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## NORWID'S ITALY AS A WHOLE (PROBLEMS OF THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS)

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*Czarne kwiaty* (*Black Flowers*), one of the best known and most exquisite artistic texts of Norwid, at the very beginning has a very undemonstratively suggestive picture. The narrator-protagonist visits Stefan Witwicki, who has reached the end of his life. The ill and almost motionless man, as Norwid wrote:

[...] posunął mi po ziemi leżącą przy kanapie pomarańczę [...] [PWsz VI, 177<sup>1</sup>]

This situation happened in Rome in 1847, when Norwid, a young traveller, a pilgrim-traveller, was entering for the first time into the richness of the treasures of the Apennine Peninsula; unusual landscapes and history materialized; also the history and contemporaneity of Christianity and its cultural stamps. And it was in this spot that an orange “rolling on the floor” in his direction had such an impact upon him that it dominated and in a sense thwarted the dominant dark mood of the sketch. This orange, from the opening part as if lights the sphere of vision, introduces special charm, interplaying with the understating senses, and co-operates with the huge space of reality, signed by residually articulated facts.

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<sup>1</sup> Quotation from Norwid's writings from the edition: Cyprian Norwid, *Pisma wszystkie*, zebrał, tekst ustalił, ed. by Juliusz W. Gomulicki, v. I–XI, Warszawa 1971–1976; then PWsz, a Roman number – a volume number, an Arabic number – a page number. “[...]He rolled towards me on the floor an orange lying near a couch.

An orange is a symbol of innocence, eternal love, life. Sometimes it is associated with the sun, defined as “a golden apple”—as dictionaries of symbols inform us—given to someone, it ensures success and luck. When offered as a gift by someone who gives with great effort and as if in the “last gesture” of the ending life, it signifies the unusual character of a message and a wish, a union between the two meeting people, and also oscillates murkily in the direction of the objectified “eternal being”, life, never ending friendship and—I am afraid to use this word in the context of today’s anthropological deformations of meanings—of love.

Whether Norwid could have thought in terms of such symbols is not particularly important; an orange exists here in this way, and its presence has this effect upon the structure and meaning of the whole text.<sup>2</sup>

Persian oranges, sour ones, were brought to Italy in the eleventh century. They appeared rarely and were used as medicine. Sweet oranges were brought to Europe by Italian merchants around 1500, and although a bit later the biggest orange groves were in Portugal, for Norwid they were concretely and privately connected with his South—meaning with Italy. In the Warsaw of his youth they were not, we might assume, common, so we may expect many reasons why they were connected in his imagination with Italy and its culture.

An orange appeared in a few other important poems by Norwid, for example in a poem written in 1861:

And that *despatch* ... it says what... ? A sugared drink?  
Or perhaps an orange?... ‘In Greece -  
Locusts - on Cyprus a village slipped over the brink -  
Adelina Patti’s singing in ‘*The Golden Fleece*’ -  
I see the orange’s from Malta - it’s very sweet.’  
‘Have another...’

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<sup>2</sup> Elżbieta Dąbrowicz wrote about oranges and their role in Norwid’s writings in her paper: *Strona Norwida. Studia i szkice ofiarowane Profesorowi Stefanowi Sawickiemu*, ed. by Piotr Chlebowski [et al.], Lublin 2008; however my goal, functions and profile here are very different.

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...and how is Despotism in defeat?

["The Last Despotism", l. 8–14]<sup>3</sup>

We have a very different character of the poem from the earlier picture from *Black Flowers*. It is artistically distinguished and clearly shows an ironic stance towards the 'parlour culture' which interplays in the poem with the recalling of an orange—a symbol of quite concrete meaning—the sharpness of the existential and moralistic dimension of the poem is blunted, there appears bareness and reduction of the axiological dimension of life. There are many oranges in this poem, and each of them seems to contradict the symbol of "eternal love". We observe here a "reversed" role of a symbol (this term was used once to call key phenomena in Norwid's writing by Ewangelina Skalińska).

