

JOANNA TRZCIONKA

“CONVERSATIONS ARE MONOLOGUES”¹
LYRICISM IN *PIERŚCIEŃ WIELKIEJ DAMY*
(“A RING OF A GREAT LADY”)
BY CYPRIAN NORWID

A Ring of a Great Lady is one of Norwid's best researched plays. Thanks to the research undertaken by Irena Sławińska,² Waclaw Borowy,³ Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki, Sławomir Świontek⁴ and Joanna Zach Błońska⁵ the following issues have been dealt with: the geneological, dramatic and (to a certain extent) linguistic structure, elements of theatrical visions, Norwid's understanding of his times and civilization, the so called parlour stigma, the notion of a 'live woman', Norwid's views on artists and poetry, and the parabolic

¹ Cyprian Norwid, «A Dorio ad Phrygium», in *Pisma wszystkie*, zebrał, ed. by Juliusz W. Gomulicki, vol. 1–11, Warszawa 1971–1976, v. 3, 322. All quotations, except from *Vade-mecum*, are from this edition. A Roman number is for a volume, a Latin one for a page..

² Irena Sławińska, *O komediach Norwida*, Lublin 1953, 60–65, 71–76, 162–171; *Sceniczny gest poety*, Kraków 1960, 7–88; *Reżyserska ręka Norwida*, Kraków 1971, 59–37

³ Waclaw Borowy, *O Norwidzie. Rozprawy i notatki*, Warszawa 1960, 75–77.

⁴ Sławomir Świontek, *Wstęp*, in Cyprian Norwid, *Pierścień Wielkiej Damy*, ed. by Sławomir Świontek, Wrocław 1990, III–LXV; *Norwidowski teatr świata*, Łódź 1983, s. 151–159, 167–174; *Paraboliczność struktury scenicznej „Pierścienia Wielkiej Damy” C. Norwida*, in *Dramat i teatr. Konferencja teoretycznoliteracka w Świętej Katarzynie*, ed. by Jan Trzynadłowski, Wrocław 1967, 45–59.

⁵ Joanna Zach-Błońska, *Monolog różnogłosy. O dramatach współczesnych Cypriana Norwida*, Kraków 1993, 134–146.

construction of the play and the construction of the monologues. Kazimierz Braun⁶ described the play from the theatrical perspective.

A Ring of a Great Lady has also been dealt with by Jan Kott⁷, Roman Taborski⁸ and Teresa Skubalanka.⁹

The circumstances in which the play was written and its further 'life' are also known. It was written in 1872 for a drama competition organized by Stanisław Koźmian, director of a theatre in Cracow. While Norwid was working on it he was suffering from acute financial problems and numerous disappointments. We might assume that he was determined. In this period he was also trying hard to have *Vademecum* published. Unfortunately, he did not succeed. *A Ring* was not awarded any prize in the competition. A neat manuscript was found in the papers of Teofil Lenartowicz and published for the first time in 1933 by Zenon Przesmycki, and three years later it was shown on stage by the Reduta theatre.¹⁰

The similarity of the ups and downs of these two texts (*Vademecum* and *A Ring*) is not the only analogy connecting them. The similarities are probably much deeper. They go back to the idea of creating a novel literary text, different from any texts written earlier in Poland. The author of a book, *O komediach Norwida (On Norwid's Comedies)*, while analysing Norwid's views on the art of drama wrote that:

⁶ Kazimierz Braun, *Cypriana Norwida teatr bez teatru*, Warszawa 1971, 135–168.

⁷ Jan Kott, *Wielkie serio i buffo Norwida*, „Przegląd Kulturalny”, R. XI, 1972, no. 17.

⁸ Roman Taborski, *Wstęp do „Pierścienia Wielkiej Damy”*, in *Cyprian Norwid. Interpretacje*, ed. by Stanisław Makowski, Warszawa 1986.

⁹ Teresa Skubalanka, *Uwagi o kształcie językowym „Pierścienia Wielkiej Damy”*, in „Prace filologiczne”, v. XLIII, Warszawa 1998, 417–424.

¹⁰ Historical and publishing information from *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Cypriana Norwida* Zofii Trojanowiczowej i Elżbiety Lijewskiej, v. II / 1861–1883, Poznań 2007, ed. by Juliusz W. Gomulicki, *Dodatek krytyczny*, in: Cyprian Norwid, *Pisma wszystkie*, v. 5, Warszawa 1971, and: Sławomir Świąntek, *Wstęp*, in Cyprian Norwid, *Pierścień Wielkiej Damy*, op. cit., V–X; Irena Sławińska, *Przedmowa*, in *Eadem, O komediach Norwida*, op. cit., 1–6.

Norwid clearly had in mind avoiding the cheap effect of haughty, strongly accented words—the difficult linguistic stratum of the drama. We will find in this approach an echo of the drives which were dominant while he was writing *Vade-mecum*. In *Vade-mecum* the issue at stake was the very *materiae poeticae*, while in *A Ring*, the choice of dramatic words. So, Norwid's programme looked like this: non-poetic *materia* and simple, colourless words both in lyric poetry and in drama.¹¹

These are important words; the experience of reading the text shows, however, that *materiae poeticae* also has its place in drama. The poetic features of Norwid dramas were described by Kazimierz Braun,¹² while Sławomir Świontek had no doubts about the fact that *A Ring of a Great Lady* is a poetic drama in the contemporary sense of this notion.¹³ Therefore, it is worth pondering where this poetic aspect can be found.¹⁴

¹¹ Irena Sławińska, *O komediach Norwida*, op. cit., 13.

¹² Kazimierz Braun, *Poetycki teatr Norwida*, in *Idem, Cypriana Norwida teatr bez teatru*, op. cit., 251–262.

