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NORWID AND CONTEMPORARY POETRY: A STYLISTIC SKETCH

My paper has been inspired by a valuable text written by Stefan Stawicki entitled “Z zagadnień semantyki poetyckiej Norwida” (“On Norwid’s Poetic Semantics”).¹ Stawicki stated in it that “Norwid’s poetics, particularly his poetic semantics, brings to mind contemporary poetry, particularly the type we call ‘poezja lingwistyczna’ (‘linguistic poetry’) and its forerunners.”² So, he recalled the overcoming of semantic tensions in the poetry of Przyboś, and the revealing of inadequacies of the linguistic system and ‘de-semantization’ of language in the poetry of Tymoteusz Karpowicz, and the playing with words by Tadeusz Nowak.

My experience in this field is the result of my research which I have undertaken over the last few years on the style of a few distinguished contemporary poets: Miłosz, Herbert, Szymborska, and Różewicz.³ Earlier, I researched textual-stylistic relations existing between Norwid’s poetry and Polish Romantic and post-Romantic poetry.⁴

We must remember that any stylistic comparisons within such prolific and thematically varied output as Norwid’s poetry and

¹ Published in S. Sawicki *Norwida walka z formą*, Warszawa 1986

² *Ibid.*, 40.

³ T. Skubalanka, *Język poezji Czesława Miłosza*, *Lublin 2006*; *Eadem*, *Sztuka poetycka Czesława Miłosza*, *Lublin 2007*; *Eadem*, *Herbert, Szymborska, Różewicz. Studia stylistyczne*, *Lublin 2008*; *Eadem*, *Styl poetycki Zbigniewa Herberta*, „*Stylistyka*” XVII, 2008.

⁴ T. Skubalanka, *Styl poezji Norwida na tle tradycji poetyckiej romantyzmu*, in *Eadem*, *Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Norwid*, *Lublin 1985*.

the poetry of the above-mentioned poets must take into account the diversity of stylistic phenomena based in texts in relation to various factors: theme, literary genre, concept of a described protagonist, mode of poetic narration, time of plot and other features of an author's poetics. Therefore, the generalizations which we may come up with must be formulated with sufficient caution and limited to relatively certain remarks.

This problem has been lately raised by Danuta Zamaćńska, who has challenged the argument of the exclusiveness of intellectual elements in Norwid's poetry.⁵ Zamaćńska stated that there exists "violent emotionality in some texts based on the example of some poems, such as "Czemu" ("Why") and the poem known under the title "Pierwszy list, co do mnie doszedł z Europy" ("The First Letter that Reached Me from Europe"). Some of Norwid's texts really have open, direct descriptions of conveyed emotions. Here are some examples:⁶

I jak smutno było mi dokoła.

(Epos nasza, 29)⁷

Ból, spieka, gorycz i marsz drogą krętą.

(Ibid 30)⁸

Aż pękło serce jak organ zepsuty

(Pierwszy list..., 37)⁹

For yet another thing I long

("My Song [II])"¹⁰

Yes I am proud, unkempt

And my love, brother, has to winds

⁵ D. Zamaćńska, *Słynne-nieznane. Wiersze późne Mickiewicza, Słowackiego, Norwida, Lublin 1985.*

⁶ All quotations in Polish from: Cyprian Norwid, *ed. by J. W. Gomulicki, Warszawa 1973, abbreviation: Pwp*

⁷ "And how sad I was all around" ("Our Epic", 29)

⁸ "Pain, parches, bitterness and march on a curvy path" (ibid, 30)

⁹ "Till the heart broke, as a busted organ." ("The First Letter...", 37)

¹⁰ C.K. Norwid, *Poems, Letters, Drawings*, transl. by Jerzy Peterkiewicz, Carcanet, Manchester, 2004, 28.

For adoration and contempt.

("Do not call me to a humble folk-song")¹¹

I was grieved.¹²

Many more examples could be given. Such open representation of one's emotions turns out to be typical for many Romantic poets, including Słowacki, whereas Mickiewicz was not consistent in this respect. On the one hand, in one of the Lausanne lyric poems he wrote: "I open a window and cry", but in *Pan Tadeusz* he also used descriptive techniques.