We also find an orange—just one—in probably the most artistically important poem from the last phase of Norwid's writings "To Bronisław Z."

But now *the end* draws near; *the moral* and the baskets  
Swiftly cleared, as oranges, nimbly caught  
By hands failing to grip the fruit's full rotundity  
Enlarge their rarity, size and worth./  
Happiness, you see, my dear – exists, so does Poland –  
And Humanity  
Take the oranges as proof...hasn't Newton's apple  
Taught us significant truths...?) There's also art's  
essential strength,  
Alive when able to idealize the here and now [...]

["To Bronisław Z. l. 79-86]<sup>4</sup>

This fragment, particularly in connection with Witwicki's orange, gives a definite fullness. While "The Last Despotism", as

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<sup>3</sup> Cyprian Kamil Norwid, *Selected Poems*, trans. by Adam Czerniawski, Anvil Press Poetry, London, 2004, 80.

<sup>4</sup> Cyprian Kamil Norwid, *Selected Poems*, op. cit., 93-94.

if in the manner of point counter point, makes these oranges from the first and last of the referred to fragments clearer and allows us to catch their holistic sense.

An orange moved with the rest of the strength and “oranges nimbly caught/By hands failing to grip the fruit’s full rotundity” are connected by symbolic and real values—“moving towards”, while the words about “rarity, size and worth” point towards the author’s imagination, within which these fruits of the South had an important place.

It is characteristic that the poem “To Bronisław Z.”, a late masterpiece of Norwid, connects both the mature and simple—in the context of Norwid’s earlier troubles with ‘others’—relationship to people<sup>5</sup> and also existentially conclusive, in the context of earlier writings of Norwid and his convictions about the nature of art.

His judgement about it was different than in the aesthetics thought contemporary to Norwid and slightly before him; it was more profound and at the same time simpler. An orange—“Newton’s apple”—acquiring a symbolic rule, or law—is connected with the opinion of Mickiewicz, fundamental in this poem, transformed into his own poem:

[...] Today, a master-craftsman sees not, lacks the Insight  
To note the bearing and expression of a convent-sister  
*When, having received the Sacrament, she leaves the altar  
steps*  
*That’s where the sources are!* That, I recall, is how the author of ‘Dziady’  
spoke to me.

[To Bronisław Z. l. 21–24]<sup>6</sup>

An orange, lighting Norwid’s space of poetic worlds, a detail connected in his brain with a very specific culture, with a symbolic

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<sup>5</sup> I wrote about this problem in Bernadetta Kuczera-Chachulska, *Norwida «przypowieść o pięknie» i inne szkice z pogranicza genologii i estetyki*, Warszawa 2008, 119–135.

<sup>6</sup> Cyprian Kamil Norwid, *Selected Poems*, op. cit., 91.

and material weight; in a pictorial and discursive manner it explicates, integrates important—maybe the most important—elements of his reflections and lyric fascinations. It creates a fusion of the anthropological and philosophical (aesthetic) and maybe—in an indirect way—theological interests of Norwid. Norwid's aesthetics did not exist without his special theology, and vice versa: his theology was, to a large degree, determined by his reflections on art. I think that it would not be a case of overuse to call it 'theological aesthetics'.

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**(generalizing intermezzo)**

This term (theological aesthetics) was taken, of course, from Hans Urs von Balthasar. The inspiration of his works has allowed me to become aware of some (important) features of Norwid's writings; to formulate the problem, which is clearly constituted in Norwid's writings, and more precisely in his writings on Italy, its culture, its resonance: real and metaphorical.

What matters here is a non-accidental encounter of two problems:

1) Awareness of Norwid's strongly Christ-oriented vision of the world (if we take into consideration the memory of readers' experience and all that has been written on 'religious' or 'theological' Norwid)<sup>7</sup> creates in a reader of Hans Urs von Balthasar's texts feelings of—let us call them—a certain lack: why Haman, Solovjov, Hopkins, Péguy but not Norwid? Obviously, this objection is not well founded if we take into consideration the situation of the Polish language and Polish culture in Europe, but how well founded if we take into consideration Norwid's writings.

