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NORWID'S CONCEPT OF LITERARY ORIGINALITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE HISTORY OF POETICS

“Originalność jest to sumiennosc w obliczu źródeł” (“Originality is conscientiousness in confrontation with sources.”)¹ We know this Norwid phrase very well. It has been so popular that it has almost become a proverb. Norwid scholars refer to it, its seductive accuracy excites enthusiasts of Polish poetry, and students of Polish departments learn it by heart before the exam in Romantic literature. And this is hardly surprising—Norwid managed to convey an original thought in a brilliant phrase, which justly became a part of the canon of epigrams of Polish culture.

And since this process has been accomplished, we have allowed it to shine in glory and we have been using it for our purposes, kindled and immobilized it, so that it could become understood automatically, so that it could become every-day and ordinary. Thanks to us, Cyprian Norwid would not have to complain about the murky nature of his language—after all, we have lit in front of him not a candle, but a powerful searchlight, and with it we are ready to light even the dimmest corners of his poetic world. Blinded by this light, he would have to realize straight away that he is surrounded by people

¹ Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim w sześciu publicznych posiedzeniach (z dodatkiem rozbioru «Balladyny»)* (VI, 423). All quotations from Norwid are from this edition, Cyprian Norwid, *Pisma wszystkie*, ed. by Juliusz W. Gomulicki, vol. I–XI, Warszawa 1971–1976; a Roman number stands for a volume number, an Arabic number for a page number.

who love, accept and admire him. This admiration, however, comes at a price—this poet (let us admit—a very difficult poet, indeed) has been given the role of an inferior provider of catchy formulae, ready-made for school declamations, and is celebrated by his late postmodernist grandsons who are no longer surprised or astonished by anything.

However, his phrase—if we reject the apparent certainty that we know well what it means—should be surprising, should strike us as paradoxical, and should confuse and flummox us. If we considered it deeply, if we confronted its unclear message with similar formulae of other nineteenth-century authors, we would see that the notions used by it are not very congruent, and what is more: they were really forced to be together. Each of these notions seems to be pulling in the opposite direction, in the manner of a drowned woman swimming ‘upstream’ and her equally stubborn husband, in the fable written by Mickiewicz, our national bard. Originality as “conscientiousness in confrontation with sources”?—this is really a peculiar expression.

Peculiar but also extremely accurate! If we were to look for the widest possible formula expressing paradoxes in Norwid’s thinking about art, the quoted phrase would be excellent. After all its shape is like an unclear inscription over a secret passage to a treasury of a library. It is something akin to “*ubi leones*” from Umberto Eco’s famous novel; if it is used properly, it will lead to hidden secrets; otherwise it will keep its secret from the curious eye. After all, a feature of secret inscriptions is that their understandability is only apparent, and the true message is hidden somewhere in the truly Delphic haze of multiple meanings. And such is probably the case with Norwid: the quoted formula is a very good clue for the inquisitive but a trap for the credulous. However, we should bear it in mind that even the former will soon learn that the instructions enclosed in it are not an invitation for a nice walk in a park, lit by a mellow sun of the evening, but that it heralds an arduous journey through a gloomy and impassable thicket full of traps, false clues and unexpected turns.

My esteemed readers might think that I have pitched my scholarly lyre too fantastically? This may be true, but I have done it for two purposes. Firstly, Norwid liked allegories—the darker,

the better—so, maybe he would like this introduction. Secondly, I am one of the people who have many a time succumbed to the intriguing sound of the maxim quoted at the beginning and who, after passing the threshold of the world of Norwid's thoughts, have personally experienced that it is full of ambiguous metaphors, oxymoronic and aporetic concepts and incongruous categories. So, please treat this paper not as a statement of one who is going to explain and enlighten, but as the narrative of an eyewitness who tries to understand the adventures and traps which he has met on his journey as a reader. While following Norwid's thoughts he has come across road signs with the following words: 'originality', 'conscientiousness' and 'sources'—the problem is that each of these signs is pointing in a different direction.