He wrote about the "longing soul", but at the same time he admitted that he had "only one such (wonderful) spring in his life." The direct naming of emotions described here would not really be accepted by contemporary poets. Herbert often used ancient allegories, while Szymborska used in such cases the 'lyric of the mask', describing emotions through intermediaries, one of whom was a lonely cat in an empty flat, or the fictional character of a jester, the *alter ego* of the lyric 'I'. Let us then quote fragments from the poem entitled "Cień" ("Shadow")

My shadow is a fool whose feelings
are often hurt by his routine
of rising up behind his queen
to bump his silly head on ceilings. [...]
My jester took on nothing less
than royal gestures' shamelessness, [...]
I'll stay serene, won' feel a thing,
yes, I will turn my head away
after I say good-bye, my king,
at railway station N., some day.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 30.,

¹² Cyprjan Norwid, "Vade mecum" in *Poems*, transl. by Danuta Borchartd, Archipelago Books, New York, 2001, 17.

¹³ Quatations from this source : W. Szymborska, *Wiersze wybrane*, , Kraków 2004, abbreviation Ww.

Tadeusz Różewicz, on the other hand, described emotions through demonstrations of certain behaviours, and these behaviours were called indexes—linguistic indicators; that is signs denoting an object in an act of deixis. Through such an index a poet is able to make a reader realize the sense of the phenomenon s/he describes. And so, for example, in the poem entitled “Odwiedziny” (“A Visit”) there is a description of the behaviour of the lyric ‘I’ experiencing—as might be supposed—deep shock at the sight of the hair of his interlocutor, presumably cut off during the stay in a concentration camp:

‘Don’t look at me like that
she said
I stroke the cropped hair
with my rough hand
‘they cut my hair’ she says
‘look what they’ve done to me’. [...]

why does she stare like that
I think well I must go
I say a little too loudly

and I leave her,
a lump in my throat.

(“A Visit”)¹⁴

The following phenomena become indexes: speaking too loud, tightened throat (although it is more like a symptom), leaving a room.

But simultaneously with the open expression of experienced emotions we encounter in Norwid’s poetry, more contemporary ways of expressing them, for example, we find a similar use of the poetics of gesture with a comment, similar to Różewicz’s indexes:

Tam króluj, Ty! lecz ja usiędę w mroku,
Zarzuć płaszcz na smętne moje czoło,

¹⁴ Tadeusz Różewicz, *They Came to See a Poet: Selected Poems*, transl. by Adam Czerniawski, Anvil Press, London, 2011, 45.

Podslucham w tonach myśl jak grom w obłoku,
A ty graj wciąż i niech tańczą wokoło...

(*Słuchacz Pwp*, 137)¹⁵

Another lyric technique of toning down an expression is the use of substitution, so common in Miłosz's poetry:

A day so happy,
Fog lifted early, I worked in the garden
Hummingbirds were stopping over honeysuckle flowers,
There was no thing on earth I wanted to possess.¹⁶

In such a treatment it is not an experiencing man, but the day which is happy, and the language is poor. Mechanisms of substitution are fundamental for so called indirect lyric poetry, objectified, examples of which may also be found in Norwid's poetry, for example in the poem "In Verona":

But the people say, and they say it with learning,
These are not tears but stones returning,
And no one waits and waves!¹⁷

Tears as indicators of emotions were contrasted here semantically with stones—indexes of insensitivity without pointing to an experiencing person. It should be stated in the margin that the negative connotations of stones have been regularly used by Herbert, who, for example while writing about his return from abroad, used the phrase "stony bosom/of his homeland".¹⁸

¹⁵ "Over there, you reign! And I will sit aside in gloom./I will put a coat over my sad forehead,/I will overhear in tones a thought as if a thunder in a cloud,/And you, play with no stop and let them dance around..."

¹⁶ Cz. Miłosz, *The Collected Poems 1931-1987*, Viking, London, 250.(this poem was translated by Czesław Miłosz himself)

¹⁷ C.K. Norwid, *Poems, Letters, Drawings*, op. cit., 50.

¹⁸ Zbigniew Herbert, "Mr. Cogito—the Return" in *Report from the Besieged City and Other Poems*, transl. by John Carpenter and Bogdana Carpenter, Oxford University, Press, 1987, 14.

A contemporary poet can neutralize drastic aspects of the descriptions of some traumatic experiences by lowering pathos through the introduction of some common or primitive element contrasted with the solemn mood of a given moment. This is the case of one of Herbert's poems dealing with suffering:

All attempts to remove
the so-called cup of bitterness-[...]
failed [...]
forcing at last
with silly tricks
a faint
smile.¹⁹

The introduction in the parenthesis of the name symbolizing suffering.