¹³ Sławomir Świontek, *Paraboliczność struktury scenicznej „Pierścienia Wielkiej Damy”*

C. Norwida, op. cit., 51.

¹⁴ The poetic aspect of a drama is decided mostly by lyricism being the overarching category present in poetry – this aesthetic category is connected with subjectivity. See Stefan Szuman, *O kunszcie i istocie poezji lirycznej*, Toruń 1948; Ostap Ortwin, *Żywe fikcje*, ed. by Jadwiga Czachowska, introduction by Michał Głowiński, Warszawa 1970; Czesław Zgorzelski, *Liryczność poezji romantycznej*, in *Idem, Zarysy i szkice literackie*, Warszawa 1988; Paul Ricoeur, *Język, tekst, interpretacja*, ed. by Katarzyna Rosner, trans. by Piotr Graff i Katarzyna Rosner, Warszawa 1989; Roman Ingarden, *O tak zwanej prawdzie w literaturze*, in *Idem, Szkice z filozofii literatury*, intro. by Władysław Stróżewski, Kraków 2000; Bernadetta Kuczera-Chachulska, *Kategoria liryczności a problemy wartościowania*, in *Wartość i sens. Aksjologiczne aspekty teorii interpretacji*, ed. by Andrzej Tyszczyk, Edward Fiały, Ryszard Zajączkowski, Lublin 2003; Anna Nasiłowska, *Persona liryczna*, Warszawa 2000; Janusz Sławiński, *Liryka, Podmiot liryczny*, in Michał Głowiński, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, Janusz Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. by Janusz Sławiński, Wrocław 2002.

The plot of *A Ring of a Great Lady* is essentially realistic.¹⁵ However, Norwid skilfully added lyrical elements to it. It seems that the integration of realism and lyricism in this play¹⁶ creates the important factor of the construction of parabolic meanings (together with the method of ‘zooming’ and ‘showing’¹⁷). They are built onto the basic plan of intrigues and events.¹⁸ As a result we have a great poetic synthesis “of rules governing the world and man in general”.¹⁹ This synthesis is, to a large extent, influenced by the presence of lyricism, which at the same time makes the drama poetic. That is why an attempt to understand lyricism in *A Ring* becomes an important way of understanding this drama. In this paper I will limit the research field to some elements of the dramatic structure of the play, which are, to a large extent, shaped through lyricism: time, space, and the construction of the main protagonist.

**1. “Till there was no space between us,/And time followed
the space”²⁰ The lyrical spatial-temporal
projection of the drama**

The plot of *A Ring of a Great Lady*, according to the author’s instructions, is set in the nineteenth century in the palace of countess Harrys and its vicinity. (V, 190). It lasts a day and is relatively typical: Act One—in the morning, Act II—at noon, Act III in the evening. As Sławomir Świontek noted:

The dramatic plot of *A Ring* is set in real conditions of social life in the nineteenth century. The time, the rhythm and the manner of this life is governed by social conventions, rules, *bienséances*. They influence

¹⁵ See Sławomir Świontek, *Wstęp*, op. cit., XXXIV.

¹⁶ Janusz Maciejewski indirectly drew the attention to Norwid’s joining realism and lyricism See Janusz Maciejewski in *Idem, Cyprian Norwid*, Warszawa 1992, 108.

¹⁷ Sławomir Świontek, *Norwidowski teatr świata*, op. cit., 161–163.

¹⁸ Sławomir Świontek, *Paraboliczność struktury scenicznej „Pierścienia Wielkiej Damy”*

Norwida, op. cit. 48.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁰ Cyprian Norwid, *Pierścień Wielkiej Damy*, V, 302.

the plot development and influence the behaviour of the protagonists. Which makes the following aspects so crucial: hours of visits, the time of the countess's charity work, and the regulated time of social life presented in the drama.²¹

In the drama time begins to have one more function, apart from the fact that it influences the parlour life, "which is the real clock of this world – the world of the countess"²² and influences the development of the plot. The hours given in the play become a special 'clock of experiences' of the main protagonists.

Three time levels can be distinguished in this drama. The first one covers the whole of the nineteenth century, the second is narrower – it covers one day (the nineteenth century is seen in a sort of 'zoom'), and the third level is different and is connected with the experiences of individual protagonists. That is why the proper time of the plot refers not only to nineteenth century society, but also (maybe, predominantly) to the concrete people in this period and in this society. This sphere moves to the foreground and becomes a kind of lens into the nineteenth century. The multi-layered temporal structure exists in the drama thanks to the composition in which we can distinguish 'formal time' (identical with plot time) and 'content time' (appearing in the statements of the protagonists).²³ The latter appears in the statements of Durejko and Maria (pointing, among other things, to the literal order of the judge and constant lack of time of the countess) and is implicated by the lyric element present in the drama.

The first words of Durejko in the fifth scene are: "The time and rigour of execution has come". He says them three times in the first and third acts (V, 205, 206, 284). These words not only tell us about

²¹ Sławomir Świontek, *Wstęp*, op. cit., XXXVI.

²² *Ibid.*, 241.

²³ I use Péter Szondi's expression in a slightly different way, while analysing Thornton Wilder's play *The Long Christmas Dinner* understands them in the following way: 'formal time' is the time of the play, 'content time' is shaped by primordial montage. Cf., Péter Szondi, *Teoria nowoczesnego dramatu*, transl. by Edmund Misiołek, Warszawa 1976, s. 144.

the judge, but also inform us about subsequent events, so difficult for Mak-Yks—in the first act about his dismissal from a flat, and in the third about the suspicion of the theft of the ring, Similar words of Salome, “yes, I come at this unusual hour, so early to forewarn you” (V, 192), stress not so much the time of day, but the moment in which the machine of coincidences connected with Mak-Yks’s painful experiences took off.