Let us note paradoxes in Norwid's literary concepts. On the one hand, they were based on the arguments, constantly repeated by Norwid, about the crisis of nineteenth-century art.² This is my random selection of Norwid's quotes on this issue: "All art, not excluding the art of writing, is degraded in the whole world [...]"³ "All art—not excluding the art of writing—is in decline everywhere [...]"⁴ "contemporary literature [...] does not cope with life,"⁵ "*the situation in literature is really sad!*"⁶ In a different fragment he compared contemporary writings to "*industrial literature*", "wide because not high, and industrial and commercial because it is wide".⁷ And what about Polish literature? Here, Norwid also complained regularly. "Polish poetry, *in my opinion*, is in a critical condition"⁸, vernacular literature is false because "*it keeps looking to the past and to the future, but it seems to run away from the present.*"⁹: its

² I wrote more about it in a paper, *Universum arcydzieł. Dyskurs krytyczno-literacki w listach Norwida*, „Studia Norwidiana”, 2014, no. 32, 41-60.

³ Letter to Maria Trębicka, Paris, 18 July 1856 (VIII, 269).

⁴ Letter to Maria Trębicka, Paris, 18-19 July 1856 (VIII, 274).

⁵ Cyprian Norwid, *Żądany list o mogile i mogiłach* (VI, 580).

⁶ Letter to Władysław Bentkowski, Paris, beginning of June 1857 (VIII, 309).

⁷ Cyprian Norwid, *Żądany list o mogile i mogiłach* (VI, 580).

⁸ Cyprian Norwid, *Do czytelnika [przedmowa do Vade-mecum]* (II, 9).

⁹ Cyprian Norwid, *Listy o emigracji* (VII, 17).

‘parochiality’ is a chronic condition and at the same time “the result of political *no-being* and lack of moral vigilance.”¹⁰

These gloomy declarations were often accompanied by the poet’s statements in which he stressed the breakthrough character of his own writings: For example, he described *Quidam* as a “*thing, unachieved yet in all our literature*;¹¹ in an introduction to *Vade-mecum* he heralded the coming of the “new age” of Polish poetry¹² (obviously as a result of his own poetry); in an introduction to *Pierścień Wielkiej-Damy* (*The Ring of the Grand Lady*) he defined a “new type of Tragedy” invented by himself, and added intelligently that “we do not have a *word* for it (because the *thing* still does not exist).¹³ In a letter to Józef Ignacy Kraszewski he suggested the following reasons for his future fame: “[i]ntroduction of an *Idea of Art* which has not existed before me; *reappraisal of Słowacki*, which I have clearly started; *development of the concept of originality*, which has not been done before me.”¹⁴ Elsewhere, he described himself as “the only living *truly original Polish poet and writer*”, “who is not guilty of the fact that he receives the attention of the whole of contemporary Polish literature and amnesia of the whole society”.¹⁵

On the other hand, in Norwid’s poems we come across frequent declarations about his deep connection with European (and Polish!) cultural tradition and with ‘old’ art and aesthetics, which he presented as models for contemporary artists and theoreticians: “It seems that there is no trace of an old idea of *art* in Polish literature”,¹⁶ he complained. “Contemporary criticism is little concerned with it; it usually relies on a *reviewer’s taste*, a criterion by all means subjective

¹⁰ Cyprian Norwid, [*W sprawie uczczenia prześladowanych unitów*] (VII, 177).

¹¹ Letter to Władysław Bentkowski, [Paryż, end of May 1857] (VIII, 308).

¹² Cyprian Norwid, *Do czytelnika* [przedmowa do *Vade-mecum*] (II, 10).

¹³ Cyprian Norwid, *Wstęp* [przedmowa do dramatu *Pierścień Wielkiej-Damy, czyli Ex-machina-Durejko*] (V, 185, 186).

¹⁴ Letter to Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, [Paris, c. a. 21 May 1867] (IX, 289).

¹⁵ Letter to Joanna Kuczyńska, Neuilly [and Paris] 1866, 7 August (IX, 256).

¹⁶ Cyprian Norwid, *O kwestii losu artystów polskich*, (VI, 562).

and not grounded in anything?"¹⁷ Norwid often gave whole lists of his spiritual patrons. For example, in a short lecture devoted to the writings of Juliusz Słowacki (Lesson III) he referred to the whole pantheon of great people, influential politicians, distinguished philosophers, brilliant artists and scientists, as well as spiritual leaders of mankind. So, in one lecture, Norwid decided that he had to rely on such authorities as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Tacit, Vergil, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Dante, Copernicus, Lamartine and O'Connell, Goethe and Byron, Emerson and Kossuth, Słowacki and Mickiewicz, anonymous Indian poets and biblical authors, prophets of the Old Testament and Fathers of the Church, and then, towering high above them, the figure of the Saviour himself.