Tadeusz Różewicz, in the poem entitled "Brama" ("A Gate"), presents a situation in which a visitor to a cemetery speaks with grave-diggers:

za tą bramą
nie będzie historii:
ani dobra ani poezji
a co będzie nieznamy panie?
będą kamienie
kamień na
kamieniu na
kamieniu kamień
a na tym kamieniu jeszcze jeden kamień.²⁰

¹⁹ "Mr. Cogito Meditates on Suffering", Translated by John Carpenter and Bogdana Carpenter, <https://matthewsalomon.wordpress.com/2007/12/10/zbigniew-herbert-mr-cogito-meditates-on-suffering>, retrieved 21.09.2018.

²⁰ The poem "Brama" ("A Gate") comes from T. Różewicz, *Nożyk profesora*, Wrocław 2001. "Beyond this gate/there will be no history/or goodness or poetry./ What will be then, the unknown sir?/There will be stones./stone over stone over stone/and on this stone/and on this stone one more stone."

A quote from the folk song beginning "Tam na Podolu biały kamień" ("Over there in Podole a white stone") receives in this context a very tragic sense through the juxtaposition of a field stone on which a happy-go-lucky "Podolunecka" (a woman from the Podole region) is sitting with a tombstone. The result of this operation could be called "black humour". The question arises if we could find similar phenomena in Norwid's poetry, which foreshadowed some stylistic tendencies of contemporary poets. Norwid often used the so called lowering of the tone through the introduction to his descriptions of appropriately contrasting objects, in an ironic fashion:

Tenderness [...] is also a long blond tress,
On which a widower will hang,
A watch of silver fire ("Tenderness")²¹

Let us now concentrate on a figure which usually accompanies the tone of solemnity, which is amplification, hyperbole, *intensivum*.. Studying Romantic texts has shown that this figure was very characteristic for some of the texts from this period, for example for Słowacki's "Testament mój" ("My Testament"). In Norwid's poetry pathos appears often in the context of religious and patriotic themes, for example in "Chopin's Pianoforte":

In all that which you played there was the stark
Simplicity of Periclean perfection, [...]
Poland was in that music from the crest
Of all-perfection epochs caught in rainbow ecstasy.²²

Here we have a list of positive expressions like "perfection", "all-perfection", and undoubtedly "simplicity". In an indirect manner the value of the expression is underlined by an epithet, "Periclean", coined from the name of a sculptor regarded as a master; a similar function is also played by such expressions as "the crest" and "rainbow ecstasy".

²¹ C.K. Norwid, *Poems, Letters, Drawings*, op. cit., 60.

²² *Ibid.*, 72.

Norwid applied a similar technique in “Fragmenty (“Fragments”):

I tak ja widzę przyszłą w Polsce sztukę,
 Jako chorągiew na prac ludzkich wieży,
 Nie jak zabawkę ani jak naukę,
 Lecz jak najwyższe z rzemiosł apostoła
 I jak najniższą modlitwę anioła.²³

An enlarging simile has such elements elevating the fragment as “chorągiew (“banner”) and “wieża” (“tower”). These are accompanied by such superlatives as “the highest” and “the lowest”.

Indirectly the positive valorisation is amplified by words from the religious lexicon, such as ‘apostle’, ‘prayer’ and ‘angel’. A series of historical events and processes described by Norwid often achieves a cosmic and perennial dimension which is introduced through such words and phrases as: “the comet”, “the universe”, “the star”, “the abyss”, “the globe”, “chasms of sea and heavens”, “centuries”, “mankind”, etc., which create a landscape both psychic, geographical and temporal; a landscape reminiscent of Słowacki’s *Król-Duch* (*A King-Spirit*). This can be illustrated, for example, by the poem “Marionetki” (“Marionettes”).

1

How can one help being bored, when silently
 A million stars shine in the silent skies,
 Each one glittering quite differently,
 And everything stands still—and flies...
 And the earth stands still like the abyss of time.²⁴

Perhaps it is some of Herbert’s poems which stylistically resemble Norwid here. For example, “Przesłanie Pana Cogito” (“The Envoy of Mr. Cogito”), with sacral elements, mythological allusions,

²³ “And in this way I see the future art in Poland,/As a banner on a tower of people’s labour,/Not as a toy or science,/But as the highest of apostles’ craft and as the lowest prayer of an angel.

²⁴ C.K. Norwid, *Poems, Letters, Drawings*, op. cit., 40.

names of heroes, amplifying expressions like "kingdom without limit".²⁵ Such poetic practice is usually accompanied by some forms of archaization, or at least of avoiding common elements, which is signalled, for example by the very word "the Envoy" from the title.