The dawn is heralded by the first sunbeams and birds singing, “which fly to windows to say hello” (V, 223). The beginning day is a pretext for Mak-Yks’s poetic monologue (V, 191-192) The words of the monologue point towards the protagonist; they are filled with lyricism which obliterates the dominance of ‘real’ time. The protagonist’s contact with contemporaneity elicits recollections and an obscure fear of the coming future; time transcends the dimensions of the drama. Péter Szondi wrote that in dramas such a thing happens when the reality of the depicted world is viewed and experienced “through the subjective lens of some central ‘I’”²⁴ In *A Ring* we see the actions of such a subject through the lyrical layer.

Time, in a specific way, determined by the movement beyond the window, is watched and poetically commented upon by the protagonists:

Szeliga
 See!... at this hour
 Such a traffic of carriages can be seen through this clearing,
 It seems as if they had just been woken up!
 Or that something unusual has happened,,.
 And yet, it is only the time of visits...
 (V, 223)

The poetic explanation of the view from the window is enough to cause internal turmoil in both protagonists (Mak-Yks and Szeliga) and to introduce dramatic tension without external development of the plot. The putting together of “a traffic of carriages” and “the time

²⁴ Ibid., 69.

of visits" results in the situation in which time becomes dynamic and acquires a spatial form.²⁵ This is characteristic in situations in which time is articulated poetically. Szeliga explains to the judge the purpose of astronomical observations and says: "The eye when it sees the goal, exhilarates,/And makes the place and time secondary" (V, 205). Maks-Yks uses similar words to describe his feelings for Maria:

Really:
At a distance—I have always been close,
Till there was no space between us,
And time followed the space.
(V, 302)

The lyric declarations of Szeliga and Maks-Yks abolish the spatial-temporal limitations, making from both of these spheres a kind of universe of human emotions.

In *A Ring* the time of the plot and everything which is connected with the chronology of events have been included in the sphere of interior time; the time in the framework of which we can see the internal processes of the protagonists, their getting ready for concrete decisions (the slow and conscious getting ready of Mak-Yks for suicide and then, overcoming it; a sudden and unexpected change of Maria; the emotional development of Szeliga and Magdalena). The observation of time's actions on many layers is possible thanks to the lyricism present in the drama, thanks to which the formal limitations of dramatic constructions are transcended. The internal experiences of the protagonists given to receivers through poetic confessions result in the constant transcendence of the time and the space of the drama, making it relative.²⁶

²⁵ According to Szondie, spatial time exists when the drama is not filled with an plot. See, op. cit., 88.

²⁶ See op. cit., 44.

The construction of dramatic space²⁷ reveals the lyrical character of the drama even more clearly. In fact it has been totally subjected to the emotions of the main protagonists (particularly of Maks-Yks) and is really created by them. The events in the first act are limited by the space of Mak-Yks's room: "An attic—a place filled with books, windows overlook the green, but are somewhat shaded—the morning" (V, 191). Act II is set in "one of the side parlours of Villa Harrys" (V, 226), act III in "the main parlour of the Villa—with wide door leading to a veranda and side ones leading to other parlours" (V, 262). This space is "visualized", described in stage directions, closed, the world here is seen through a window or a parlour door. Michael Issacharoff, called it the mimetic space.²⁸ The author's directions give only general information about the place, which leaves room for reconstruction on the part of recipients. The real 'concretization' of the space is accomplished through reading of the so called 'added meanings', which are realized in the reading of monologues and dialogues. The space constructed in this way is dependent on the protagonists' experiences and their points of view.²⁹ At times it reveals the attitude of a protagonist to some space, as is the case with Mak-Yks's room: it is cosy and gives the feeling of security.

MAK-YKS

[...]

Looking around his flat

I have many consolations!... Here...this room...

In the direction of the window

²⁷ I understand dramatic space as an effect of literary reception. See; Patrice Pavis, *Słownik terminów teatralnych*, przeł., transl. and ed. by Sławomir Świontek, Wrocław 1998, 400.

²⁸ Issacharoff divides dramatic space (understanding as given by a playwright) into mimetic and diegetic. Quoted in Jerzy Limon, *Między niebem a sceną. Przestrzeń i czas w teatrze*, Gdańsk 2002, 27.

²⁹ Issacharoff defines it as diagetical space, see footnote 29.

Over there! Maria's shadow seen from afar.

In the direction of the room

The silence of dead hearts in my books,
Which live not only with reading.

Mysteriously

It happens that the external aspect of texts in here,
Sent here and there, by accident,
Enlivened suddenly by a flash of light,
As groups of mummies in a pyramid,
Says something with wide lips,
And walls take it to the air.
Which wholly belongs to me! –

(V, 196–197)

This is "the whole world" of Mak-Yks. Even the shadow of Maria is here. Let us note the fact which has been stressed several times, that the room and everything in it belongs to the protagonist. Scattered books are compared to mummies in pyramids. The whole room becomes a special place, cosy, but also mysterious, sepulchre-like, throbbing with some invisible life. The protagonist's distance to the place has been totally abolished. Mak-Yks describes each thing as if he was in very, close, physical contact with it. The monologue shaped in this way is a lyrical projection of the world presented in the drama. We can discern in it the constant oscillation between giving the space some autonomy, and treating it exclusively at the context for the protagonist's 'soul space'.³⁰

This poetic fragment aptly shows the emotional attitude of the protagonist to the place and intensifies the dramatic effect of his removal from the flat. The room is Mak-Yks's private space

³⁰ Cf., Henryk Michalski, *Od egzemplarycznej do lirycznej projekcji świata*, in *Przestrzeń i literatura*, ed. by Michał Głowiński and Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, Wrocław 1978, 168.

which is brutally invaded by Durejko. The removal from the flat results in the breaking of the protagonist's emotional ties with a place so important to him. He is thrown into a hostile, external space, so far perceived only through a window. The view from the window forms a horizontal space, which is dangerous, while birds carrying bread crumbs upwards show a vertical space³¹ which gives little hope.

