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WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT NORWID'S LYRIC POETRY? SOME REMARKS ON THE WAYS OF READING NORWID

Norwid wrote in the introduction to *Kleopatra i Cezar (Cleopatra and Caesar)*

Blank verse is far more difficult to write than rhyming verse, because it is bound not only in one point at the end, but in the whole length of a verse. An unbound poem requires much more correctness than a bound one.¹

I start by reminding that Norwid was much concerned with the fact that poetry should be organized in an exquisite way, even in such spots when rhymes and 'primary' rhythms no longer hold, and that it should have its unique shape of individual literary tropes and—what is obvious—a set of grammatical and linguistic norms. And even when they hold, they do so in a manner so transformed that an original shape cannot be recognized. Ireneusz Opacki was probably such a twentieth century literary scholar, whose views on these issues seem to be closest to Norwid's. Opacki claimed in his introduction to the interpretation of Słowacki's poetry (whose lyricism is particularly hard to define) that the reality of poetry "is a discipline of strict imagination."² While Norwid, particularly in the last quoted

¹ All quotations from Norwid come from : Cyprian Norwid, *Pisma wszystkie*. ed. by v. I-XI, Warszawa 1971-1976; here: V, 9-10.

² I. Opacki, „W środku niebokręga”. Poezja romantycznych przełomów, *Katowice* 1995, 8.

sentence, when he claimed that “an unbound poem requires much more correctness than a bound one“ stressed the extraordinary congruency of poems and the rules governing this congruency.

When I claim that I want to talk on “what we know about Norwid’s lyric poetry”, I do not, of course, intend to quote the results of huge research, which has lasted almost a century and which has led to a certain transparency of themes which appear in Norwid’s lyric poetry, has specified the genres he uses, has connected themes of poems with events from Norwid’s life, has fulfilled an empty field of historical and literary contexts (for example: Norwid and the first wave of Romanticism, Norwid and positivist tendencies), and has reconstructed the vision of man present in his poetry, and the anthropological dimension of his writings (to use contemporary lingo).

There are excellent works within the areas I have drawn, which are still topical and valid, and we may assume that they will be still alive for many decades to come. There also exist less fortunate studies, but their sheer presence is good for Norwid studies as they draw borders of observations and findings, so that we have much better knowledge about the directions which might be taken and such directions which should not be threaded on under any circumstances. With a long time perspective we see, for example, that the great severity of Waław Borowy in treating Roman Zrębowicz was refreshing for the method employed³, but that at the same it occluded at times the precious intuitions of Zrębowicz about the nature of Norwid’s poetry.

The late, expressively intelligent works of Wiesław Rzońca, not always accurate in their final conclusions, showed even more emphatically how strong was Norwid’s inner ‘constans’, not susceptible to any methodological ‘attempts’.⁴

³ See, for example, W. Borowy, *Norwidiana 1921-1924*, in *O Norwidzie. Rozprawy i notatki*, Warszawa 1960, 99-100.

⁴ See, for example, W. Rzońca, *Norwid poeta pisma. Próba dekonstrukcji dzieła*, Warszawa 1995.

The formalist and structuralist revolution in literary studies, which was connected with a substantial improvement of reading poetry in general, created certain possibilities for Norwid scholars as well. A monographic work of Zdzisław Łapiński⁵ used these possibilities in an indirect way, and so did interpretations from the volume by Stanisław Makowski entitled *Cypriana Norwida kształt prawdy i miłości* (*Cyprian Norwid's Shape of Truth and Love*),⁶ and also, quite recently, Aleksandra Okopień-Stawińska reading of the poem "Jak" ("How") in *Teksty Drugie*.⁷

However, in the plethora of commentaries of individual Norwid poems,⁸ which competently use new methodological achievements, we can discern a certain inadequacy; a certain "poetic difference", which remains beyond interpreters' reach.

At times this is a key difference which hides the sophisticated and fundamental senses of a given poem.

Here, I refer to a situation when a scholar deals in detail with the parabolic aspects of a poem, its versification, generic complexities, historical and literary circumstances, and even with a very detailed analysis of meanings with the philosophical tools employed. We all remember the brilliant analysis "Fortepian Szopena" ("Chopin's Pianoforte:) by Władysław Stróżewski; this reflexive focus on each individual word, deepening of the interpretation with revealing bundles of meanings, showing off an unusual sensibility to the musical dimension of the poem.⁹ But ultimately we must admit, if we have ever attempted our own reading of this poem, that this is the distinguished analysis of a philosopher, who reactivated mostly meanings, a very

⁵ Z. Łapiński, *Norwid*, Kraków 1971

⁶ *Cypriana Norwida Kształt prawdy i miłości. Analizy i interpretacje*, ed. by St. Makowski, Warszawa 1986

⁷ A. Okopień-Stawińska, *Semantyczna strategia zamilczenia (Przypadek, „Jak...” Cypriana Norwida)*, „Teksty Drugie” 2000 no. 5.