These names could be enumerated endlessly.¹⁸ Norwid's fascinations with ancient art and philosophy could also be discussed at length, as well as his diligent studies of the Bible and old Polish poets.¹⁹ I wonder if this is also the case with Norwid's knowledge of poetics, particularly of old poetics. It seems that the answer to this problem is very complicated. I will offer some hypotheses on it, hoping that literary tradition going back a few centuries will shed new light on Norwid's concepts.

Norwid's writings include a great variety of notions connected with traditional poetics (starting with almost all the letters of the alphabet) beginning with "allegory", through "bard", "beauty", "creation", "emulation", "expression", "form", "harmony", "idealization", "ideal", "impression", "inspiration", "meaning", "originality", "parabola", "patterns", "poem", "poet", "poetry", "proportion", "realism", "rhythm", to "sign", "style", "symbol", "talent", and many, many more.

¹⁷ Cyprian Norwid, *o Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 413).

¹⁸ This issue was analysed in detail by, among others, Paulina Abriszewska in a valuable book, *Literacka hermeneutyka Cypriana Norwida*, Lublin 2011 (particularly in chapter IV: „Norwid – poeta kultury. Wobec tradycji, historii i kultur”, 197–249).

¹⁹ The breadth of Norwid's cognitive horizons was described, among others, by Piotr Chlebowski in *Romantyczna silva rerum. o Norwidowym «Albumie orbis»*, Lublin 2009.

Apart from them, we have many names connected with genres, such as: “apology”, “biography”, “comedy”, “drama”, “epigram”, “epic”, “the epic”, “hymn”, “long poem”, “lyric poetry”, “novel”, “ode”, “song”, “satire”, “tragedy”.²⁰

It is also worth remembering an obvious issue: Norwid was interested in aesthetic reflections throughout his life—from *Promethidion* (1848), *Lectures about Juliusz Słowacki* (1860), till his late treatises, for example *Milczenie (Silence)* (1882).

Norwid’s thoughts about poetics get a bit lost in the wider stream of philosophy of literature (more in Plato’s than in Aristotle’s style), closely connected with philosophy as such.²¹ Norwid seemed to take as important the same things which had mattered to Plato, “connecting aesthetics (and theory of art) with philosophical discourse.”²² Both for Plato and for Norwid poetics was just a part of more general philosophical considerations (ontological, theoretical, axiological), and the concrete views on these issues “were closely connected with [...] philosophy.”²³

What is more, among the authorities to whom Norwid referred, authors of old books on poetics or treatises on theory of rhetoric appeared relatively rarely. Here and there, obviously, there appeared Aristotle (and Plato, whose influence on Norwid was strong). However, he rarely referred to Horace (as the author of *De arte poetica*), Quintilianus, Leonardo da Vinci, Giambattista Vico, Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (more as a poet than a theoretician),

²⁰ While compiling this list I relied on the invaluable help of: *Internetowy słownik języka Cypriana Norwida*, ed. by Jadwiga Puzynina and Tomasz Korpysz, <http://www.slownikjezykanorwida.uw.edu.pl> [accessed 22.08.2016]. On Norwid’s genological awareness compare, among others, *Genologia Cypriana Norwida*, ed. by Adela Kuik-Kalinowska, Słupsk 2005; Magdalena Woźniewska-Działak, *Poematy narracyjne Cypriana Norwida. Konteksty literacko-kulturalne, estetyka, myśl*, Kraków 2014.

²¹ Elżbieta Feliksiak, *Poezja i myśl. Studia o Norwidzie*, Lublin 2001, 86.

²² Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temierusz, *Przeszłość poetyki. Od Platona do Gianbattisty Vica*, Warszawa, 1995, 30.

²³ *Ibidem*.

and moreover, sporadically, to Grzegorz Piramowicz, Kazimierz Brodziński, Edgar Allan Poe. Norwid referred to aestheticians such as Karol Libelt or Józef Kremer, much more often. He never referred to such writers as Julius Caesar Scaliger, Pico della Mirandola, Nicolas Boileau, Jean-François La Harpe, Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski, Leon Borowski, or Euzebiusz Słowacki.