A window is an element of spatial decoration which has been adopted in an interesting way for the drama. It is an element connecting a hostile external world with the enclosed space of the drama, which it expands at the same time. It functions as a lens through which the protagonist looks at the world and through which this world enters his life. Irena Sławińska, while presenting the achievements of the research on theatre from the world perspective wrote, among other things, about two types of spaces described by Volker Klotz, which refer mostly to open drama, but which are also adequate in the case of *A Ring Innenraum*— private, intimate space and *Aussenraum*—the menacing external world:

The relationship between these two separate spaces usually has [...] an antagonistic character: the external world thrusts itself on the individual, violates her isolation [...], does not give an individual the right to her own 'coquille'. The channel of the contact is usually an open window, through which pours the menacing *Aussen, le dehors*.³²

In Norwid's drama the external intervention continues. The protagonist's space is restricted so much that the only thing which he is left with is his dignity, which will also be destroyed.

Practically all the dialogues in the first act are set near the window. It is the theme of conversations, at times a makeshift one, but it also is a channel supplying information about the protagonists' real

³¹ Michał Głowiński, *Wokół „Powieści” Norwida*, in *Idem, Prace wybrane. Intertekstualność, groteska, parabola*, v. V, Kraków 2000, 270.

³² Irena Sławińska, *Teatr w myśli współczesnej. Ku antropologii teatru*, Warszawa 1990, 321.

emotions and motives. At times it provides a very good background for the lyrical monologues (of Mak-Yks and Szeliga). In the scene which opens the drama the protagonist compares the glaring/striking sunbeams to people:

As if some were known to us,
While the other ones were foreign—and these went into glasses
As someone strange—or someone announcing strangers.
(V, 191)

This is a prophetic declaration. After all, just a moment later Salome will see through this very window the judge with Szeliga, and the result of this visit will be very painful to Mak-Yks. These are the first words of the drama. They are only preceded by the invocation: "Here we have the first beam, of the ones that strike..."

In this way, the protagonist not only initiates the plot, but he also constructs the world of this drama,³³ which is characteristic of lyric poetry. The window is no longer an element of architecture. It begins to acquire symbolic values. On the one hand, the protagonist looks at the world through it, and on the other it becomes a sign of his separation from the external, hostile reality, which, however, breaks through inside.

Mak-Yks looks at the world through the window, at the closest of perspectives (with trees and birds), which makes him reflexive and fosters poetic visions, but he also looks at the window itself. While he is watching the departing Salome and pondering her request he says: "If only this woman knew this" (V. 195), and turning to the window, moves in his mind towards a different person. "And if SHE knew it!". The look through the window creates in him an image of Maria, whom he sees:

As if she were one of the saints on the windows
Of a Gothic church --- like pearls,

³³ Janusz Sławiński claimed that the space in a work of literature exists "as long as it has not become a clear problem for a speaking subject." See *Idem, Przestrzeń w literaturze*, in *Przestrzeń i literatura...*, 17.

With amethyst folds of her robe
And the golden areola on her forehead.

(V, 196)

The window ‘creates’ in Mak-Yks a poetic impression through the simple connection of glass and stained-glass. Despite the striking beams, it is one of few consolations for him. But it is even something more: “For me [...] these windows/have their own mystery...” (V, 221); as if the protagonist drew from these windows some reviving powers. When Szeliga takes over the room, Mak-Yks states:

I can see that this place pushes me off!
I even detest the window! --
So that I turn away from it -- not wanting
Either the light of the day or the moon.

(V, 216)

The gesture of turning away from the window, strengthened by the spoken words (separated graphically), takes on a symbolic meaning of losing something precious, as well as of disconnection from a favourite object, resignation leading to despondency and powerlessness. “[...] The coincidence of various ironies/diminishes personality—one does not want to want!” (V, 216).

The fact that both Mak-Yks and Szeliga attach so much importance to the same windows reveals their feelings (for example, when they both jump to the window, when they see carriages moving, V, 223-224). Because for count Szeliga windows also have “astronomical importance”. From the moment Szeliga appears on the stage he keeps staring at the window and the view beyond it, and makes it a topic of conversation and considerations (almost the whole of the fourth scene). For Szeliga, as for Mak-Yks, the window opens two perspectives. However, unlike Mak-Yks, he is not interested in the one closest to him, as he claims that: “beyond the house [...] is my goal” (V, 205). And he is only to a little extent concerned with the observation of the external world, the countess’ house and the countess herself. For Szeliga, concentration on the superficial thing, together with suspiciousness towards Mak-Yks, would mean

"the eclipse of the moral world" (V, 224). He warns himself against such short sightedness.

To be able to make one's sight go beyond the window,
When one cannot do it inside -
This is: to look through ONE, FLAT glass!

(V, 225)

The motif of the window is constantly connected with the ability to see, but to see with one's inner eye. Because the window is located in a double context (an element of decoration and a poetic metaphor), it constantly generates new ways of looking at the space. It is impossible to have one general outlook at the dramatic space of *A Ring*. It was organized in such a way that a reader should "take what is 'seen'" as only a part of the much bigger whole.³⁴ The space of the room or the parlour, in which the drama is set, is only apparently limited. It is constantly transcended by the protagonists. Sometimes its borders touch infinity:

MAK-YKS

In deep monologue

Forsooth, I am returning TO MYSELF! –

Equivocally

But I am still left with many layers,
Higher and higher!—till lands
Of Durejko himself! ...end
Smiling wryly

It is really so fortunate that the globe is in the space
Which Humanity has not measured
Grand—yes, as abyss!... And the only one.