The theological vision of Norwid was holistic and systematic, although he himself questioned the latter,<sup>8</sup> and extremely perceptive,

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<sup>7</sup> It is enough to recollect texts of Rev. Antoni Dunajski and numerous treatises of Stefan Sawicki. Besides, it seems that most commentaries on Norwid's writings have to deal, in some way, with Christian theology.

<sup>8</sup> Mostly in *Milzeniu* (PWSz VI, 226).

on the verges of orthodoxy, which were blurred at times (See, for example, Stefan Sawicki *Zmarchwywanie historyczne* (*Historical Resurrection*)). Hans Urs von Balthasar tried to present how humanity experienced that in Christian revelation it had been given 'God's glory' to behold. The the goal he set himself was to "show the fullness of this experience:"<sup>9</sup>

[...] only beautiful theology, that is the kind which is inspired by *gloria Dei*, is capable of radiating it continuously and has a chance to influence man's history in a way which is convincing and which transforms humanity[...] <sup>10</sup>

Revelation becomes a powerful analogy to the beauty of the world. Balthasar also stressed the power of theology through literature <sup>11</sup> and the realization of what is ethical and spiritual in the aesthetic dimension. He wrote: "The choice of these theologies and visions of the world—disregarding their great importance—was made according to the power of their historical influence".<sup>12</sup> So, is it not possible to look at Norwid from our time perspective as one of the primordial (the deepest, most basic) theological influences on John Paul II? As some invisible domino affecting contemporary theological thought?

2) Norwid's theology connected into one with his thinking about man; it places aesthetics in the same holistic perspective understanding of art and beauty. Art is the highest of all human activities, the highest duty of man. In Norwid's mind, this art, geographically and historically, was connected with Italy (and its experience). Norwid's art might be seen as a great area, a certain map of issues, pictures, themes, placed over a great plain. And on this map in a non-symmetric and non-systematic way we could glimpse places,

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<sup>9</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, op. cit., v. 2: *Modele teologiczne*, part I: *Od Ireneusza do Bonawentury*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, op. cit., v. 1: *Kontemplacja postaci*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, op. cit., t. 2, op. cit., s. 9.

which are 'Italy'. Italy was for him not so much the background as the foundation, a kind of clearance.

This concept of clearance allows us to better understand these problems and order them. Norwid's anthropological and theological expression may appear to be 'systemic', although it is not a system; it may appear 'holistic' although it constructs only on a fragment. And Italy was such a radiating fragment in Norwid's writings.

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We detect in Norwid's writings certain details, props, pictures which—if we were to read him less holistically—would seem to testify and mean provisionally, in the specific reading of the texts; it is only in the intertextual perspectives that these pictures evoke more fundamental senses. They create something akin to "figures of wholeness"—as I have tried to refer to them.

Certainly an orange, "Newton's apple", creates such "a figure of wholeness", but also, as we can judge from the representation of the situation with Witwicki, a figure of "eternal love". Because it may be that Norwid, who was generally so reticent, particularly in the case of love, with his reference to pictures of Italy, opened up this theme in a camouflaged and thrifty way. Maybe "figures of wholeness" allow, in this case, for making this theme stronger?

Love, understood generally but also in the very concrete way, was the theme of one of Norwid's finest lyric poems, moving with its meanings both towards the distant past and the distant future; and directly connected with Italy. I have in mind his powerful lyric poem "W Weronie ("In Verona"). It is one of the best known lyric poems in Polish poetry, and it has been interpreted in two contrastive ways, although both of them purport to be holistic: by Teresa Kostkiewiczowa and Marian Maciejewski.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, «W Weronie», w: *Cypriana Norwida kształt prawdy i miłości. Analizy i interpretacje*, ed. by Stanisław Makowski, Warszawa 1986; Marian Maciejewski, *Norwidowskie «łagodne oko błękitu»*, in *Liryka Cypriana Norwida*, ed. by Piotr Chlebowski, Włodzimierz Toruń, Lublin 2003. See also Adam Cedro,