"Róża" ("On a Rose") by Herbert has a clear example of amplification, when the development of flower petals is described in a surrealist fashion:

an explosion–
purple standardbearers
emerge from the interior
and the countless ranks
trumpeters of fragrance
on long butterfly horns
proclaim the fulfillment

the intricate coronations
cloister gardens orisons
gold packed ceremonies
and flaming candlesticks
triple towers of silence
little rays broken on high
the depths–²⁶

Herbert gathered here all kinds of grandeur: rituals, objects of huge dimensions like "towers", "on high" and "the depths", connected with such religious elements as "orisons". Other contemporary poets also at times use amplification, but not as intensively. Let us quote Miłosz:

Przeklinaj śmierć! Niesprawiedliwie jest nam wyznaczona.
Błagaj bogów, niech dadzą łatwe umieranie.²⁷
("Twój głos", ["Your Voice"])

²⁵ "The Envoy of Mr. Cogito", translated by Bogdana Carpenter, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48501/the-envoy-of-mr-cogito>, retrieved 21.09.2018.

²⁶ Zbigniew Herbert, *The Collected Poems, 1956-1998*, transl. by Alissa Valles, ecco, New York, 2007, 21-22.

²⁷ "Curse death, it has been unjustly given to us,/Beg, Gods to give us light death."

This figure is also used by Różewicz, who generally tended to avoid it:

Nothing will ever be
 explained
 nothing levelled
 nothing rewarded

nothing
 never (“Knowledge”)²⁸

Szyborska used a very different technique, which seems to make the most ordinary objects and processes appear to be the most unusual ones, which is, for example, seen in the poem “W biały dzień” (“In Broad Daylight”), describing the fictitious stay of Kamil Baczyński in a boarding house:

[...]standing up, straightening his sweater,
 and slowly moving toward the door [...]
 [...] no one would
 freeze in mid-gesture, mid-breath
 because this commonplace event would
 be treated—such a pity—
 as a commonplace event.²⁹

Or in the poem “Jarmark cudów” (“Miracle Fair”)

The usual miracle:
 invisible dogs barking
 in the dead of night.³⁰

We can call it making exotic of what is every-day; in the case of Różewicz it goes as far as rubbish heaps. Descriptions of such ugly, non-aesthetic phenomena were unthinkable in Norwid’s poetry.

²⁸ Tadeusz Różewicz, *They Came to See a Poet: Selected Poems*, op. cit., 174.

²⁹ Wisława Szymborska, *Poems New and Collected*, op. cit., 192-193.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.

The border of taste and other aesthetic evaluations has therefore been shifted, and the 'integral' poetry of Brzękowski is a testimony of this process. Let us use a fragment from Różewicz's poem to illustrate this:

Ciesząc się dobrym zdrowiem odwiedziłem brzegi Acheronu
szedłem chyba pół godziny
w kierunku dworca kolejowego
minąłem piekarnię
urząd pocztowy
obok budki z piwem
stali mężczyźni
w przybrudzonych koszulach
(“Acheron, w samo południe” (“Acheron, High Noon”)³¹)

Acheron—one of the rivers in Hades—is sharply contrasted here with dirty shirts.

Let us return now to the issues of the 'open' expression of emotional experiences in Norwid's poetry. We must stress once again the presence of some elements which create the impression that they belong to different discursive styles. And so, although the role of the category of stylistic lack of picturesqueness with such exponents as personifications, aphorisms and different non personal constructions seems to be dominant, at the same time we get, although very rare, clearly sensuous and concrete descriptions, for example of a wandering beam in the poem “Dedykacja” (“Dedication”):

Patrzyłem, jak przez szyb brylanty
Promień słońca wbił się – i zalotnie
Na rzeźbionym czole Atalanty
Drżąc, rozwachlarzył się stokrotnie [itd.]³²

³¹ “Enjoying good health I visited the shores of Acheron/I walked for about half an hour/in the direction of the railway station/I passed a bakery/a post office/near a beer booth/there stood men in dirty shirts.”

³² “I was watching when through diamonds of windows/A sunbeam gleamed in – and in a flirting manner/On the carved forehead of Atalanta/Trembling, spread out a hundred times [etc.]”.