How did the situation look in detail? Similarly to other Romantics, Norwid was unequivocally against imitation. He considered it to be a source of shame for an artist; a result of lack of intellectual independence, and he argued against the conviction that it was a result: "of the need" to refer to "nature" understood in Classicist terms and "models" understood likewise.²⁴ "Blind"—that is mechanical—imitation was for him an intellectually barren activity and was aesthetically detrimental; he associated it more with ignorance ("no-knowledge"), called it "the most hideous fallacy"²⁵ and "the greatest of traitors"²⁶, and he saw a dummy as a figure of it.

Because imitation of creation is Hell. Weak, ill, cowardly bodies must act through imitations. The just ones do not go here and there, but they know and walk on straight, as a beam of light.²⁷

"That is why all", who "imitate are completely *barren and technical*, and before they notice it they are like *Egyptians!*"²⁸

Norwid's critique of imitation also included disapproval of the lack of authenticity of social life. According to him, it is not only individuals and not only artists who imitate; it is whole nations as well. Norwid approved only of those communities which:

²⁴ Cyprian Norwid, *Ze względu artykułu «o cynkografii» w «Bibliotece Warszawskiej»*, vol. II, 519 (VI, 589).

²⁵ "Imitation is either no-news, or the most hideous fallacy, and here the French code is appropriate" (Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...*; VI, 425).

²⁶ "The biggest traitor is blind imitation. See [*Dla Ludwika Mierosławskiego*] (VII, 148)

²⁷ Letter to Marian Sokołowski, [Paris, ca. 15 September 1875] (X, 54).

²⁸ Letter to Bohdan Zaleski, [Paris, 22 September 1871] (IX, 496).

Do not *ape* [...] do not imitate things achieved by *other nations which live in other cosmic and social conditions*, but which, when they enter the auditorium of history have this sobriety, that they want to create something of their own, they want to construct one more rung on the ladder of the freedom of the world.²⁹

That is why after periods of charlatans one atom of original and diligent work overcomes imitation. A little book of Copernicus moves the worlds, while thousands of volumes remain lifeless.³⁰

Within the bounds of this reasoning, imitation became synonymous with bondage (both spiritual but also physical),³¹ and its opposite was individual and group freedom, and authentic creativity and creation became its result.

Norwid saw in the tendency to imitate features of his own era; chasing after novelties:

Dead imitation with the ever stronger development of exploitation of everything that is new and positive will finally reach the point of exhaustion of the very order and rhythm of continuity, which we will be then have substituted with some magnetic phenomenon, which I leave aside.³²

Therefore, we might assume that we are dealing here with a typically Romantic rejection of imitation. The thing is that Norwid's critique of this artistic activity went far beyond the ideological frames of Romanticism and its ideological leaders (Fredrich Schlegel, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Maurycy Mochnacki, Michał Grabowski

²⁹ *Nota z dziewięciu punktów, która załączona była duchowieństwu, Kawalerom Maltańskim, generalnemu organizatorowi Armii Polskiej Wielmożnemu Mierosławskiemu i wysokim wojskowym polskim* (VII, 151).

³⁰ Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 425).

³¹ "The beginning of the movement was creative, and later it was only an imitation of the European past in a slavish way—bondage and its fruits". (Appendix, VII, 159).

³² Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 426)..

or Julian Klaczko).³³ It reached deeper into history and renewed Plato's arguments. As we remember, it was Plato who was against imitation as a lie and dissimulation.³⁴ At the same time it seems that Norwid did not deal with the point so strongly stressed by Plato—lack of trust in human emotions. According to Plato, poetry "lied" just because it represented human passions and deeds (including the reprehensible ones) as more beautiful than they are in reality.³⁵ At this point Norwid had the opposite view: "Expression", that is "externalization" of "things hidden in the soul of man"³⁶ was for him one of the criteria of truthfulness of art.³⁷

There is one more reason for which the whole issue of imitation is not so obvious. Norwid admitted that art "in its lowest sense" is "*imitation of nature*" and there is no other solution.³⁸ Similarly to Plato, he understood the activity of imitation of reality in art as its "recreation", that is—I am quoting Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temierusz—"reduction of what exists to 'an appearance', a shape perceived by the senses."³⁹ Thanks to this, Norwid's critique of imitation was accompanied by an approval of fidelity in art:

We see, for example, in art which is work closest to the light, that it has ignominiously accelerated its production and since the time when people took *nature* for their model and its faithful imitation, that is not *expression*, but *impression*—since that time, as I say, one

³³ Compare on these issues: Marek Stanisław, *Wczesnoromantyczne spory o poezję*, Kraków 1998; Magdalena Bąk, «*Mimesis*» romantyczna – teoria i praktyka w Polsce, in *Romantyzm i nowoczesność*, ed. by Michał Kuziak, Kraków 2009, 257–285.

