

INTRODUCTION

Tomas Venclova once stated that “Bema pamięci żałobny rapsod” (“A Funeral Rhapsody in Memory of General Bem”), a poem which he himself translated into Lithuanian and on several occasions recited in this language, is the best literary work of the nineteenth century, and according to some other reports, the most beautiful, or even, the best poem in the world.¹ Iosif Brodsky declared, probably even more emphatically: “I consider Norwid the best poet of the 19th century—of all I know, in any language. Better than Baudelaire, better than Wordsworth, better than Goethe. For me, at any rate”.²

Similar statements obviously cannot be verified, because artistic works are not prone to objective measurements and classification, but Cyprian Norwid, a representative of the second generation of Romantic poets, an artist creating at the junction between different periods, who relied on what is the best in Polish and European tradition of literature and philosophy, and who managed to create an individual, unique language and style, is today undoubtedly regarded as one of the most distinguished Polish artists, and not only of the nineteenth century. What is more, of all the greats of his times, he seems to be the most alive and topical, and that is why he is still a point of reference for many contemporary poets. But he is also present in readers’ consciousness,

¹ See K. Czyżewski, *Człowiek z innej strony*, in T. Venclova, *Eseje. Publicystyka*, *Sejny* 2001, 6, J. Harwtig, *Czy dzisiaj Norwid jest już nasz?*, „*Więź*” 2001, no. 11, 162.

² Quoted in Frank Corliss, Jr, *Norwid and the American Transcendentalists*, in: *Cyprian Norwid (1821–1883) Poet – Thinker – Craftsman, A Centennial Conference*, London 1988.

and the new editions of his works, or their musical interpretations, have considerable resonance with subsequent generations of readers and audiences. The memory of Norwid is also alive in the places of his childhood—the local communities out there do a lot to popularize this unusual artist and his works.

The scholarly research on Norwid's rich and varied works (poetry, artistic and discursive prose, including epistolography, drama, visual arts) is now a sub-discipline of the Polish studies integrating methodologies mostly from the history and theory of literature, linguistics, and the history of art. The research on Norwid's works involves long lasting research projects (a chronology of Norwid's life and works, critical editions of his works, a catalogue of his visual works, a dictionary of his language), regular conferences, editorial series, and even an annual journal, *Studia Norwidiana*, which has been published since 1983. Research on Norwid, which is carried out by a large group of scholars from various universities, is also permanently present in the volumes of *Colloquia Litteraria*. The second volume of this journal was devoted to the works of Norwid,³ and various types of texts on Norwid (ranging from extensive studies to reviews) appear regularly in it.

This volume consists of a selection of works on Norwid which have appeared in *Colloquia Litteraria* over twelve years of the journal's existence. The texts included in it show the variety of approaches and methodologies used to cope with Norwid's texts. Although it would be difficult to refer to them as fully representative of the Norwid research in Poland at present, they nevertheless offer some perspective of it, and undoubtedly they may become an inspiration for those who have only started to enquire into Norwid's life and works.

Tomasz Korpysz

³ As was the number 22.