

Key words: hermeneutics; Romanticism; literary criticism and history; conceptions of culture.

Słowa kluczowe: hermeneutyka; romantyzm; krytyka i historia literatury; koncepcja kultury.

MICHAŁ KUZIĄK – Professor of the University of Warsaw with a post-doctoral degree (habilitation),
e-mail: michalkuziak@wp.pl

Publication financed within the programme of Minister of Science and Higher Education under the name of ‘National Programme for the Development of Humanities’ in the years 2016-2021.

Arent v a n N i e u k e r k e n – CYPRIAN NORWID
– PETER GEHRISCH,
ÜBER DIE FREIHEIT DES WORTES
(*RZECZ O WOLNOŚCI SŁOWA*)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18290/sn.2016.34-13en>

1.

One of the most important issues in the study of the works by Cyprian Norwid is his place in the developmental dynamics of literary tradition, both in Poland and Europe. This issue is not only crucial for the history of Polish literature as seen from a diachronic perspective and viewed as if it were isolated from other “national” literatures, but also for the attempts to put the works of the author of *Vade-mecum* in a broader picture of “European” (or even “world”) literature in the sense of a factor co-shaping Polish literature as “synchrony in diachrony” (Yury Tynyanov, Janusz Sławiński) and organizing itself around a “key tradition”. The results of these studies, i.e. arranging a hierarchy of contexts, have a significant impact on the strategies used by translators of Norwid’s poetry. A particularly problematic category turns out to be at the (apparent?) asynchronicity of Norwid’s poetry as compared to the literary tradition at that time. The tendency of both literary critics and translators to construct Norwid’s poetics around a pioneering model overlooks the ambivalence essential to Norwid’s poetry, prose and even epistolography: on the one hand, some of the features of his texts, such as situational irony, epiphanic character, understood both as a compositional procedure and a manner of representing the *sacrum* (in its eventualisation), his tendency to denser use of stylistic treatments – indicate the affinity of Norwid’s poetics to creative explorations of European modernism; on the other hand, the discursivity

of Norwid's poetic language, archaic and rhetoric nature of his idiom (although not without dissonance, yet this is another "rhetorical" device that assumes the "oratory" style is still in use) refer an attentive reader to the pre-Romantic tradition. Simultaneously, there is no doubt Norwid was also deeply rooted in Polish Romanticism and he briskly responded to the ideological issues present in the works by Mickiewicz, Słowacki and, in particular, Zygmunt Krasiński. Equally, he was also engaged in a dialogue with his peers, including Teofil Lenartowicz.

An additional source of his inspiration for creative investigation was the context of contemporary French literature, which involved not only poetry, but also essayistic writing, historiography and journalism. It appears to me that it is precisely Norwid's relation to French literature that caused many misunderstandings in attempts to situate his works in the literary tradition. Generally speaking, it can be claimed that in his poetry, the traditionalist worldview goes hand in hand with a tendency to extreme densifying of poetic language, which, at first glance, resembles a similar trend in some French symbolists. It can be hardly denied that the language of Norwid's poetry (but also that of prose – a good example is a still puzzling text entitled *Milczenie* [Silence]) is sometimes no less hermetic than the language of Mallarmé. However, there is an important difference between the poetry of the author of *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [On the freedom of the word] and – the otherwise great – verbal artifacts such as *Afternoon of a Faun*. This difference can only be captured in the context of a dispute about the origin and forms of European modernism. However, this context does not determine the specific nature of Norwid's modernism (if one may even use the term). The main concern here is the relationship between the subject and the world. In Norwid's poetry "the covenant between the word and the world" (cf. George Steiner's remarks in his famous book *Real Presences*) has not yet been broken¹. According to many historians of literature, challenging the obviousness of this relationship was the origin of the "key tradition" in European poetry of the late 19th century. In this respect, there is no difference between such an apologist for this trend as Hugo Friedrich, author of the famous book *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik*, and George Steiner who emphasises the negative consequences of breaking the covenant between the word and the world. The author of the book *Real Presences* recognises, however, that the radical decision taken by modernists to systematise self-referentiality of language as a means of artistic expression was a result of a more general process of semantic decomposition brought about by bad literature and journalism, i.e. – to use Norwid's terms: as a result of the dominance of "vulgarisation" over "authorship" "[...] SŁOWO / Pojęte jest technicznie, zami-

¹ Cf. G. STEINER, *Real Presences*, London 1989, p. 93.

ennie², wekslowo, / I tylko: jako środek – i o żadnej dobre / Jako cel [...]” (PWsz III, 596)³. Referring to an Austrian writer, linguist and philosopher, Fritz Mauthner, one of the fathers of the so-called “Sprachkritik”, Steiner emphasises the unfortunate social consequences of this process:

The uses of speech and writing in Western societies are fatally infirm. The discourse which knits social institutions, that of legal codes, of political debate, of philosophic argument and literary construct, the leviathan rhetoric of the public media – all are rotten with lifeless clichés, with meaningless jargon, with intentional or unconscious falsehood. [...] Language has, according to Mauthner, become both cause and symptom of the senility of the West as it lurches towards the silencing catastrophes of war and barbarism. (Steiner, *Real Presences*, pp. 110-111).