(V, 215)

³⁴ Jan Błoński, *Dramat i przestrzeń*, in *Przestrzeń i literatura...*, 197.

The perspective of Mak-Yke's spatial seeing is conversely proportional to the more and more limited space he could be in. The poetic monologues make it possible to overcome the barrier of the enclosed space of the drama, and enables the entering of the materially intangible, internal space of the protagonist. The area of his deep emotions becomes the proper space of the play. The setting of *A Ring of a Great Lady* described in the stage directions externally is poor and static.³⁵ It is enriched and made dynamic only thanks to the metaphors embedded in the language of the drama.

Both the dramatic space and the time of the plot were made metaphoric and transferred to the spiritual experiences of the protagonists. Both layers (temporal and spatial) become subjective, which is closely connected with lyricism. It is natural that if lyricism starts to dominate in a drama, the plot disappears to certain extent,³⁶ or that what 'is said' in a given play and what 'happens' are two very different things.³⁷ It seems that *A Ring of a Great Lady* is an example of a play in which balance and adequacy were preserved; which means: each of the spheres described above (of time and space) has two layers: external and internal. They coexist in this play and mutually intermingle, but they do not interfere with the area of plot adequate for a dramatic form or with the quality of values generated by the lyricism embedded in the play.

2. "To remove oneself from oneself and enter oneself"³⁸

Lyrical description of Mak-Yks's ordeal

A Ring of a Great Lady begins with these words: "Here we have the first beam, of the ones that strike..." (V, 191). Sławomir Swiontek analysed Mak-Yks's monologue and observed that: "the whole plot of the play

³⁵ Perhaps except for the final scene, which contains a display of fireworks.

³⁶ Péter Szondi, op. cit., 38.

³⁷ Ibid., 77.

³⁸ Cyprian Norwid, *Rzecz o wolności słowa*, III, 569.

to come [...] will consist of the subsequent 'strikes' aimed at the main protagonist".³⁹

The events of the play are centred around Mak-Yks's experiences, which gives it a specific character: they reveal a different—internal—space of the plot. Revealing this separate plane of the play is connected with the strong lyrical saturation of large fragments of it. We will not find in *A Ring* separate parts or so-called lyrical interludes, but many utterances (both monologues and dialogues) are harmoniously transformed into autonomous poetic pieces. They have an influence on shaping the most important semantic layers of the play. Among other things, they reveal deep personal transformations of the protagonists, particularly of Mak-Yks.

He is a young poet, quiet, shy, and even a bit clumsy (V, 300); he reads a lot. His perceptive mind allows him to exquisitely understand the nature of his society. (V, 225) Mak-Yks is not always concerned with the way he looks, "with the untrimmed beard" (V, 229). He leads "almost, the life of a hermit" (V, 229), and at the same time he can surprise people around him with his high culture and awareness of different social conventions. (V, 225) He is poor, is behind with his rent (V, 192) and, generally, is not very active.

This small set of information about his features may lead to constructing certain impressions about him. He has been treated roughly by life, and what a reader may get from the text is only a small part of reality. The expulsion from his flat, the failure during a visit to the countess and the final event in the evening, although they are painful in themselves, are additionally strengthened by his numerous monologues, and make the dramatic situation even more acute. The lyrical fragments form a tissue used to construct this play.

Mak-Yks's suffering caused by his losing his flat are shown to a reader from Salome's perspective. She tidies up the room after he has left it.

³⁹ Sławomir Świontek, *Wstęp*, op. cit., XXXVIII.

My God!

The world does not give the place to quiet people,
As if by a flood, they are more and more
Covered and pushed all the time,
Till the last day overflows their foreheads...

(V, 211)

A reader is moved by the cry of pain of the old servant. A poetic vision of a man ‘pushed’ and ‘overflowed’ by suffering as a wave of a flood, which destroys everything it finds in its way is very expressive. An interesting analogy of a flood and time, acting to the detriment of the protagonist is thus created. A bit later, Salome reacts strongly to Szeliga’s remark about Mak-Yks’s madness, and she analyses the situation of such a man in contemporaneity:

SALOME

[...]

With a sigh

Quiet people are a disgrace of the world!
And it pushes them off all the time,
Further and further, quicker and quicker...
And finally they say: “He is a madman!”
I am a maid, I sew for the princess
(And maybe you, the count, know her)
Princess Orsi (who used to be an actress),
It is there that I saw so many strange things of the world!

(V, 212)

“Disgrace of the world”—a strong epithet, showing that people like Mak-Yks are not wanted by the world; that they are superfluous. It is better to push such a man beyond the borders than to see sick social structures or the ineptitude of political systems. Salome discovered even more. She had a chance to see the life of the great world when she was a seamstress for princess Orsi. She learnt a lot about this social class and she considers it mad. The last lines of the servant’s utterance force us to change our thinking and see Mak-Yks in a new light.

Deeply

Not everybody who speaks with himself
Is a madman...
And not everybody
Who lives so modestly is nobody! –
(V, 212)

Looking through Salome's eyes allows readers to see the suffering of the protagonist, and at the same time it changes the image of Mak-Yks created by people around him. Salome's incisiveness and her judgement are surprising. All her utterances have 'additional' semantic power. As if she was speaking with a voice different than her own, the voice of an old, simple servant. In fact this additional awareness belongs to the author of the play, a poet who reveals himself in the character he created.⁴⁰ This situation (which is not unique for Norwid) points to some form of tension which exists between the voice of the protagonist and the voice of the author, which is characteristic for poetic dramas.⁴¹ It seems that all characters in this play (except for the Durejkos) despite social and cultural differences have the stamp of what Eliot would have called "that unmistakable personal rhythm".⁴²

Mak-Yks's next difficult experience happens during his visit to countess Harrys. Mak-Yks wants to talk with the countess about Salome's son, but because of the subsequent blow "something in his way of thinking broke" (V, 235) and he managed only to comment bitterly on her words:

MAK-YKS
These are 'not people! – lady!... these are only

⁴⁰ See Jacek Kopciński *Nastuchiwanie. Sztuki na głosy Zbigniewa Herberta*, Warszawa 2008, 92.