³⁴ Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temierusz, op. cit., 46.

³⁵ Ibid., 55.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Letter to Maria Trębicka, May 1854, New-York (VIII, 212).

³⁸ "Art [...] in its lowest meaning, being '*imitation of nature*', cannot be therefore perceived otherwise in *nature*, but as *beauty* and the immediate period of this beauty, active participation, separate time—in other words—a *law*, existing and binding with all others laws of nature." Cyprian Norwid, *O sztuce. (Dla Polaków)* (VI, 339)

³⁹ Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temierusz, op. cit., 44.

beautiful day a daguerreotype arrived and has topped this trend and has gone further.⁴⁰

Despite these declarations Norwid did not cut himself off from the literary strategy of ‘photographing’ reality—it is enough to recall a fragment from *Black Flowers*, in which the following statement appears: “Whenever I keep reminding myself of the latest conversations with people who have already gone into the invisible world, dying here, so many times [...] I convert my pen into a *daguerreotype*, in order to be faithful [...]”⁴¹ Faithful to what he was as an eye witness.

So, how come a daguerreotype “has topped” those writers who have faithfully reconstructed reality (in the sense of imitating nature), although at the same time a strategy of literary daguerreotype allows it to be “faithful”? And imitation itself—is really just a pretence, when only with “the lie of art” the lie of the world can be revealed (as he wrote in the poem “To Nikodem Biernacki”)? Is it then good or is it useless? It is not certain. Although probably such a solution to deal with this dilemma could be proposed: maybe according to Norwid literary imitation is at times indispensable—that is when literature takes on a duty to represent “only things existing” materially⁴² or even—when in some mysterious way it renews (repeats? expresses?) experience of reality common at a given period. Because not everything that may be considered imitation, really is imitation. For example:

In the novels of Słowacki Byronic form should not be treated as imitation in the manner in which Mickiewicz’s *Wallendrod* and Malczewski’s *Maria*, despite this form, are not imitations. [...] imitation of those who have introduced something compulsory for the whole of mankind is not imitation but humanity, so that is why astronomers should not be called Copernican, and poets should not be called Byronic.⁴³

⁴⁰ Letter to Maria Trębicka, May 1854, New-York (VIII, 212).

⁴¹ Cyprian Norwid, *Czarne kwiaty* (VI, 177).

⁴² Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temierusz, op. cit., 62.

⁴³ Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 463).

Such a rule would function, however, only within the lower type of writing, which would be—to use the words of Plato—"imitative poetry" (or, to use a more contemporary formula)—realistic, and not "inspired poetry".⁴⁴ Even then, we would be dealing with a worse type of literature. The truth about the world according to Norwid could be most fully expressed by realism, and obviously not fantasy (which he treated as giving vent to "dreams"), but literature using allegories, symbols, parables or metaphors.⁴⁵

Even more problems appear when we approach the manner in which Norwid used the term "originality". I would like to remind you here that Norwid dealt with this issue many times, and in the third lesson of his *Lectures about Juliusz Słowacki* he developed an extensive argument about the "idea of false and real *originality*."⁴⁶ The very point of departure seems to be peculiar: Norwid claimed that so far "philosophers have not developed the notion of originality"⁴⁷, so there is not much to refer to. Well, maybe apart from one footnote—referring to plagiarism and coming from French copyright law. Here we have Norwid's statement:

[...] such a rule in the copyright law is in total agreement with the truth, and this code is much more prophetic than contemporary literary theories, and therefore the police should have its place in Academia.

⁴⁴ Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temierusz, op. cit., 62.

⁴⁵ Paulina Abriszewska argued convincingly: "This, what researchers want to unite and define as a symbol or an allegory, is in the text a subject of an endless process of transformations, redefinitions and, consequently, it escapes final and unambiguous taxonomies." See Paulina Abriszewska, op. cit., 296.

⁴⁶ Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 405).