The conclusion seems clear. All attempts at reviving language, or – shall we put it in the “literary”, “formalist” terms – de-automatisation of semantic stereotypes (indeed, the Russian formalists were not interested in the relationship between the automatised mechanisms underlying literature and art and wider social processes) involve the separation of “poetic” language from the discourses falsifying the nature of the word and produced in a society that fell victim to the process of self-alienation. In his poetry, Norwid highlights a close correlation between linguistic processes and social development, placing them in the context of the sacred Christian history. The combination of these three perspectives underlies the uniqueness of Norwid’s poetic project against the background of the literature of the second half of the 19th century.

Of course, it must be noted that French symbolist poetics should not be reduced to pure self-referentiality. In a letter from autumn 1864 to his colleague, symbolist Henri Cazalis, Mallarmé revealed creative intentions which guided his writing of the famous poem (or maybe rather failed tragedy) *Hérodiade*:

² Gehrisch translates “zamiennie” [interchangeably] inappropriately as “Alternative” instead of “austauschbar”: “Drum ist heute das WORT,/ Technisch verstanden, als Alternative und Wechsel,/ Und eben: als Mittel – und an keinem der Tage/ Als Ziel...” [C.N. NORWID/P. GEHRISCH, *Über die Freiheit des Wortes*, Leipzig, 2012, p. 139 (henceforth: Norwid/Gehrisch)]. Also, the translation “wekslowo” [as exchange] as “als Wechsel” raises doubt. The noun is indeed used in finance and banking as well, but the German reader thinks primarily about the basic sense of “change”, “transformation”.

³ Quotes from Norwid are given based on the edition that was used as the source of the analysed translation of *Rzecz o wolności słowa*: C. NORWID, *Pisma wszystkie*, the text was collected, edited, an introduction and critical notes were provided by J.W. Gomulicki, Vol. I-XI, Warsaw 1971-1976. Quotes are included in the main text, acknowledged with the abbreviation PWsz, the Roman numerals refer to the volume while the Arab ones indicate the page.

J'ai enfin commencé mon Hérodiade. Avec terreur, car j'invente une langue qui doit nécessairement jaillir d'une poétique très nouvelle, que je pourrais définir en ces deux mots: *peindre non la chose, mais l'effet quel produit.*

“Not to paint the thing, but the effect that it produces”. It is hard to imagine a poetic principle more distant from Norwid's concept of the word since his language remains discursive in that it seeks to ensure to “odpowiednie dać rzeczy – słowo” [give the thing an appropriate word] (PWsz II, 13). It must be admitted, however, (Mallarmé mentioned it three years later, in a letter to the same Cazalis) that the intuitions as to the status of poetry are rooted in a concept of the subject who is not an all-powerful manipulator of linguistic material, but a “fragile” entity, “self” in which “the universe [...] finds its identity”:

Fragile comme est mon apparition terrestre, je ne puis subir que les développements absolument nécessaires pour que l'Univers retrouve, en ce moi, son identité.

However, this concept is utopian as it involves the destruction of a concrete “self” of a man: “I am now impersonal and no longer that Stefan you knew, but a certain tendency of a spiritual Universe to look and develop through what was me”. The very form of this expression and communicative situation in which it operates (the presence of a specific receiver) reveals the utopian character of this new poetry. Also in this context, the Mallarméan poetic project is located on the opposite pole of Norwid's concept of the word which “było z Człowieka wywołane” [was caused by the Human] (PWsz IV, 213), and in which “dwie przyczyny [...] uczestniczyły: jedna w sumieniu⁴ człowieka, druga w harmonii praw Stworzenia” [two reasons [...] participated: one in the human conscience, and the second in the harmony of the laws of Creation] (PWsz III, 559).

The modernist-*cum*-symbolist ideal of a self-referencing poetic text thus derived from epistemology, which was completely foreign to Norwid. Although Norwid did not avoid all sorts of formal games, using the ambiguity of linguistic material, the basis of Norwid's polysemy is never text self-referentiality or weakening of the author's subjectivity. The obscurity of Norwid's language results rather from the very nature of existence of a modern man lost among the phenomena whose relation to the “noumenal” sphere lost its obvious character.

⁴ Peter Gehrlich renders “w sumieniu człowieka” [in human conscience] as “in der *Seele* des Menschen” [in human soul] [Norwid/Gehrlich, p. 73]. It could be obviously pondered whether human soul is some ethic energy, but would it not be easier to translate it literally: “Gewissen”?

