being destined for such a hat [...] – Yes, I am convinced that the wreath made of the Lamb is the brightest of all wreaths! So, if we take the archaeological and symbolic form of this cap, we might claim that Godfrey himself could have worn it.<sup>13</sup>

The name of Godfrey unambiguously pointed to the context of the Christian stance of the knight, in whom Norwid wanted to see the model of the Polish renaissance of independence.

After the disappointment with the developments of the January uprising, the motif of chivalric stylization of the subject was rarer, but it did not disappear completely. However, it was no longer associated with the victorious Godfrey, but more with the loneliness of an errant knight. The lyric 'I' from the poem which opened *Vade-mecum* wanders aimlessly in a space reminiscent of a deserted battlefield, later a cemetery. He keeps on asking how he is to fulfil his call

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<sup>12</sup> Cyprian Norwid, *Na zapytanie: Czemu w konfederatce? Odpowiedź*, I, 369-370. "I put an amaranthine confederate's cap on my head, // Because it is a cap which Piast had as a lining for his crown, // And I do not care that it has been forgotten / Where it came from. / Or why it has been made common, O shame! // But, anyway, you can see that I know the jewel of old Poland's Commonwealth, / As I regard it higher than all other wreaths, / The one of lamb made."

<sup>13</sup> *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Cypriana Norwida*, vol. II, op. cit., 57. The motif of a 'wreath made of lamb' springs from the fact that confederate caps usually had linings made of lamb skins. Cf., Juliusz W. Gomulicki, «*Jak się to pismo niejasne wyklada?*», czyli o wierszu Norwida «*Na zapytanie: Czemu w konfederatce? Odpowiedź*», „*Poezja*” 1983, no. 4/5, 63-75; Robert Waszkiewicz, *Norwid w konfederatce a fotograficzny portret doby powstania styczniowego*, „*Studia Norwidiana*” 1990, no. 8, 109-121.

to reconstruct lost values. In the late poetic letter “Do Bronisława Z.” (“To Bronisław. Z.”) the St. Casimirus alms-house for Poles in the suburbs of Paris was presented as a space marked with traces of a chivalric and monastic past

[...]  
 Look – here and there you see unremarkable walls  
 Enter – it’s late afternoon you might think perhaps  
 You’ve strayed into remnants of the knight’s monastery  
 Somewhere on Malta and here and there through  
 doors ajar  
 You have revealed a rusty sword hung from a wall  
 Or a fierce and melancholy profile  
 Like a shadow of the broken banner at the national funeral,  
 A near-centenarian in a confederate cap  
 Has passed and faded into a corridor as long as  
 nothingness. [...]<sup>14</sup>

The chivalric stylization also influenced the construction of lyric protagonists, particularly of the “contemporary people of integrity”—men in whose deeds Norwid perceived a movement beyond the pragmatism of their own age and traces of the old ethos—such as the poetic representation of general Józef Bem in “a funeral rhapsody”, or emir Abd el-Kader. In this context the lack of poems devoted to historical heroes of the Middle Ages and from the seventeenth century in Poland is surprising. If we look into Norwid’s *Album Orbis*, which was a note-book in which he recorded motifs that fostered his imagination and thinking, it turns out the picture of the Middle Ages is very modest, and, as Piotr Chlebowski, noted, “devoid of internal dynamism and concern.”<sup>15</sup> What dominates is the drawings and illustrations of types of protagonists (knights, saints, praying nuns)

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<sup>14</sup> C.K. Norwid, *Selected Poems*, transl. by Adam Czerniawski, Anvil Press Poetry, London, 2004, 92.

<sup>15</sup> Piotr Chlebowski, *Romantyczna silva rerum. O Norwidowym «Albumie Orbis»*, Lublin 2009, 290.

rather than of individualized heroes. Two figures stand out in this context—Joan of Arc and Savonarola, both of them rejected by their contemporaries. But these two figures were also locked in Norwid's archive of the imagination and did not become literary protagonists, although because of the dramatic shape of their biographies and the way in which their life ended (at the stake) they could have been perceived as attractive in literary terms.

Northrop Frye may have been right when he reconstructed the successive stages of culture in connection with the taxonomy taken from periods of biblical revelation: he perceived the Middle Ages as a period of law and wisdom, although he rejected prophecy as an equal element in religion and culture. Frye wrote:

Medieval Europe had a High King and a High Priest, an Emperor and a Pope, but the distinctively prophetic third force was not recognized. The exceptions prove the rule. The career of Savonarola is again one of martyrdom, and the same is true of Joan of Arc.<sup>16</sup>

Frye went on to show how the process of imitation within the religious space of the freedom of prophecy led to it being shifted to literature. I have quoted Frye not only because he and Norwid pointed to the uniqueness of the same historical people, but to show that Frye's opinion corresponds with Norwid's intuition about the role of nineteenth-century poets, most fully expressed in his lectures on Juliusz Słowacki. "The serious service" of poets directed to revive the epic tradition in history and literature would have to be a synthesis of prophetic words, chivalry and Christian universalism. It could join Romantic prophecies and actions with medieval ideals. Norwid saw the beginning of the fulfilling of these postulates when he wrote:

A poet walks in the direction of Belvedere with a bayonet, later O'Connell and Lamartine wrote their poems, later Mickiewicz acted

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<sup>16</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, Arc Paperbacks, London, 1983, 128

in Italy, and then Ludvik Kossuth ended the same epic poem which started in Missolongi.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, in the poems written during this period Norwid undermined this historical and philosophical hope. A poem entitled “Autor nieznaný” (“An Unknown Author”) could be read as a symptom of lack of hope; its archaic lyric situation, stylized to look like a poetic tournament, reveals the defeat of all the competing minstrels. The sceptical distance also prevails in Norwid’s most ‘Gothic’ poem, entitled “Memento”. The grandeur of old architecture and the pathos of the symbols connected with it are here juxtaposed with trivial signs of presences left by tourists of the nineteenth century. This ironic confrontation suggests a negative answer to the question about the possibility of the continuity of the great ideals of the past.<sup>18</sup> However, this was not the last word of Norwid in this context: the search for paths to return to chivalric attitudes returned in the wake of the January uprising. It was strongly voiced in such poems as “Sariusz” (“Sarius”) and “Do wroga” (“To an Enemy”), in his letters and memorials. However, after the defeat of the uprising Norwid once again adopted a pessimistic outlook. In a letter to Marian Sokołowski dated 6 February 1864, Norwid defined his position: “It is so nice to grumble at Europe that it does not start a crusade, it is really so nice, *but the unity of Catholicism and humanitarianism should not have been broken by Pantheons of nations*”. (IX, 129) So, Norwid thought that without Christian universalism there was not a chance for the past to return in the form of the idea creatively shaping contemporaneity.

Norwid was fascinated by the Middle Ages and he frequently returned in his writings to the idea of referring to some of the values of this period. It was a theme susceptible to the rhythm of political

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<sup>17</sup> Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim w sześciu publicznych posiedzeniach, Lekcja II*, VI, 421.

<sup>18</sup> Cf., The interpretation of this poem in: Krzysztof Trybuś, «Memento» Norwida – kilka uwag, in *Rozjaśnianie ciemności. Studia i szkice o Norwidzie*, ed. by Jacek Brzozowski and Barbara Stelmaszczyk, Kraków 2002, 111-123.

events, and that is why it shows well Norwid's hesitations; that is why we can observe the tides and ebbs of his application of medieval motifs. So is it true that in his writings we can discover some medieval pieces but no attempts to create a poetic world set in this period? Not quite—Norwid tackled such an artistic task several times.

The poetic creation of the Slavonic Middle Ages appeared in his writings at the turn of the 1840s. It consisted of the worlds of three early dramas: *Zwolon*, *Wanda* and *Krakus*. After his return from America in 1854 Norwid did not attempt to create any more such holistic literary pictures located at the border of fairy tales and the beginnings of history.

This requires some explanation if we want to treat these three texts as a (perhaps unintended) trilogy. *Zwolon* has usually been analysed as a parabolic picture of the Polish political situation in the nineteenth century and a parable of the defeat of successive uprisings. Yes, but this parabolic costume—the foundation of great metaphors—was constructed according to the standard of a fairy tale full of medieval props. It is stage directions which show it: a king and a queen have their residence in a castle surrounded by a wall. People gather on a square "under various banners", next to a Gothic church, and courtly etiquette is enacted, associated with medieval society. The stylization of the poetic words in this drama is not, however, uniform: Norwid used realia from different periods, mixed events and places, added intertextual allusions to Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, Krasiński's *Un-Divine Comedy*, Słowacki's *Balladyna* to poetic novels (first of all to Malczewski's *Maria*). The purpose of all this seems to be to stress the fact that the concrete historical processes are repeatable and universal, and can set the rhythm of events anytime and anywhere.

The situation is different in *Wanda* and in *Krakus*. It is connected with the 'fairy-tale' history of Poland, taken from the old Polish chronicles and re-interpreted in an original way. The most obvious source here is Wincenty Kadłubek's *Kronika polska* (*The Polish Chronicle*). Kadłubek's chronicles and Norwid's dramas have many thematic and plot similarities, while the sacral, haughty construction of *Wanda* as the protagonist and the dialogic form of the chronicle

may have influenced Norwid. However, this was not the only source. A long time ago Zenon Przesmycki pointed at the complexity of literary and non-literary inspirations which could be found in both dramas:

[...] when it comes to these strangely lively, colourful, clear pictures of the “beginnings of the nation”, to this pre-history of the Polish nation full of character, to this simple language, blunt but dignified in a Homeric fashion, to these thoroughly indigenous freedom of rhymes—[...] we should go back in the search for inspirations and influences to Norwid’s wanderings in Poland in 1842 with an experienced ‘pilgrim’—Władysław Wężyk. It was then that the young poet must have been struck by folk tales, historical traces, architecture, old monastic libraries, all these “bones sticking out of fields” (“Wspomnienie wioski” (A Recollection of a Village)). This is supported by a motto placed on the manuscript of *Wanda* and a story by A. Czajkowski about ‘a wonderful poem’ which Norwid read in count’s Leon Łubieński’s place after the return from the trip. We learn about the nature of this pilgrimage from the fragment of *Pamiętnik podróży* (*A Memoir of the Trip*), which Norwid wrote in 1857: “This year I travelled around Poland. There were two of us: the late Władzio Wężyk and I. We had with us several dozen books on history, chronicles and memoirs. In this way written words on history got directly intertwined with unwritten words [...]”<sup>19</sup>

So the sources of these dramas were: parallel reading of books and of Poland’s landscapes. The title page of *Wanda* offers a strong argument for such a claim. The drama was dedicated by Norwid to “Wanda’s Grave near Kraków”, while the motto was taken from Wespazjan Kochowski’s poem “Góra Łysa” (“The Mount Łysa”) It is characteristic that through the paraphrase of Kochowski’s quotation Norwid committed a literary mystification and obliterated the source::

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<sup>19</sup> Zenon Przesmycki, footnotes in : Cyprian Norwid, *Pisma zebrane*, v. C: *Pism dramatycznych dział pierwszy*, Warszawa – Kraków 1911, 425.

Tak kościół trzyma, że gdy Pan umierał,  
Na PÓŁNOC, głowę skłoniwszy, pozierał,  
Na Oliwnej Górze dziwnej  
Kończąc mękę, skłaniał rękę  
Ku – PÓŁNOCNYM LUDZIOM...

Stara Pieśń  
(Przepisana z książki w klasztorze  
na Górze Świętokrzyskiej  
w puszczy)<sup>20</sup>

The obliteration of an author and pointing to the place and circumstances of finding the quotation allowed him to move the motto into a more removed past than the seventeenth century, and the creation of the suggestion that the message of the drama grew out of old, anonymous tradition which revealed the spirit of the community.

Both dramas are also connected by the fact that they are mystery plays. They are mysteries of the beginning, showing how Slavic space and history are penetrated with God's Words, and how people are initiated into history. This process is fulfilled through the completion of the primordial Slavic spirituality with Christian tradition, and its importance is sensed and activated by the eponymous characters: Wanda, who feels metaphysical unease connected with the conviction of the lack of some undefined but important dimension of life, and Krakus, intuitively fulfilling the call of God's man, conquering evil in himself and in the world. A fairy-tale-like dragon becomes in Norwid's drama the symbol of evil, while the rivalry of brothers and Rakuz's fratricide has references in the biblical story of Cain, and foretells the presence of both moral poles in the future history of the nation.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 125. "The Church says that when the Lord was dying,/He was looking in the direction of the NORTH,/On this strange Olive Mount,/When his sufferings were ending, he gestured with his hand,/In the direction of the NORTHERN PEOPLE. "An Old Tale" (Re-written from a book in the monastery on the Mount of the Holy Cross in the forest)"

These remarks also show the differences between *Zwolon* on the one hand and *Wanda* and *Krakus* on the other. In what way, therefore, can we look at these plays as a dramatic triptych connected with some medieval thread? Such a thread, present in all three dramas and at the same time a factor determining their ideological message, is the idea of the word “zwolon”, derived from the interpretation of the phrase from “Bogurodzica” (“The Mother of God” („Matko zwolena Maryja”). The motifs of this mediaeval song appear in all three dramas: it was from there that the name of the eponymous character of *Zwolon* was taken. In the scene in the churchyard in this drama we have the juxtaposition of two choirs. One starts the song of revenge; the other breaks in with “The Mother of God”. The motifs of Mary appear in *Krakus* in the story of the Old Man—a hermit, to whom the sons of Krak come for advice. There are many allusions to these motifs in *Wanda*..

The idea from *Zwolon*, harmonization of the fate of the nation with the will of God, connects all three dramas. These dramas, based on fairy-tale motifs, illustrate the appearance of this idea at the beginning of the national history, while *Zwolon* points to the fragile continuity despite threats of history. Such a strong gesture of the grounding of Polish tradition in the message taken from the medieval song was never to be repeated in later Norwid’s poetry, but it returned in his discursive texts, most intensively in «Boga-Rodzica» pieśń ze stanowiska historyczno-literackiego odczytana” (““The Mother of God”; the Song Analysed from Historical and Literary Perspectives”). There, once again Norwid considered “The Mother of God”, a song sung by Medieval knights, as a source of ‘the Polish epic’ understood in terms of philology and history. This medieval hymn was for Norwid to be both the ‘book’ to read, and the ‘candle’ lighting the sense of national history.