The problems of its internal complexities still seem to be open. Here I would like to concentrate on some chosen issues, connected with the subsequent case of a “figure of wholeness”. I quote the poem:

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Above the house of Capulets and Montague,  
Thunder moved, washed in dew.  
Heaven’s gentle eye –

2

Looks on ruins of hostile city-states,  
On broken garden gates,  
And casts a star from on high –

3

It is for Juliet, cypresses whisper,  
For Romeo that tear  
Seeps through the tomb;

4

But men say knowingly and mock,  
That was no tear but a rock,  
Awaited by none!

[“In Verona”]<sup>14</sup>

The poem was most certainly written during Norwid’s second sojourn in Italy in 1847-1849 (the last edition of the poem is dated c.a. 1873). The author’s footnote bears this information: “In Verona, on a night of a very old year, written by a servant.”<sup>15</sup> Gomulicki’s list of different manuscripts and autographs informs us about several untitled autographs of the poem, while the first published edition based on the authorized copy of the autograph, included in a text

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Piotr Chlebowski, Józef Fert, *Bibliografia interpretacji wierszy Cypriana Norwida*, Lublin 2001, 48–49.

<sup>14</sup> Cyprian Kamil Norwid, *Selected Poems*, op. cit., 59.

<sup>15</sup> See. Juliusz W. Gomulicki, *Metryki i objaśnienia*, in *PWsz* II, 380.



of the comedy *Noc 1002* (*The Night 1002*), was entitled "Improwizacja w Castel-Fermo pod Weroną" ("Improvisation in Castel-Fermo near Verona") and was published by "Dziennik Literacki" in 1867. Another published version was entitled: "Nad grobem Julii Capulleti w Weronie" ("Over the Grave of Julia Capulleti in Verona").<sup>16</sup>

All this points to possibilities of a very wide interpretative context of this poem. Norwid was not concerned—as we might assume—with limiting senses radiating from such strongly marked poetic events, clear and strong metaphors and symbols of the text. So if we were to closely read it again, taking into account the most creative and clarifying interpretations of this poem, we might see this overwhelming dimension of its meanings, maybe the central place of this poem in the "theological aesthetics" of the poet.

And one more digression: von Balthasar took seriously Dante's artistic-theological proposals: focusing on simultaneously earthly and eternal love for a woman; in the starting moment of this theology he pointed to the triple character of Dante's thought: 1) reflection on his own personality; 2) on his own fate' and 3) on "Eros"<sup>17</sup> ("A Christian does not have to reject finite love for infinite love, but in a positive way, brings his finite love to the other one"),<sup>18</sup> and as he had commented earlier:

He [Dante] was a synthesis of scholasticism and mysticism, ancient tradition and Christianity, the sacred idea of a Kingdom and Franciscan-spiritual Church, and in a manner even more surprising, he is a synthesis of the world of courtly love as presented in medieval courtly poetry [...]. In a sense Dante seems to belong to those great medieval builders of cathedrals, with whom ethics and aesthetics were connected, and they supported themselves mutually for the last time.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 380–381.

<sup>17</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, op. cit., v. 2: *Modele teologiczne*, v. II: *Od Dantego do Péguy*, . 25.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 34.

But, regardless of the manner in which Dante's integration might be considered, there is always in it an excess of what is summed up.<sup>19</sup>

If we follow this analogy: Norwid's writing was a huge cultural and intellectual synthesis; at the same time it was not syncretic; which means that there did not appear elements put together in a manner similar to the one done elsewhere, but it was the case of the original thinking creating a whole, which is located in a very different place. This is also the case of the content of the poem "In Verona", which, embedded in the contexts of Norwid's writings, relying to a certain extent on Dante's theology of love, eventually moved it into a different place.