⁴⁷ "Action and practice are two things; the definitions of which and differences between them are not our concern here. I would merely state that although philosophers have not developed the idea of originality, anyway, any time an author of a some comedy uses a line from a comedy written by someone else, we have at once one of the French copyright laws punishing it. The law and police are here ahead of philosophers". Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 423).

Because it seems to be saying that *originality is conscientiousness in confrontation with sources*.⁴⁸

It was in this very context that Norwid came up with the formula with which I started this paper. Norwid went on to argue for it with the help of the evocative picture of drawing water from a spring. He asked: "How come water is not itself a spring?" And quickly he answered: "Such originality does not exist." Because: "You can drink out of a decanter, gripping it by its neck and leaning it towards your mouth, but the one who drinks out of a spring must kneel down and bow his head."⁴⁹ No one carries the spring in himself. We should note here that this important declaration was in conflict with the convictions of many Romantics that the source/the spring of true creativity is an artist, equipped with divine powers.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, the figure of true originality for Norwid was Jesus Christ himself, who created new reality and created a new community—argued Norwid—solely through fulfilling the laws of the Old Testament:

[...] there is not a single word of the Saviour which had not appeared earlier in the Prophets and folk parables. And even more, it was not only the Prophets of the chosen nation of God but even Greek masters had known many of these moral laws. The Saviour himself says that *his teaching is not his teaching*, that he did not come to teach, but to fulfil, so there is no originality in it—and this, at least, is obvious!⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ And he continued; "Someone will tell me that conscientious reciprocity with sources does not give self-power, and that for individual originality one has to have the source in oneself, but I will repeat that there is absolutely no such individual originality, it never was and never will be." Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 423, 424).

⁵⁰ Cf., Meyer Howard Abrams, *Zwierciadło i lampa. Romantyczna teoria poezji a tradycja krytycznoliteracka*, trans. Maria Bożenna Fedewicz, Gdańsk 2003 (particularly the chapter : „Romantyczne metafory sztuki i umysłu”, 57–84).

⁵¹ Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 425).

In the same way as the activity of imitation is not the result of "the need", because—let us repeat—"there are models everywhere because nature is everywhere" and "only the way of beholding *it* is a difference, the way of expressing, *style*"⁵² and, moreover "only well understood originality, only real creative effort can become active in God's matters—that is to win—because only the Lord, the Master is creative perennially."⁵³ The criterion of originality then would be defined as "reference of one's individual conscience to the final source of truth."⁵⁴

At this point we arrive at another important point of Norwid. It runs as follows: you cannot create "without Masters". Norwid used in this respect the argument of Socrates:

Socrates, through the mouth of Plato, said this about the invention of writing: when Theut showed to Tamus the writing signs he invented, Tamus cried when he saw these letters: "Father, you get blinded by the love of letters and you do not see the goal of letters. You will simply make people not remember, nothing more, because you gave the way of reminding and reminiscing, and those who will learn them will be certain that they have entrusted them with the mystery of their own knowledge and that they will do without Masters"—these words were quoted by Plato from Socrates's mouth. While the expression "without Masters" means *spiritus rector* and refers to the Masters of masters, because, as we have mentioned above, the originality of Socrates: it was there that he sent his disciples.⁵⁵

The formula "without Masters" is interpreted by Norwid not only as creation with no concern for models, but also as foolish disregard of the truth and the order of things set up by God. As the "Masters" in his arguments are messengers of the real Arch-master

⁵² Cyprian Norwid, *Ze względu artykułu «o cynkografii» w «Bibliotece Warszawskiej», tom II, str. 519* (VI, 589).

⁵³ Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 426).

⁵⁴ Cyprian Norwid, *O tszynie i czynie. Do M..... wtóry list* (VII, 55).

⁵⁵ Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 427).

and Arch-Teacher, Christ, and thanks to His unction they hold an honourable post of the only Truth. He is both the guarantee and embodiment. They are go-betweens between man and God, the Truth and nature of the world. That is the words of the poet—as any true word—not only “express” man, but also “judge” him⁵⁶ because they are rooted in the primordial reality and eternal axiology, ceaselessly reminding us about the existence of the foundations of civilization and humanity.