⁸ Collected in: *Bibliografia interpretacji wierszy Norwida*, ed. by A. Cedro, P. Chlebowski, J. Fert Lublin 2001

⁹ W. Stróżewski, *Doskonale – wypełnienie. O „Fortepianie Szopena” Cypriana Norwida*, in *Istnienie i wartość*, Kraków 1981.

important analysis if we connect it with what literary scholars have already written about this poem, (for example T. Makowiecki)¹⁰ but this analysis leaves us with the impression of a certain want, despite the interpreter's attempts to see the whole in an integral way—something is missing. And again, I am not concerned here with the banal experience that the words of a poem cannot be transformed into a discourse. I am concerned here with the fact that something else could be transformed here into the so called language of scholarly description, that there exists a further chain of the described reality of the poem that requires research effort and intuition (which maybe requires not being burdened by any sort of methodology) which projects the horizon of intentions.

Let us move on to the concrete things:
 Jak gdy kto ciśnie w oczy człowiekowi
 Garścią fijołków i nic mu nie powie...
 Jak gdy akacją z wolna zakołysze,
 By woń, podobna jutrzennemu ranu,
 Z kwiaty białymi na białe klawisze
 Otworzonego padła fortepianu.

(II, 82)¹¹

This is a fragment of a well-known whole, and I want to respect this whole. Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska begins her analysis of the poem from “the idea of silence as an element and a stimulator of speech”, and she asks: “what has been said and what remains silent?” and answers that the poem “is based on the schema of an unfulfilled simile, in which the first part of the simile appears four times, while the second part remains silent.”¹²

¹⁰ T. Makowiecki, „*Fortepian Szopena*”, in *O Norwidzie pięć studiów*, Toruń 1949.

¹¹ “How when one throws a man/With a handful of violets and will tell him nothing.../How when one slowly shakes an acacia,/So that the scent similar to a dawn,/With white flowers onto white keys/of an open grand piano fell.”

¹² A. Okopień-Sławińska, *Semantyczna strategia zamilczenia...*, op. cit., 31-32.

The whole of Okopień-Sławińska's further actions, returning rhythmically from time to time to Norwid's text, to large extent, however, remain on the level of some macro-structures, and are subordinated to a defined, extra textual idea (the semantic strategy of poetic silence) rather than to a lyric communicate itself. "Silencing" is one of the elements of this poem. The first two lines, so important aesthetically, here are dealt with in the following way:

Throwing violets at someone is a charming gesture of quarrel. Here, however, we have the case of throwing in the eyes [...] a handful of violets, which is a more aggressive gesture, provocative and maybe not quite friendly and jocular. We are not certain of that, even more so because of the lack of any verbal explanation.¹³

Okopień-Sławińska wrote a brilliant analysis, but when we look at this analysis closely we see that she moves to the interpretative order (the rhythm of her conduct) too quickly, taking into account only a certain framework of the lyric event. For example: "To throw" ("rzucić") is not synonymous with "to pitch" ("cisnąć"), and if in the commentary we skip this subtle difference, some truth about the poem will remain uncovered (which includes both the vehemence of this expression and the emotional-traditional weight of this word, and what is more, some boldness of the gesture combined with an unusual delicacy—present at the level of appearances). The fundamental modelling of meanings in this opening fragment is influenced by two points connected with meanings and appearances: "Pitch" and "a handful of violets". On the other hand, "will tell him nothing" has no clear level of 'appearance', or it is very small.

While "the lack of words" and this great spot under specification is stressed here through resonance modified (strengthened) by the rhyme. And what is the outcome of these remarks? Among other things, the characteristic quality, aesthetically valent—as Ingarden would have said—is also created in connection with the perceptive apparatus of a reader and, in a way, frees him/her from caring about

¹³ Ibid., 34.