It is characteristic that this time Norwid's theology originated in Verona, and relied on Shakespearean tradition, although ultimately it entered into a hidden opposition with Shakespeare. What we are dealing with here is not an aesthetics filled with events bloody in dramatic conclusions, but with "heaven's gentle eye". This is a result of the transfer of the perspective of seeing into eternity.

This poem appears in the circle of poetry so clearly Christ-centred. The fact of the Incarnation is the centre and the most important perspective of Norwid's writings. The aura, radiating into eternity, of this distinguished poem was placed in such a specific poetic whole. We could note, slightly on the margin, that Dante, whom Norwid translated extensively and in whom he was much interested, was also perceived by him as an artist and thinker, who was close to philosophical problems. Norwid noted:

[Dante] not only became the godfather of his own language, but he was also a translator of *theological* language and the creator of a political language.<sup>20</sup> [Emphasis – B.K.Ch.]

Norwid's creative thinking and his ideas about human love are strongly connected with God's love; their union was founded on

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 14–15.

<sup>20</sup> Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim w sześciu publicznych posiedzeniach (z dodatkiem rozbioru «Balladyny»*, PWsz VI, 412.

holistically considered tradition (remote and immediate at the same time), which had, to a large extent, an effect upon the power of Norwid's aesthetics.

"In Verona" is the poem in which we find, even during the first reading, the stability of words. The aesthetic perception of this miniature masterpiece allows us to experience the highest binding of words in a multi-layered and growing network of the poem's structure and in the labyrinth of its lyric complexity. I understand 'binding' here as the unmovable appropriateness of the artistic solution, but also—maybe to a bigger extent—an impression, eluding attempts of more specific names, of the immovability of the world, this reality, which is brought to life by subsequent poetic formulae. This same remark holds true—in greater detail—to subsequent pictures, lyric determinations, which remain in inverse proportion to the ambiguity of the poetic message. Therefore, we have on the one hand the power, weight and clarity of a poetic communicate and on the other, blurred meanings radiating from such an attitude.

This is both the contrast, crucial for the expression of the poem, and also the stability of the 'foundation' offering a chance to catch the subtle and hidden sense.

The most important semantic opposition of the poem confronts cypresses and people, who construct a clear community with the pseudo-rational old man from Mickiewicz's "Romantyczność" ("Romanticism"), and they are on the side of "fragmentary" knowledge. The cypress is a symbol of farewell, parting; it immortalizes the past (in a way it also catches it, rules over it), but—as dictionaries tell us again—primordially a cypress was a sign of a flame, fire, the connotations of which are, after all, so obvious—and equally obviously related with the future (fire as love). Therefore, the cypress is holistic, particularly in the context of human knowledge; it is also a certain genological trope, a signature of elegiac attitudes. Considering the role it takes in this poem, we may refer to some 'meta-elegy' covering smaller, human elegies: individual, more or less accidental partings, partings not immortalized in Shakespeare's model of love, some "global theme", "historical androgyny", meta-rule.

On the side of “people”, the ones who “speak”, we find a picture of the world characterized by a lack of goals (“awaited by none”), some kind of stopped disintegration; stones fall “just like it”. In a way the theme is suspended, with no indication of its direction. The other picture is found in the poem according to the rule of logical opposition: because, after all, we have a tear (feeling, empathy); after all, someone is waiting; we have clear, although subtly expressed defiance of the lack of goals, arbitrariness and randomness; the exclamation which ends the poem is an expression, if we take into consideration the whole, of regret—perhaps—of hidden pain, but in the context of the whole poem—as if momentary, provisional, contingent.