One of the most crucial similarities between the key aspects of Norwid's style of poetry and the contemporary style of poetry I have been researching lately are different techniques of giving judgements about values. All these poets, with Norwid in the forefront, are artists putting the weight of expressed thoughts above more and less attractive and glamorous representations (although here there are certain differences, if we take into consideration the unique mastery of form displayed by Szymborska, reaching such exquisite heights of style which might be called 'conceptism'). Aphorisms are important determinants of such an attitude. They are characterized by brevity, succinctness, terseness, persuasiveness, etc. Aphorisms are judgements about values, and therefore the meanings connected with them are circled around some general ideas, universals of human existence. With Norwid we have such concepts as: man, man's fate, posterity, God, religion, civilization, truth, world, heroism, art, past, history, ideas. Here are some examples:

Since before song matures, man often dies,
(Norwid, "To John Brown, Citizen")³³

Roads to posterity are known
To none save after self-strife wars,
(Norwid, "The Ripe Laurel")³⁴

The aphorisms appearing in Miłosz's poetry have an identical semantic structure—with such key issues as time, passing, memory, God, world, happiness, unhappiness, life, death, nation, truth, beauty, art, word, etc. For example, in the poem: "Koleżanka" ("Classmate"):

I zapytuję, czemu tak przewrotnie bywa:
Życie mało wyraźne, tylko śmierć prawdziwa. ³⁵

³³ C.K. Norwid, *Poems, Letters, Drawings*, op. cit., 33.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁵ T. Skubalanka, *Język poezji Czesława Miłosza*, op. cit., 65. "And I ask, why is it so perverse/that life is so indistinct and death real."

It is similar with other poets, for example with Szymborska:

Death

Always arrives by that very moment too late

(*"On Death, Without Exeggeration"*)³⁶

The aphorisms of the poets analysed here have similar formal features, so for example we can find existential sentences with 'is' and 'are' (in different tenses and modes) with grammatical omnitemporal forms of verbs:

Tenderness—a cryful of wars, a clang

(*"Tenderness"*)³⁷

[...]only the object which does not exist

Is perfect and pure. [...]

(*Miłosz, Bobo's Metamorphosis*)³⁸

In the persuasive function we often have verbs in the imperative mode and the predicates 'it is necessary', 'should', 'needed'.

Nie trzeba robić z pokoleń ofiary

(*Norwid Początek broszury politycznej... Pwp, 122-3*)³⁹

A man should not love the moon.

(*Miłosz, "Should, shouldn't"*)⁴⁰

Another characteristic feature of these aphorisms are pronouns in subjective sentences:

Kto żył krótko, lekkie są jego winy.

Kto żył długo, ciężkie są jego winy.

(*Miłosz, "Posłuchanie", "Audience"*)⁴¹

³⁶ Wisława Szymborska, *Poems New and Collected*, op. cit., 189.

³⁷ C.K. Norwid, *Poems, Letters, Drawings*, op. cit., 60.

³⁸ Czesław Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems, 1931-2001*, ecco, New York, 2003, 195.

³⁹ "Generations should not be sacrificed" ("The Beginning of a Political Pamphlet")

⁴⁰ Czesław Miłosz, *The Collected Poems 1931-1987*, op. cit., (transl. by Czesław Miłosz).

⁴¹ "Who lived a short life, small are his trespasses/Who lived a long life, heavy are his trespasses".

The same function is performed at times by the word ‘man’:
 Wielkim jest człowiek, któremu wystarczy
 Pochylić czoła,
 Żeby bez włóczni w rękę i bez tarczy
 Zwyciężył zgoła!
 (Norwid, *Wielkość Pwp*, 66)⁴²

Quantifying words such as ‘all’, ‘each’, ‘always’, ‘everywhere’ are also frequent. While comparing aphorisms by different poets we notice paradoxes which are based on semantic antinomy. This, however, is a more general issue, moving beyond aphorisms. Norwid’s predilection for contrastive phrases is clearly seen in these selected examples:

Is he playing again, or disdaining us?
 (“Chopin’s Pianoforte”)⁴³

Cywilizacji dwie – widzę ustawnie:
 Jedna – chce wszystko o d k r y w a ć
 na serio, Druga – chce wszystko
 p o k r y w a ć zabawnie Świątą
 liberią!...

(*Sieroctwo Pwp*, 70)⁴⁴

And everything stands still—and flies...

(“Marionettes”)⁴⁵

Tu, gdzie im krótszy czas, tym lepiej skrywa Szybkość swą, ważność
 i miarę

(*Bliscy Pwp*, 118)⁴⁶

And here are examples from the poems of other poets:

⁴² “Great is man, to whom it is enough/to bow his head./For him to win without a spear and a shield.” (“Greatness”)

⁴³ C.K. Norwid, *Poems, Letters, Drawings*, op. cit., 72.