⁴¹ Eliot believes that in a poetic drama a poet can speak through any of his protagonists. See Thomas Stearns Eliot, *The Three Voices of Poetry*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1953, 12-16,

⁴² Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Poetry and Drama*, Faber & Faber, London, 1950, 12.

People grateful to you or
 Knowing how to appreciate you – not people!...
 With them you could clasp a button.
 With no mistakes, properly
 (V, 234)

The words of Maria, “these are not people”, were painful to Mak-Yks. In his poetic answer there appears the irony of Norwid, approaching sarcasm in a strange connection with the seriousness of the utterance. The irony is directed at the words of the countess. Her behaviour shows sharply her attitude to the main protagonist and other people. The edge of irony shows the truth about such people as Maria, and it also shows the disappointment of Mak-Yks. The seriousness mentioned before is hidden in the protagonist’s complaint, which in a subtle way shows the authenticity of his feelings towards Maria. Mak-Yks really admires her.

The clash of irony and seriousness results in the situation that this utterance reveals Mak-Yks’s remorse and bitterness, and is not his ‘attack’ on a particular person. Mak-Yks has been touched so strongly, that he loses his control over words, “which jump out of the mouth/being stronger than the speaker”. (V, 234) It seems that from the perspective of Mak-Yks’s experiences, his meeting with Maria is the climax of the play. His suffering reaches heights because he was deprived of his dignity. The accusation of the ring’s theft, which comes later, is only an external expression of the words mechanically thrown by Maria” “These are not people!” Joanna Zach-Błońska, in the context of *A Ring of a Great Lady*, wrote that

Inside the dramatic discourse there appears a characteristic hiatus between the realistic means of the scenic plot’s construction and the suggested parabolic meanings of events and utterances.⁴³

This dissonance, discussed by Zach-Błońsk, between prosaic events and the senses generated by them is the result of the lyrical features of this play. It results in the multi-layered structure of it: the level

⁴³ Joanna Zach-Błońska, *Monolog różnogłosy...*, op. cit., 49.

of primary literal meanings and the parabolic layer built on the top of it, revealing the truth about nineteenth century society⁴⁴ and a plane of the internal experiences of the protagonist, parallel with it.

Mak-Yks is a sensitive man who refuses to be humiliated, but he seems to have no more stamina to deal with the blows. However, he is certain that:

[...] these are not people, today:
One day and one hour
Only they will remain...
This depends on the background, not on the object,
When the background changes, the object will follow.

(V, 234)

This fragment has multiple meanings. In the undefined future Mak-Yks's position may change. For, example his material situation will improve, or some social changes will come. His social status will grow and he will be 'worthy' of being called a man. However, the reading of this passage takes us further, because the words "only they will remain" is one more sign of the protagonist's authentic admiration for the countess. It is this authenticity which does not allow him to change his attitude towards her, and one day it may turn out that it is the position of the countess which will change, and only those who in her eyes were "not people" will remain "obliged" and "able to appreciate". One more thing is revealed here: the protagonist's conviction about his own 'worth'.

The metaphor of the 'background' and the 'object' used by Norwid in this fragment corresponds with the symbols of the 'background' and the 'essence' from his poem significantly entitled (*Śmierć*) ("Death"). Therefore, using the distance analogy, "one day and one hour" may indicate the ultimate moment in man's life. Anyway, a border point has been shown which changes everything. The "background" and the "object", in a way, refer to the changing

⁴⁴ Sławomir Świontek, *Paraboliczność struktury scenicznej „Pierścienia Wielkiej Damy”...*, op. cit., 44-59

situation of man, and also to what is transient in life, as if the pair of words “the person—the situation” has been replaced by the parallel “the object—the background”. This constant discovery of definitions of what it means to be a man is very poignant. Norwid dealt with this issue in most of his texts; texts written within very different generic conventions.⁴⁵ In *A Ring* it is seen mostly in the way Mak-Yks as a protagonist is presented; in his attempts to get closer to the people surrounding him, but nevertheless remaining in isolation.

A reader is surprised by Mak-Yks’s idea “to end it all with one shot” (V, 295), because throughout most of the play this character is like Norwid’s *porte-parole*, he conveys Norwid’s own ideas. Mak-Yks’s suffering and despair, however, do not obliterate the sharpness of his observations and the analysis of certain issues, including his own behaviour. Thanks to these, he is able, during the countess’s reception, to construct the following reflection,

MAK-YKS

In monologue

It turns out that one moment
Of doubt – one turbulent thought,
Even if we have forgotten it,
May be a burden for the whole day!...
Searching himself with his hand.
The pistol bangs into furniture! As if it was superfluous!

Eating

– I was idle, indeed,
The body intended to end with itself...

To himself, smiling

⁴⁵ See Mieczysław Ingot, *Norwidowski człowiek*, „Pamiętnik Literacki”, R. 74, (4); Pelagia Bojko, *Sfera „słów wielkich”: „człowiek” i „człek” w liryce C.K. Norwida*, Piotrków Trybunalski 2006; Tomasz Korpysz, *Człowiek w definicji poetyckiej Norwida. O różnych definiensach jednego definiendum*, in Idem, *Definicje poetyckie Norwida*, Lublin 2009, 229–284.

Byron was right when he
Stated that the courage of Ancient men
Was dependent on good digestion!...