So—maybe Romanticism? But it is not possible to forget Norwid’s polemics with the Romantic conviction of the existence of supernatural forces, which an artist draws from the union with creative Nature or Absolute or which—perhaps even more often—he would find in himself; the model of divinity. While, as Norwid insisted, neither in reading nor in creation should we “turn away from the primordial power with which the author created”; it is exactly the opposite: success of these activities depends on “reading” from the work of a writer “*what he created, or even more, (to read and understand) the work of centuries grown upon it.*”⁵⁷ Instead of a naive faith in the value of the direct reception of a given work, Norwid insisted on respecting the history of its reception, and also on taking into account the changing historical context, which modifies the senses embedded in it. Norwid did not have much respect for apparent novelties—in art, life, or history. “*China is a remarkable phenomenon. Suddenly it turns out that Mexico is absolutely exceptional! ... That Egypt is by all means original!!—that Jews are so absolutely unusual...*” etc. etc., nothing but exceptions!”⁵⁸—he mocked.

It is also not possible to ignore his understanding of the form of artistic work—Norwid expressed not only a Romantic distance from it, but also stressed its absolute necessity and meaningful features. He argued, for example, that a good form should be clear

⁵⁶ Ibid., 429.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 428.

⁵⁸ Cyprian Norwid, [Z powodu podręcznika Szujskiego] (VI, 540).

and transparent, but in a very unusual sense of the word. He relied in this context on "an edifice of perfect architecture":

[...] it can and should be transparent, although made of granite, and it is [perfect] when the frontage allows us to see the plan and internal design of the whole edifice. While a crystal glass may obtrude objects behind her if a beholder adopts an improper (skewed) point of view.⁵⁹

Let us confront this picture with Stendhal's metaphor of "a novel as a mirror carried along a high road", and we will soon see the difference.

So, was Norwid a Classicist, such a modernist one, in the manner of Eliot, Herbert or Przybylski? An admirer of harmony, proportions and order? An advocate of absolute, finished beauty? A proclaimer that poetry is "a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written", and that not a single poet "has his complete meaning alone" and is not a lonely island but a catalyst of the group of human emotions?⁶⁰ But wait! Have we not heard in some of the earlier quoted formulae the echo of the neo-Platonic concept of a poet-prophet, drawing inspiration "from above" and inspiring others with his singing? Were we not informed by Norwid's basically Romantic dislike for an excessive formalism in art?

So, maybe Norwid's searches will be focused on his reflection on truth—truth in art and truth in general—the most important, after all, goal of an artist?⁶¹ Let us remind ourselves: according to Norwid,

⁵⁹ Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 407).

⁶⁰ T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and Individual Talent", *Perspecta*, Vol. 19. (1982), pp. 36-42. The quotations come from pages 39 and 37. Cf., Andrzej Kaliszewski, *Nostalgia stylu. Neoklasycyzm liryki polskiej XX wieku w krytyce, badaniach i poetykach immanentnych (w kontekście tradycji poetologicznej klasycyzmu)*, Kraków 2007; Marek Stanis�, «Klasycyzm» i klasycy w literaturze polskiej XIX wieku. Przegląd stanowisk badawczych, w: *Klasycyzm. Estetyka – doktryna literacka – antropologia*, red. nauk. tomu Katarzyna Meller, Warszawa 2009, s. 261–280.

⁶¹ Norwid said: "A poet needs only the triumph of truth!". Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 424).

the truth about the world (and the truth of the world) is located somewhere between the opposing poles.⁶²

This is *a real* emotion, which is true poetry because I consider neither *dreams* (as weak) nor *reality* (as too material), but true *reality* to be an object of art.⁶³

This “between” does not mean, however, some static “golden mean”, nor it is a simple synthesis of contradictions. It expresses them and allows them to exist in man’s mind.⁶⁴ It is the role of a poet to preserve this truth as if in a vessel and to express it.⁶⁵

Let us admit that it is not easy to become a poet in Norwid’s fashion. Because, how can one be faithful to “a priesthood of hope”⁶⁶ and a prophet with supernatural wisdom, and at the same time not give up the profession of an ordinary member of the intelligentsia and be able to use ordinary, human knowledge and erudition? How to be at once a vessel and a mirror? How to be someone to whom at the same time these formulae apply: *poeta vates* and *poeta doctus*?

And what about Norwid’s view on literary originality? It is also not easy to define. Anyway, it is best expressed through paradoxes.⁶⁷ After all, it is independence and authenticity, but also a creative dependence on the Masters. This is faithfulness to once call but also

⁶² Compare Renata Gadamska-Serafin, *Poetyka – estetyka – metafizyka*, „Tematy i Konteksty” 2013, no. 3 (8), 160–161.