⁴⁴ “I see two civilizations, one wants/to *discover* everything in earnest. The other—wants to cover everything/Amusingly with a splendid livery. (“Orphanhood”)

⁴⁵ C.K. Norwid, *Poems, Letters, Drawings*, op. cit., 40.

⁴⁶ “Here, where the shorter the time/the better it hides its speed./Importance and gauge”. (“The Close Ones”).

we are—simply—free
that is—ready to depart
(Herbert, "Maturity")⁴⁷

This terrifying world is not devoid of charms.
(Szymborska, "Reality Demands")⁴⁸

Every beginning
is only a sequel, after all,
and the book of events
is always open halfway through.
(Szymborska "Love at First Sight")

Even peculiar tautological statements of Szymborska, such as:

but in poetry there is only room for poetry—
(*Trema Ww*, 307)

are connected with Norwid's poetry:

Treść – wypowiedz bez liry udziału,
Lecz dać duchowi ducha,
Myśli myśl – to tylko ciało ciała,
Cóż z tego? – martwość głucha!...
(*Liryka i druk Pwp*, 85)⁴⁹

It is not literal similarities or some other type of imitation which is at stake here, but some similar stylistic tendencies, being the result of the intellectual character of statements. Another result of the application of such poetics is the drive towards explicitness of expression. Norwid put it in this way:

⁴⁷ Zbigniew Herbert, *The Collected Poems*, op. cit., 84.

⁴⁸ Wisława Szymborska, *Poems New and Collected*, op. cit., 233.

⁴⁹ "You will say the content without a lyre,/But to give a spirit to a spirit,/A thought to a thought—it is only a body to a body,/And so what? Deaf deadness!" ("Lyric and Print").

I long [...]
 Where longingless and thinkingless and unafraid
 Men live whose yes is yes, whose no is not,
 Without light-shade
 (Norwid, "My Song [II]")⁵⁰

The call for explicitness was fundamental in Różewicz's poetic programme, who thus wrote about words of love and hope:

Wszystkie one były
 jednoznaczne,
 nie było między nimi
 porównania ani przenośni

 peryfrazy ani hiperboli
 ale miały w sobie moc sądzenia
 i moc wzrostu
 i miały moc tworzenia
 (*Poetyka* Niep. 138)⁵¹

As is clear from this quotation, the drive towards explicitness was accompanied in Różewicz's poetry by a rejection of the figurative nature of the language of poetry. More detailed analyses carried by me have clearly shown that such a poetic programme turned out to be totally utopian. Różewicz's 'war with form' was in fact a war with the excesses of his predecessors.

Texts of contemporary poets and Norwid's poems contain different types of semantic tensions.⁵² They are partly the results of the antinomy and paradox mentioned earlier, and partly result from the introduction of the discursive mode of expression which turns

⁵⁰ C.K. Norwid, *Poems, Letters, Drawings*, op. cit., 28.

⁵¹ "They were all/explicit,/ there was not between them/a single simile metaphor,// periphrasis or hyperbole in/but they had the power of judgement/and the power of growth/and the power of creation."

⁵² In the case of Norwid this problem was described by Sawicki (see footnote 2)

them into persistent conversations with readers or with protagonists. Hence, constant pleas and questions:

Dopóki będę za c i e b i e umierał?
(*Do wroga Pwp*, 96)⁵³

Addressed also to oneself:

But tell her what? ...
• • • Mirrors will crack, Candelabra shudder at the *realism*
(“Nerves”).⁵⁴

This rhetorical tone changes in Różewicz’s poetry into the style of a chat:

Zapytałeś
mnie czy
pisać wiersze
i nie wiesz
czemu milczę [...]
mówiłem do siebie
więc to tak
tak się płaci za
wszystko za
co za nic
więc to tak

(“Spóźniona odpowiedź”, “A Belated Answer”)⁵⁵

It is similar with Herbert:

⁵³ “How long will I be dying *for you*?” (“To an Enemy”).

⁵⁴ C.K. Norwid, *Selected Poems*, transl. by Adam Czarniawski, Anvil Press, London, 2004, 78.

⁵⁵ “You asked me if one should write poems and/you don’t know/why I am silent [...] /I was talking to myself/so, that is it, that is/how you pay for everything which is for nothing/that is it.”

what actions to take
 what would be best
 – aha
 I know what I will do
 (“Pica Pica L.”)