(V, 276-277)

It seems as if a totally different persona was speaking, detached, as far as the world and himself are concerned; detached, in a way, also to his surroundings, which are in some way responsible for his suffering. He is even able to smile and crack a joke at himself... The idea of suicide, carrying the pistol with himself, was the result of the pressure of events and emotions. Now, the pistol is no longer needed. The joke about "Ancient men" is indicative of Mak-Yks's great triumph over himself—of gaining the courage to live. Summing up of his behaviour with the words of Byron is deeply ironic. Irony allows him "to move out of himself".⁴⁶ This man has transcended some layer of reality and looks at his suffering from a distance. The consciousness which he has attained places him beyond the community he lives with, and he is aware of the meaning of his words:

MAK-YKS

Loudly

[...] how cynicism ...to whom?...hm

Those who watch this tragedy from afar,

Never getting near Fate,

Never touching gods with their fingers,

Are idolaters exactly because of this!

(V, 277)

This is sharp and deserved criticism of all people who want to see the suffering of themselves and others from a distance. They are afraid to get closer to it and face it. They run away from the pain

⁴⁶ It is difficult to agree with Sławomir Świontek, who claimed that irony is hidden in the fact that "the protagonist intending to commit suicide becomes much more cheerful after he has eaten a snack", because irony becomes the result of his analysis of his own behaviour. See Sławomir Świontek, *Paraboliczność struktury scenicznej „Pierścienia Wielkiej Damy”...*, op. cit., 51

of others through charity work, and they push their own suffering into the unconscious. Mak-Yks has, in a way, the right to give such a sharp opinion because he himself has “seen into suffering as an artist”⁴⁷. The poem from *Vade-mecum* has not been quoted by accident. In the play we find the same Norwid’s “Fate”. Frequent associations of fragments from this play strengthen the conviction about the unity of the integrated personality which is revealed in different texts and is close to the author’s subject.

Mak-Yks is now a different man, although he still suffers. He is totally exhausted, tired in the community which has led him to the end of his tether. He decides to go away, to go on a long journey because:

[...] a traveller, if
Covered from head to toe in white dust,
Bears heat...is cooled by the goal of his journey
And he is happy with all *traveils* --
But what will You tell about this tree,

Near a public road,
Whose lightest leaf or bough
Through all days sharp limy dust

Covers with a pale layer of sand?—With what?
Greenness will be comforted by them,
Looking at the wheels which go closely by,
As on the wheels of his torture,
Throwing dust at him
And turning them towards the earth,
Through the permanent funeral of each leaf.

(V, 278)

This allegory of a “tree near a public road” is beautiful and horrible. And the laconic statement of Mrs. Durejko: “Why don’t you translate

⁴⁷ Cyprian Norwid, *Fatum*, w: tegoż *Vade-mecum*, oprac. Józef Fert, BN I, nr 271, Kraków 1999, s. 58. Cytaty z *Vade-mecum* za tym wydaniem. Dalej w nawiasie piszę skrót VM oraz numer strony.

pieces/for young ladies to recite?" (V, 278) strengthens the impression of dissonance between the poetic vision and the meanings it conveys. Apparently, the wife of the judge saw something 'poetic' in the question, hence her answer. She did not completely understand that Mak-Yks had been talking about himself and, in a way, about her as one of his tormentors. The contrast of the lyrical monologue of Mak-Yks with the non-lyrical, 'flat' answer of Mrs. Durejko strengthens the distance between the protagonist and the parlour community. The situation of the tree mirrors the situation of the protagonist; a public road becomes the metaphor of social life. Mak-Yks presents himself as someone thrown beyond the borders of society.

Let us remain one more moment with this poetic picture of a traveller-pilgrim. The very thought about this journey fills the protagonist with joy and relief. He has not yet started his journey, but he already feels like a traveller. However, he is not a typical voyager; he is more of a wanderer, who "covered from head to toe in white dust" roams the earth to reach his destination. However, we do not know this destination. Is it "the New World beyond the ocean" promised by Szeliga (V, 301), a change of surroundings, or trying to salvage one's good reputation? (V, 298) We know that Mak-Yks has not gone away, at least that is how the play ends.

Norwid built an allegory of the tree and revealed the internal state of his protagonist in an interesting way. He used multiple metaphors to do so and he compared the situation of a traveller and a tree to the situation of the one who speaks the monologue. This situation looks similar only from the outside: the traveller suffers "covered" with "white dust", the tree with "limy dust". However, the level of suffering is so different. The former brings hope, the latter brings destruction. The contrast of the imagined future of the traveller with the real state (of the tree) strengthens the emotional situation of the quoted fragment. The piling up of metaphors shows the level of suffering and necropsying of the protagonist. "Looking at the wheels which go closely by,/As on the wheels of his torture" and "Throwing dust at him/And turning them towards the earth" are the description of spent literary symbols, here used poetically in a masterly fashion.

One of the elements influencing the experiences of Mak-Yks is his feelings for Maria Harrys. The theme of love is usually presented as one of the main ones of *A Ring of a Great Lady* by most researchers. It is true that the love dialogue at the end of the play is important, but it is only one of many themes presented by Norwid. Mak-Yks declares his love to Maria at the end of the third act, when he was, in fact, forced to do so:

THE COUNTESS

[...]

Approaches Mak-Yks and touches his shoulder.

Mak-Yks! Have you ever loved me?

MAK-YKS

Bowing to her feet

At such a great distance ... And bigger,

Cruelly so much bigger,

That I really don't know if the same distance

Under our feet in Oceania,

Or when I see the 'constellation of the Cross',

From under a foreign sail... I don't know... if

The same, and at the same time

Beam will not connect us...

Verily: At distance – I have always been so close!

Till there was no space between us,

And time followed...

Honestly,

Those who love this way are either not here today,

Or they are from a different world...