‘who’, ‘for what purpose’ and ‘why’; it does not force a reader to focus on a huge, white field of under-specification, but on a suggestion (impression) connected with what has been said. And what has been said? He, the protagonist of the poem, (similarly to a reader) has not heard anything, “he has not been told anything”, so his helplessness, his powerlessness, ultimately sum up a certain quality close to sadness.

In this way we have approached the category of the lyric “I”, central to lyric poetry and its radiation, that is sending “emotional threads” onto the whole text.

Danuta Zamaćńska brilliantly expressed this with the intuition which allowed her to avoid the pitfall:

Norwid [...] having said all that was necessary using the method of a poet—added: “[...] but I will tell him nothing—because I am so sad”. How come you say, “will tell him nothing” asks a reader. “After all, you have said so much, and I see from the very first line that you are so sad!”¹⁴

Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska commented on it, not quite agreeing with this description of this Norwid poem:

The problem is that the task with which the speaker has been confronted has not been a persistent expression of one’s sorrow, but trying to express emotions which are inexpressible.¹⁵

These two research approaches are not mutually exclusive. The difference is that Danuta Zamaćńska stays close to the poem. Her interpretative judgment is the result of the creation of an appropriate research distance being the result of the radiation, which can be estimated, of the whole Norwid text. While Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska begins and ends the analysis using the category of inexpressibility, which is not quite suitable for this poem,

¹⁴ D. Zamaćńska, *Słynne- nieznanne. Wiersze późne Mickiewicza, Słowackiego, Norwida*, Lublin 1985, 81

¹⁵ A. Okopień-Sławińska, *Semantyczna strategia...*, op. cit., 38.

the category which is derived from meanings, which are not quite the type of meanings present in the poem.

There exists a valuable text by Roman Ingarden about the artistic functions of language, in which Ingarden, a philosopher and a unique expert on lyric poetry, showed the play of aesthetic values in the invocation to *Pan Tadeusz*.¹⁶ We are basically concerned with one thing, of course indirectly, of how a structuralist barrier can be overcome (this may sound a bit paradoxical), and we may move on further, that is move on deeper in the recognition of a literary text; of language organized artistically.

Ingarden's sketch is concerned with a certain part of textual reality (artistic texts), as there exist extra-linguistic components of a work of literature. Ingarden wrote:

It does not mean that there exists a lack of studies of and on language of literary works [...]. The key issue is that in the case of reading a work in the aesthetic mode there appear certain values, which in themselves are not elements or moments of linguistic entities, but the presence of which in the whole of a work—mostly in the layer of represented objects and appearances—make them fundamental to the aesthetic value of the work [...] The problem is that after realizing which types of values appear in a given work, we should ask a question: which properties or entities of language are responsible for their appearing in a given work?¹⁷

And elsewhere he wrote:

At the bottom of this attempt [the construction of a new perspective of research on the artistic functions of language] there lies the conviction that aesthetically important values really appear in the aesthetic concretization of literary works of art, and that they play a great role in revealing aesthetic values in individual works.¹⁸

¹⁶ R. Ingarden, *Funkcje artystyczne języka*, in Idem, *Studia z estetyki*, vol. III, Warszawa 1970.

¹⁷ Ibid., 316-317.

¹⁸ Ibid., 318.

And now Ingarden's key opinion about research attitudes which exclude a similar approach to an artistically organized text.

[Such researchers] treat the appearing of aesthetically important values in the same manner in which in theory of information the so called 'rumbling' or 'buzz' are treated: they are disregarded. In a way, it makes research in literature easier, but at the same time it means that everything that is poetic, which makes them works of art, is omitted.¹⁹

At this point Ingarden entered territory most crucial for a historian of literature: he dealt with the problem of the differentiation of literary works, and of the individual personalities reflected in works of art. The search for the deep specificity of texts of culture is, on the whole, in the centre of the cognitive process.

However, this issue is connected with the fundamental receptive attitude; with the areas in which the process of 'concretization' is realized. Wiesław Juszczak, in his sketches written over the last few years, has introduced quite a radical theme connected with theory of art reception: he claims that 'reception' (dialogue, communication) does not exist, that it is only a creative act we can deal with when we consider the moment of meeting with a work of art.²⁰ Therefore, a creative attitude, the reader's sensitivity, would be a gauge for assessment of reading. It should be added in the margin that Juszczak's proposal is similar to certain ideas presented by Norwid in *Promethidion*.

Who has read Norwid's lyric poetry in this manner? I will elide many researchers and will concentrate on, in my opinion, the clearest cases.