Semantic games also take the form of allusions and understatements. Here we have an example from Norwid:

Czy popiół tylko zostanie i zamęt,
 Co idzie w przepaść z burzą? – czy zostanie
 Na dnie popiołu gwiazdzisty dyjament,
 Wiekuistego zwycięstwa zaranie!...
 (W pamiętniku *Pwp*, 77)⁵⁶

Let us have no delusions: with all its responsibility for words and discipline, contemporary poetry is riddled with dark, symbolic, allusive places. Miłosz turned out to be the master of understatements and allusions. I devoted a whole chapter of my book *Sztuka poetycka Czesława Miłosza (Poetic Art of Czesław Miłosz)* to these issues, in which I tried to show different ways of applying ellipsis in texts’ constructions, among others with such constructs as: subject of description, character of a protagonist, narrative/lyric persona, etc. As we have seen in the quoted fragment by Norwid, it is also a symbol which may become a source and an exponent of an understatement.

Understatements, or rather expressing doubts, permanent exposure of presented ideas to doubts, is a characteristic feature of Szymborska’s poetry: One of the exponents of such a modality is the formula ‘I don’t know’:

But what is poetry, anyway?
 [.]
 But I just keep on not knowing, and I cling to that
 Like a redemptive handrail.
 (Szymborska, “Some People Like Poetry”)⁵⁷

⁵⁶ “Will only ash remain and havoc/which goes into an abyss with storm?/or will they remain/On the bottom of ash a starry diamond,/the dawn of perennial victory!”

⁵⁷ Wisława Szymborska, *Poems New and Collected*, op. cit., 227.

It is no wonder then that with such distance to the content of poems we often have irony. Irony is based on a certain lack of congruence of the dimensions of contrasted events or objects, which might be called mechanism of depreciation:

God's past rewards
Were lesser things:
A leaf stuck to a window pane,
A drop of rain.

(Norwid, "Give Me a Blue Ribbon")⁵⁸

Herbert turned out to be yet another master of irony, for example when he called Damastes-Procrustes "a scholar, a social reformer".⁵⁹

Different Norwid scholars have pointed to his economical use of words and to his brevity.

So the question arises about the indicators of such a method of poetic expression. It seems that the most obvious features of being economical with words are: lack of repetitions, dominance of verbs, lack of synonymic epithets, such features that were typical of modernist poetry. But such predilection for epithets can also be found in earlier poetry, for example in Słowacki's poetry. In just a few verses of Canto IV of *Beniowski* (Lines 105-112) we have a whole series of expressions with adjectives:

Lubiłem takie dusze dzikie, smętne,
Rozokolone na niebie szeroko,
Błyskawicowe trochę, trochę mętne,
Nawet gdy w ciało się straszne obloką,
I w pioruny się rzucają namiętne,
Lub nad Safony chwieją się opoką;
Lubiłem takie dusze – nie bezkarny!
Wybrednie marząc w różach, kolor czarny...⁶⁰

⁵⁸ C.K. Norwid, *Selected Poems*, op. cit., 47.

⁵⁹ Zbigniew Herbert, *The Collected Poems*, op. cit., 381.

⁶⁰ J. Słowacki, *Beniowski (poema), pięć pierwszych pieśni*, [w:] tenże, *Dzieła wszystkie*, pod red. J. Kleintera, t. 5, wyd. 2, Wrocław 1954, s.113.

Contemporary poets, particularly Herbert, Szymborska and Różewicz, usually avoid such piling up of expressions and use different means of semantic condensations, which include enumerations. It was probably Różewicz who introduced their intensive use in poetry. Although such enumerations can also be found here and there in Norwid's poetry, they are never so exposed as with contemporary poets. So, I quote for comparative reasons:

Lecz dla nas? – [...]

Ból, spieka, gorycz i marsz drogą krętą.

Nam, co za prawdą gonim, Don K i c h o t o m

Przeciwno smokom, jadom, kulom, grotom...

(Norwid, *Epos-nasza* Pwp, 30-32)⁶¹

And here we have some contemporary examples:

An old peasant woman walks

along the beach

she is still weary and trembling

she is still full of the bustle

of the journey

of artificial lights [...]

(Różewicz, "An Old Peasant Woman Walks Along the Beach")⁶²

I prefer movies

I prefer cats

I prefer the oaks along the Warta

I prefer Dickens to Dostoyevsky.