(V, 301-302)

This fragment has some of the freshness of a very new discovery. Maria's question not only forced the answer, but in a way it made Mak-Yks aware of himself and allowed him to name and express the deepest emotions. The force of the declared love brings new meanings, important for a fuller understanding of the play. Each of the painful experiences, especially the ones perpetrated by the countess, intensifies the protagonist's sufferings.

Mak-Yks's answer can be divided into three parts. In the first one he speaks thoughts he has been carrying inside him for a long time, as if he was sharing conclusions reached a long while ago. The second one (from "Verily") and the third one (from "Honestly") are filled with this freshness. The protagonist reveals for Maria, and most of all for himself, fresh layers of thought. The words "verily" and "honestly" separate different parts of the utterance, show the protagonist's attitude to these words, and gradually strengthen the expression of this monologue with the simultaneous shortening of it: from rich metaphors, through shorter, aphoristic utterance till gnomic ending. Norwid quite often organized the structure of his poems in this way. This device forestalls making shallow the final gnomic expression and does not allow us to read it without the context not only of this fragment, but of the whole play, and thus it widens its meaning.

While Mak-Yks, when he says that he is in love, reveals the drama which has been going on inside him and his unrequited love. With each passing moment any hope to have this love reciprocated moves further and further away. This leads to a gradual calming of emotions, hiding of all the emotions inside the protagonist, leading to more spiritual pain.

The opening phrases also point to a growing distance between Mak-Yks and Maria. The distance of the protagonist from the object of his love and the hope for its fulfilment grows bigger and bigger, till it acquires cosmic dimensions. What is more, Mak-Yks's love for the countess ruins him internally, leads to internal necrosis, but also takes him onto another, metaphorical perspective of life. The metaphor with the 'constellation-Cross' seen 'from under a foreign sail', not only refers to the constellation of the Southern Cross, which cannot be observed in Europe, but it is also reminiscent of the poetic imagery in the poem "Krzyż i dziecko" ("A Cross and a Child"). And suddenly a deeper cognition appears: At a distance—I have always been so close! The protagonist in one moment learns about the magnitude and weight of his feeling, which seems to be growing proportionally with distance, and accelerates so that it outgrows him, destroying all

spatial and temporal distance. Till there was no space between us,
And time followed...

Mak-Yks sums it all up in two final lines: "Honestly, those who love this way, are either not here today,/Or they are from a different world..." The protagonist's attitude has not been denied here, but his radical personal evolution has been revealed, and the transformation of his still vivid feeling for Maria is love of a mostly spiritual nature. Obviously, the gnomic ending of the monologue leads to a general reflection, and simultaneously shows Norwid's attitude to love as value in human life.

The picture of Mak-Yks's personality presented above was framed within the sequence of events. It showed the picture of a man who was radically experienced, and whose sufferings led from despair to a deeper knowledge of himself and the world around him. This knowledge is so deep and wide that it makes the protagonist able to acquire distance towards himself and the surrounding reality, and to a perceptive analysis of destructive mechanisms; the "striking beams" he is exposed to in the community he happens to live in.

Mak-Yks's utterances, particularly the dialogic ones, have an interesting construction, as they simultaneously create an element of a dialogue and an element of constant auto-reflection. The concentration of the protagonist on his own emotions creates the illusion that we have one long monologue. It could also be observed that in *A Ring* many dialogues are almost imperceptibly transformed into monologues, with so-called conversations with oneself, and thus they become lyrical utterances. At the same time this transformation of dramatic monologues into lyric poetry does not create any 'compositional crack'; we do not find any artificial attempts to build lyrical elements into the play. On the contrary, each fragment which might be called lyrical in some inexplicable way supports the plot and the character.⁴⁸

It seems that in *A Ring of a Great Lady* Norwid fulfilled T.S. Eliot's statement, which was formulated much later, that poetry in a drama

⁴⁸ Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Poetry and Drama*, op. cit. 23.

is possible only when a recipient becomes so soaked in it that s/he stops thinking about it.⁴⁹

Thanks to lyricism we can both follow the developing events and the internal evolution of Mak-Yks's personality, and also "follow the plot, which is really the process of the development of a 'great soul'"⁵⁰, of course, in a slightly different way than was the case of individuals in Romantic texts. It is quite telling that Mak-Yks is totally inactive externally. Instead we can observe an unusual 'exploitation' of his internal energy. The shape of the poetic language, its specific oscillations between Mak-Yks's individual experiences and simultaneous general reflection, together with the poetic means used, activated the symbolic layer of the play.

Irena Sławińska analysed the characters from the perspective of the main dramatic functions, defined as: participation in the love conflict and the social representation of the community.⁵¹ She pointed to the "indubitable repetitiveness of the characters"⁵², found their types, and researched the directions of the author's necessary simplifications. She focused on the evolution of the protagonists from the early plays to the later ones.

The look at Mak-Yks from the side of the lyrical description of his internal experiences apparently negates the claim about the schematic mode of this character, because reading the lyrical fragments leads us to meeting a concrete person. Each protagonist appears as a different personality, with her/his different history, and it is not possible to rely here on some simplified taxonomy. But at the same time there exists a conviction about a certain similarity of Norwid's different protagonists. It is the result of the fact that in different protagonists we can recognize one superior personality, in which we recognize Norwid himself.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁰ Agnieszka Ziółowicz, *Dramat i romantyczne „ja”*. Studium podmiotowości w dramaturgii polskiej doby romantyzmu, Kraków 2002, 26.

⁵¹ Irena Sławińska, *O komediach Norwida*, op. Cit., 125.

⁵² Ibidem.

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It seems that in *A Ring of a Great Lady* we are confronted with the unusual intensification of lyricism. Lyricism strongly influences the shape of both time and space, its presence, both in the monologues and in the dialogues. It makes the poetic aspect of this play a natural way of presenting the world and the protagonists' utterances.