Because those who speak about this poem as experts know the least, the cypress—knows clearly more, while the whole is dominated, by “heaven’s gentle eye”, introduced at the beginning of the poem, knowing the most. Maybe it is omniscient. This Great Narrator of history, whose attribute, an eye (metaphorical? symbolic?), is defined by an epithet ‘gentle’. Marian Maciejewski, in his interpretation of this poem, while commenting on ‘heaven’s gentle eye, introduced theological context (“God looking down on earth with “heaven’s gentle eye” is the God of goodness and love, and that is why he sends a star, which is a tear of kenotic cognition, forgiveness and saving absolution. So say cypresses, trees of death, but also of poetry).<sup>21</sup> This interpretation was strongly opposed and treated as an over-interpretation, while from today’s perspective we should stress its novelty and incisiveness.. The language of theology, exhausted by good and bad preaching—will often be critically perceived by a discipline which leads to a sublimation of oral and written expression. Maciejewski’s commentary seems to be—particularly in the context of all of Norwid’s writings—very precise and to the point. It distinguishes the different senses of the poem.

This Italian poem is a specific epicentre of Norwid’s theological aesthetics. It is a summing up of ideas about human love, which in the artistic and poetic creation reveals its oneness with Eternal

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<sup>21</sup> Marian Maciejewski, *op. cit.*, 38.

Love. After all, here we also have a dialectic of sacrifice in the form of the death of Romeo and Juliet.

This topic, as I have mentioned before, can be better understood in the context of Italian themes. And the next elements: the sky (heaven), "thunder moved and washed in dew", a landscape after a thunderstorm—maybe a brief one—is enriched by a rainbow, which is a possibility which has not been fulfilled, although thinking about the interpretative field may, but does not have to, refer to this absent rainbow.

Norwid's rainbow, in a literal way as well as in the title, appeared in a poem written in 1860, "Tęcza" ("A Rainbow"). Its text consists of three parts. The first one is full of digressions to his own writings in the context of the greatest Polish poetry (Kochanowski, Mickiewicz, Krasiński, Słowacki); the second is devoted to the Ancient of Days and the story of salvation with a theological conclusion; definitely reminiscent of the highest level of meanings included in "In Verona":

Gniew Jego nawet woła na człowieka:  
„Sieroto!  
Ojciec ojców na ciebie czeka”.

[PWSz I, 310, l. 61-63]<sup>22</sup>

The third part refers directly to the poem "In Verona":

A ludzie?... ludzi legenda jest inną;  
Tę – w ziemi laurów, za Werony bramą,  
Słyszałem – ówdzie stała się już gminną,  
Gdy indziej Szekspir swą rozniósł ją dramą,  
I każdy dzisiaj wie – ze słów poety,  
Kto Montekowie są, kto Kapulety...

Zamków dwóch gruzy powyłamywanych  
Po obu stronach sterczały przede mną,

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<sup>22</sup> "His anger even cries to man"/"An orphan!/the father of fathers is waiting for you in heaven."

Jako jędz dwojga kły nieprzejednanych;  
W powietrzu ciężko było – w górze ciemno

[PWsz I, 310, w. 64-73]<sup>23</sup>

The further part of the poem continues with the quiet, special tone of merging with the poem “In Verona”, in lyrically mellowed drama:

Lecz w chwili właśnie, gdy już, już mniemałem,  
Że burza wielkim uderzy nawałem,  
Góry – że echa gromowe rozjęczą,  
Ironii jakaś siła niezgadniona  
Zamków dwóch szczyty... uwieńczyła – Tęczą!  
A jam pomyślił: tu – kłamie i ona!...

Czyż łatwiej, łatwiej, planetę zwaśnioną  
Zeswoić z Tęczą Twórcy rozjaśnioną,  
Lub upiąć w niebie gwiazdy nowej kłamrą,  
Niż serca ludzi – wpierw, nim ludzie zamrą?!

[PWsz I, 311, w. 80-89]<sup>24</sup>

The gentle eye of the Creator takes quicker, pre-emptive actions. The Great Narrator of Norwid is a Great Waiter; a merciful rainbow shows his mellowness. Norwid-theologian here met Norwid-observer, Norwid experiencing the world and its people, with no illusions in his historiography, and with his special, unique (different from other Romantics) providential character (because of his Christ-centrism and because of the Incarnation). Burdened with this matter (body)—as

<sup>23</sup> “And people? People’s legend is different/The one – in the land of laurels, behind Verona’s gate,/I heard – there it became common./Elsewhere Shakespeare made it famous with his drama,/And today, everyone knows – from the words of the poet,/Who are Montagues and who are Capulets.../Broken ruins of two castles/I saw on both sides, in front of me,/As fangs of two tough witches/The air was sluggish/Upstairs it was dark.”