(Szymborska, "*Possibilities*")⁶³

So many miracles

in the life of Mr Cogito

⁶¹ "But for us? [...] /Pain, parches, bitterness and march on a curvy path. /We, Don Quixotes who chase the truth, /Against dragons, venoms, bullets, arrowheads". ("Our Epic")

⁶² Tadeusz Różewicz, *They Came to See a Poet: Selected Poems*, op. cit. 60.

⁶³ Wisława Szymborska, *Poems New and Collected*, op. cit., 224.

so many caprices of fortune
enchantments and falls
eternity therefore will probably
be bitter for him.

(Herbert, *Przeczcucia eschatologiczne Pana Cogito*, P 466)⁶⁴

As I have already mentioned, according to Stefan Sawicki, Norwid's poetry is connected with contemporary poetry through particular sensitivity to linguistic problems, which results in the permanent tendency to experiment with the language.⁶⁵ Clear lack of congruity is revealed here, because if we look closely, for example at the neologisms so frequent in Norwid's poetry, we realize that not all of the analysed poets were keen to use such a form of shaping the language. Szyborska was keen on them, Miłosz used them not so often, while Herbert tended to avoid them. Różewicz would select other forms of linguistic experimentation, attempting to create a new poetic style, devoid of excess of figures and bent on colloquial language. The novel techniques of Różewicz were centred mostly around the construction of a text, its coherence.

The plays on words which all these poets performed is also a result of the creative attitude to the language. Norwid seemed to deal with and use different meanings of morphemes and related words:

[...]

A spirit like lightning
in gesture caught
(*Norwid, "Lapidaria"*)⁶⁶

A second street of carriages on the street's track
Turns and turns back, returns and overturns...

(*Norwid, "Fame"*)⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Z. Herbert, "Eschatological Forebodings of Mr Cogito", in *Report from the Besieged City*, op. cit., 29.

⁶⁵ S. Sawicki, *Norwida walka z formą*, Warszawa 1986, 40.

⁶⁶ C.K. Norwid, *Selected Poems*, op. cit., 87.

⁶⁷ C.K. Norwid, *Poems, Letters, Drawings*, op. cit., 34.

While Szymborska enjoyed numerous games with phraseology:

With smiles and kisses, we prefer
to seek accord beneath our star,
although we are different (we concur)
just as two drops of water are.

(Szymborska, "Nothing Twice")⁶⁸

The similarities presented in this paper are only a tiny part of the stylistic similarities connecting Norwid's poetry with the poetry of distinguished contemporary poets. The differences between them are equally profound as the similarities. Herbert is connected with Norwid through the fact that they both used the language of universal values, both of them—and Miłosz as well—were not so much concerned with the stylistic diversity of words, focusing on the area of meanings of texts. Miłosz, however, seemed to be more aware of stylistic diversity, which connects his poetry with his great predecessor from Lithuania. Herbert, as a typical intellectual, moved towards allegory, although Norwid was different in this respect. Although his text *Źródło* (*A Source*) (Pwp, 73) is allegorising, if we were to search for similarities between these two poets, we should not be concerned with allegories, but first of all with model analogies from the ancient tradition (Norwid's poem "Spartacus" may be used as an example here.) However, we do not find in his poetry surrealistic elements like in "On a Rose", in the poem about a sea horse, or in Herbert's parabolic "Kawiarnia" ("A Café").

Norwid's creative attitude to the language, revealing itself in his free treatment of semantics and in innovations in morphology, seems to connect his method mostly with the conceptual poetry of Szymborska and with the experiments of Różewicz. Herbert and Miłosz turned out to be more traditional in this respect. However, we must bear in mind that the world of Norwid's values was fundamentally different from the world of Różewicz's and Szymborska's values, which is trembling in its foundation. Szymborska gave thousands

⁶⁸ Wisława Szymborska, *Poems New and Collected*, op. cit., 20.

of reservations to the axioms, and in this way she deeply changed the language of her poetry, while Różewicz, at times, moved beyond the borders of nihilism. There is no doubt that such attitudes were the result of the traumas of World War II and the period of communist totalitarianism, which we can, for example, find in Różewicz's poem "A Cottage" and Szymborska's "Reality Demands":

What moral flows from this? Probably none.
Only the blood flows drying quickly,
And, as always, a few rivers, a few clouds.⁶⁹

When we contrast such texts with Norwid's strong declarations of faith, for example in the poem "Krzyż i dziecko" ("A Cross and a Child") (Pwp 127), the differences between them become all too clear. There is no doubt that Norwid, a man of religion, belongs to the world of Herbert and Miłosz. It also influenced the style of these poets, its assertive character and the type of their linguistic modality.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 233.