Manfred Kridl was, to a large extent, such a reader; a scholar much concerned with Norwid's miniatures. And Waław Borowy, a commentator and a connoisseur, an author of an excellent anthology of Norwid's poetry, Zofia Szmydtowa, as the author of the introduction

¹⁹ Ibid., 319.

²⁰ See, for example, W. Juszczak, *Fragmety*, Warszawa 1995, 45-46.

to *Liryka romantyczna (Romantic Lyric Poetry)*.²¹ Stefan Szuman in his analysis of poetic miniatures.²² Czesław Zgorzelski who, as is known, was not a Norwid scholar, but whose short passage about the holistic perception of Norwid's poetry is a deep synthesis, which was the result of the creative act of perception and the projected search for uniqueness in this poetry.²³ I would also include here Ireneusz Opacki, who, as is known from private conversations with him, did not like Norwid, but whose interpretations of "*Bema pamięci żałobny rapsod*" ("*A Funeral Rhapsody in Memory of General Bem*")²⁴ or the poem "*Czemu*" ("*Why?*")²⁵ have not been equalled in the sharpness of his perception of the tiniest elements of Norwid's poetic skills and precision in unravelling of what is most elusive, but nevertheless present in a given poem.

And finally, a sketch by Danuta Zamącińska, perverse but sophisticated and well argued in terms of literary studies, "*O poznawaniu poezji Norwida*" ("*On Getting Acquainted with Norwid's Poetry*")²⁶

And the controversial (for many) research method of Marian Maciejewski (his sketch about Malczewski and Norwid)²⁷ and his interpretation of the poems "*Fatum*" and "*W Weronie*" ("*In Verona*"). I will not comment on the 'peaks' of his analyses, on the sphere, which we have been used to call 'theological', which has provoked opinions

²¹ Z. Szmydtowa, *Liryka romantyczna*, Warszawa 1947

²² S. Szuman, *O kunszcie i istocie poezji lirycznej*, Toruń 1948, 57-58.

²³ Cz. Zgorzelski, *Liryczność poezji romantycznej*, in *Zarysy i szkice literackie*, Warszawa 1988, 25.

²⁴ I. Opacki, *Rapsod ostatni, rapsod pierwszy*, in Idem, „*W środku niebokręga*”. *Poezja romantycznych przełomów*, Katowice 1995

²⁵ I. Opacki, *Poezja romantycznych przełomów*, Wrocław 1972, 53- 56

²⁶ See footnote 14.

²⁷ M. Maciejewski, *Spojrzenie „w górę” i „wokół” (Norwid – Malczewski)*, in Idem, *Poetyka. Gatunek – obraz. W kręgu poezji romantycznej*, Wrocław 1977; M. Maciejewski, *Norwida Fatum ukrzyżowane*, [w:] tegoż, „*ażeby ciało powróciło w słowo*”. *Próba kerygmaticznej interpretacji literatury*, Lublin 1991; M. Maciejewski, *Norwidowskie „łagodne oko błękitu”*, in *Liryka Cypriana Norwida*, ed. by P. Chlebowski, W. Toruń, Lublin 2003.

about over-interpretation. I would like to focus on Maciejewski concern with ‘between the lines’, functionally presented, which reveal Norwid’s poems as works of art. Maciejewski’s method allowed us to define in a perceptive and adequate manner the specificity of Norwid’s poetry. Let us look at one sentence:

This lyric poetry is based on the compositional rule of attempting to reach for truth, to reveal it from the power of darkness, the traces of which can be found in rough syntax, unequal rhythm, scientific metaphors...²⁸

The just proportions of meanings in this synthesis, the appropriateness of short statements, revealing whole strings of processes present in this poetry, testify to such a reading of Norwid, which sheds light on the artistic intricacies of a work of art and leads to its depth.

So, what does the phrase “to read Norwid mean”? It means to perceive lyric poetry as a work of art, and to scramble through it, at times not avoiding mistakes, to reach areas, hard (or impossible) to pinpoint for such disciplines as history, grammar, linguistics; to search for what is unique in this poetry, because it seems that this is a spot when the lyric ‘I’ and a reader can meet, where ‘the interpersonal exchange’ takes place.

So, what do we know about Norwid’s lyric poetry? We know what we have been told about their wanderings deep into this poetry conducted by the most competent readers, those who set new roads and signal us to follow them.

²⁸ M. Maciejewski, entry *Liryka. Romantyzm*, in *Literatura polska. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, ed. by J. Krzyżanowski et al, Warszawa 1984, 577.