<sup>24</sup> “But in the moment when I thought,/That a thunderstorm would fiercely strike,/That echoes will whine in the mountains,/The rainbow connected two tops of the castles./And I thought: it lies as well?/Is it easier, easier the feuding planet connect with the Creator’s lit rainbow [...] /Than hearts of people – before they die?!”

a poet he used words of drama, for sure, words of despair—perhaps; despair which, going down from the theological figure of a rainbow, is transformed into three final, rhetorical lines.

This ending in the sense of rhetoric and semantics is almost identical to the final lines of "Coś ty Atenom zrobił, Sokratesie." ("What Have you Done to Athens, Socrates") (where—after all—Dante also appeared) and is also identical with the closings of the subsequent stanzas of this poem.

The part of knowledge (revelation) and the part of experience do not come together as one on the level of human, lyric experiencing of the world in Norwid's poetry. In the Italian poems of Norwid the element of Balthasar's "glory", beauty of God which is revealed in the world, is particularly well seen. The beauty revealed in the world, in the idea and the concept of art, which is the "highest of crafts", shows God's meekness and pity for the world—a rainbow appears, after all in *Promethidion*, in the introduction to this long poem, close to the greetings of gladiators in a Roman circus (*Morituri te salutant, Veritas...*):

O! sztuko – Wiecznej tęczo Jeruzalem,  
Tyś jest przymierza łukiem – po potopach  
Historii – tobie gdy ofiary palem,  
Wraz się jagnięta pasą na okopach...

[PWsz III, 427–428, w. 11–14]<sup>25</sup>

And so on, with the intensive focus on strong, poetic words:

Ty – wtedy skrzydła roztaczasz złoczone,  
W świątyni Pańskiej oknach, szyb kolorem,  
Jakby litanie cicho skrysztalone,  
[...]

[l. 15–17]<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "O art! – Jerusalem of eternal rainbow,/You are the arch of the Covenant – after deluges/Of history—to you when with the pole of sacrifice,/Lambs together graze in trenches."

<sup>26</sup> "You – then spread golden wings,/In the windows of God's temple, with coloured glass/As quietly crystallized litanies [...]"

But—as we remember—there is also drama in the rhetorical endings of “A Rainbow” and in other poems.

The figure of wholeness implied by a rainbow includes important elements of theological aesthetic characteristics for Dante, but it also exceeds him.

Exceeds him in the focus on Christ and the rainbow arch of mercy: the pictures of Witwicki giving a symbolic orange and signs of heaven, a mellow eye of the blue, are almost symmetrical.

The survey of Norwid’s writings from the perspective of various Italian contexts shows how strongly and often they were his inspirations, pretexts, important fields for imagination and reflection. Many of his poems might be interpreted in this manner; we can see that underneath them such place names as Florence, Pompeii or Rome, had been written. These poems often contain elements of theological ideas, or ideas criss-crossing theology, aesthetics and cultural reflections. Particularly the proximity of Rome, real or remembered, forced Norwid to embark on such themes as: Christian martyrdom in “Amen”, “Psalm wigilii” (“Psalm of Christmas Eve”), “Dwa męczeństwa” (“Two Martyrdoms”), “Legenda” (“Legend”), and “W albumie” (“In an Album”). Moreover, we have poems like “Królestwo” (“Kingdom”), “Spartakus” (“Spartacus”), and “Spowiedź” (“Confession”): numerous mottos referring to the history of Christian martyrdom.