⁶³ Letter to Antoni Zaleski, Florence, 2 November 1844, (VIII, 13).

⁶⁴ I rely here on the notion of Barbara Skarga, who wrote this about dialectics in Plato and Aristotle: “It includes contradictions and does not know their synthesis.” See Barbara Skarga, *Dreszcz granicy*, in Eadem, *Człowiek to nie jest piękne zwierzę*, Kraków 2007, 71.

⁶⁵ Paulina Abriszewska wrote about Norwid’s metaphors of a poet as a vessel in op. cit., 298–299.

⁶⁶ Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 411–412).

⁶⁷ Paulina Abriszewska analysed the paradoxical nature of Norwid’s poetics. “On the one hand numerous gnomes, aphorisms, condensation of sense, on the other – a complex web of auto-reference, which a text or its gnomic verses, meant for autonomous reading, implicates into a wide authorial commentary [...]”. Paulina Abriszewska, op. cit., 193.

respect "the work of centuries" and efforts of generations gone. This is excellence, but also in a way contrastive with it 'darkness', this is clarity and mystery, impression and expression, mastery and lack. This is water from springs and sources, but also the law of the Prophets...

Therefore, from the perspective of the history of poetics, it is not possible to sustain the claim about the Romantic nature of Norwid's aesthetic sense. "Norwid's Romanticism", in the same way as "Norwid's Clacissism" or "Norwid's Modernism", are true formulae, but only partly true, demanding verifying supplements. Norwid's aesthetics was not exclusively Romantic or Classicist or avant-garde; it also was not traditional. At different moments it was different. It was an original combination of various inspirations and themes. It was deeply rooted in tradition, but it drew from various sources: the first one was located in antiquity and had been inspired by Plato, the second one was undoubtedly Classicist, the third—Romantic, and we should not forget about his similarities with the aesthetics of his contemporaries (like, for example, Baudelaire). It is a clear testimony of Norwid's "hermeneutic sensitivity".⁶⁸

Norwid created an original whole out of all these elements. In my opinion it does not resemble at all a static, ready, closed, rigid system of aesthetic ideas. Nor it is eclectic. On the contrary—it has been very interestingly planned and constructed. It creates a live organism—thanks to this suggestive dynamism and mobility of the concepts creating it. At the same time it is very elastic because it was constructed on solid philosophical foundations. It is really a great effect of Norwid's thinking—reluctant to static, symmetric knowledge, not contradictory internally, codified into the system. It expressed in a very good way Norwid's thinking about God, the world, man, artists and art.

⁶⁸ I refer here to an accurate formula of Paulina Abriszewska, developed in detail in the book *Literacka hermeneutyka Cypriana Norwida*, op. cit., However, I would like to note that this book is focused mostly on Norwid's reading of the world: man, history, culture, tradition, art. In this study I am more interested in Norwid's concept of creation and creativity.

Norwid's aesthetic views should therefore be looked at not as a learned catalogue of different ready ideas but as a list of directions, the use of which demands intellectual vigilance, constant verification, work of the imagination, intellect, emotions and consciousness, and, most of all—spiritual energy and authentic ardour. It is in this movement of ideas, in their open and aporetic character, in constant incompleteness, that the power of Norwid's thinking about literary originality is located.⁶⁹

If this is so, then it would be clear why Norwid could claim in the lectures *About Juliusz Słowacki*: "I do not bow to anyone [...]" This sentence has, after all, its continuations: "I do not bow to anyone, and that is why I can bow to a simple cross made of dry boughs, and leave with the head covered indigenously oaks and huge cedars of the Amazonian rainforest".⁷⁰ "I do not bow to anyone but the source of sources [...]"⁷¹

⁶⁹ During the debate about an early version of this paper Prof. Grażyna Halkiewicz-Sojak pointed to the need for a diachronic approach to Norwid's concepts. According to her, such a perspective would allow us to show more clearly the evolution of these concepts. I am grateful for this idea, but the limited scope of my study means that I cannot fully verify it. I can only mention that I relied on Norwid's quotes written in the 1840s, 1850s, 1860s and 1870s, and that they represent almost all phases of his writings.

⁷⁰ Cyprian Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim...* (VI, 424).

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.