There is also a poem entitled “Do władcy Rzymu” (“To a Ruler of Rome”), so differently, than for example Słowacki’s “Rome”, synthesising the lyric formula about the ‘historical sense’ of the Eternal City:

Bo cóż Chrystusa byłoby Koturnem  
Ziemijskim? – jeśli nie – Rzym!

[PWsz I, 343, w. 23–24]<sup>27</sup>

Or the sense of the union of Christian Italy with the rest of Europe and with Poland in “Do Pani na Korczewie”: (“To the Lady of Korczew”):

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<sup>27</sup> “What, if not Rome,/Would be Christ’s earthly platform?”



Bo z starej Padwy i z Bolonii małej,  
Z Rzymu ogromów,  
Przenieśli Ojce wiecznej odłam skały  
W posadę domów.

[PWsz I, 351–352, l. 33–36]<sup>28</sup>

Italy also appeared in an ironical manner in Norwid's thinking, for example in "Powieść" ("A Novel") from *Vade-mecum*.

I – jako w Danta piekle narodowym  
(Więcej tokańskim niż stara Florencia!)

[PWsz II, 57, w. 27–28]<sup>29</sup>

Italy also discretely organized a theme of great people: Mark Aurelius, Trajan, saint Paul, Cicero (for example in "Do wielmożnej Pani I." ("To a Grand Lady I."))

Cicero, rękę wzniosłszy nad zamęt ludowy,  
Głosił:

„że... przyjdzie człowiek, w boleści i chwale,  
Sprawiedliwy – i przez to w koronie cierniowej”.

[PWsz II, 206, l. 3–6]<sup>30</sup>

For Norwid, the experience of Italy was often an opportunity to show his Christianity-centred attitude. He also used the theme of art to do so. Also, the art of words and particularly of his original aesthetics. So, he translated Dante and Tasso, and his understanding of the latter can be seen in "Italiam! Italiam!"

Płyn – a nie wróćże mi z żalem  
Od tych laurów tam różowych,

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<sup>28</sup> "Because from old Padua and small Bologna,/From grand Rome,/The fathers brought a piece of eternal rock,/Into the foundations of houses.

<sup>29</sup> "And – as in Dante's national hell/(more Tuscan than old Florence!)"

<sup>30</sup> "Cicero, having raised his hand on the common's tumult,/Said: that a man will come in pain and glory.../Just and therefore in the crown of thorns."

Gdzie Tass śpiewał Jeruzalem  
[...]

[PWsz I, 77, w. 9–11]<sup>31</sup>

This “Jerusalem” in this poem is not only a synecdoche of all Tasso’s writings, whose traces Norwid follows in *Janiculum* (Norwid made himself a little paper knife out of the bark of an oak under which Tasso would sit).

It seems, however, that over Norwid’s vision, lyrical and theological at the same time, it is the expression of “In Verona” which pervades, in the same manner as its aura pervades the whole of *Vade-mecum*. The problem of love, also perceived theologically, together with Dante, makes us also think about *Promethidion*, a lyric treatise about art, beauty and love; it could not have been written about references to Italian antiquity, references of a personal nature, experienced in direct contact with Italy.

The Christian tradition, Dante, ntiquity, focus on Christianity and personal experiences combined in Norwid’s lyric poetry to form a great, intellectually cohesive whole. A whole which is the result of constant dialectic tension because of what is holistic and what is partial; because Italy was this great fragment in Norwid’s writing, through which Norwid saw the whole; the whole of anthropological issues, entering through aesthetics, in the field of deeply conceived theology, modern and profound. Even if it remained closed to the most distinguished minds of our period (Hans Urs von Balthasar).

And one more remark: it is difficult not to agree with the claim that Norwid was a poet of the South, but the experience of the South in his writings was transformed by a creative spirit of the North (for example, the existential and ontological dissonances in the ending of “In Verona” and in “A Rainbow” referred to earlier), and only thus strengthened and constructed the meaning of the whole.

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<sup>31</sup> “Go, and don’t return to me with regret/From those pink laurels/Where Tasso sang of Jerusalem.”