According to the author of *Assunta*, the condition necessary to recover the ties between the phenomenal area and the Absolute (identical with the Christian God) is the retrieval of traces of transcendence “here and now”. This is both a cognitive and ethical task.

The specificity of the most valuable part of Norwid’s artistic work is based on that a verbal material is organised in such a way that it is a representation of acts (and not the “effects caused by things”) of a man (person) finding his faith in God’s provenance of the world. The state of confusion and self-doubt of an individual in the face of the impenetrable solidity of being suddenly transforms into its opposite. This occurs owing to the sudden illumination of faith, reminiscent of “światłość” [the light] which “już – już mniemasz, że zgaśnie, skoro z dołu / Ciecz rozgrzana światło pochłonie – –” [already – already you think it goes off, as from the bottom / Heated liquid will devour the light]:

Wiary trzeba – nie dość skry i popiołu...
Wiarę dałeś?... patrz – patrz, jak płonie!... []
(PWsz II, 26)

Another manifestation of the human feeling of being lost among phenomena are false beliefs. Norwid exposes them by putting people that fall victim to this type of unjustified confidence in the contexts which, at first glance, are unambiguous, but, on a closer look, are streaked with irony.

In contrast to the situation in the works of symbolists, Norwid’s poetry is hence not a report of failure in an artistic attempt to represent the reality, nor is it an act of self-annihilation of the self, but rather a link in the chain of development of the self-manifesting word-logos, which is always the subject. That subjective nature of linguistic acts calls for retaining – and artistically enhancing – the relationship between poetic language and a wider social context. It encompasses history, politics, economics etc., of course, in the form of “words”, yet these words are not limited to the creation of self-referencing “labyrinth”. Unusual, “de-automatising” semantic connections, typical of Norwid’s poetic language, do not implement the postulate of creating “pure” poetic language, but are rather an expression of linguistic self-criticism, which *per se* is an act performed by a subject situated in a specific historical context. Stereotypes are countered by citing and putting them in new contexts. Such a work allows the receiver to reconstruct the whole context, i.e. that what seems to be innovative and unique, and what is fixed and “automated”. To allow for such reading, the creator uses all sorts of artistic means, including silence. Obviously, in practice, it is not easy to strike a balance between these two perspectives, but translators for Norwid – in particular those who have

their own literary ambitions – often tend to emphasise the “originality” of this poetry (put differently, they focus on the “de-automatising” mechanisms), whereby they involuntarily (but sometimes also deliberately) are tempted to assimilate Norwid’s poetic language to the modernist model.

2.

Understanding the premises of Norwid’s existential works is therefore of great importance not only for their interpretation, but also for the selection of an appropriate translation strategy. For Norwid, obscurity and ambiguity are not his goals, but rather a tool, or put differently: an “iconic” sign allowing to capture the essence of the human status in relation to the surrounding human reality. They are also not the basis for an alternative to the reality of the phenomenal world (in such cases, the lack of semantic transparency in the work would prevent any attempts to read it as a representation of the phenomenal world). Eventually, Norwid’s poetry is always embedded in the phenomena (however, these phenomena are rooted in the *sacrum* and Norwid’s idea was to manifest this relation through the representation of the process by which the subject emerges from a state of forgetting about the real presence of God in the world; each poem constitutes thus a “partial” revelation of the sanctity of being). In this respect, this poetry is also discursive, i.e. Norwid’s poetic language never denies – even under the greatest semantic density – the logic of cause and effect (another thing is that sometimes, in less successful works, reader’s efforts associated with the attempt to discover the rules of logic behind these do not always correspond to the weight of the subject; in such cases the work – or its fragment – becomes a kind of “puzzle”). Unlike symbolist poetry, the language of Norwid’s poetry can be translated into other languages, in which discursiveness does not go hand in hand with poetic qualities in the narrow sense of the word. The intellectual essence of Norwid’s worldview can be almost always extracted from a shell of its poetic execution. Almost forty years ago, this was attempted by Rolf Fieguth in his “reporter-style”⁵ translation of *Vade-mecum*. Of course, even then it is easy to make various mistakes, because Norwid’s logic is quite perverse and besides it requires – due to the enormous thematic span of his works – a precise reconstruction of the intellectual context of that era. The thing is that this context still poses many problems. In

⁵ For the concept of “reporter-style translation” in the context of Norwid’s works, see E. BALCERZAN, *Spotkanie tłumaczy Norwida*, [in] *Cyprian Norwid. W 150-lecie urodzin*, Warszawa 1973, p. 225. I think, in particular, of the following statement by Balcerzan: “Service to the reader sometimes brings translator’s efforts closer to *reporter’s* activity. Concern for the development of native literature makes him an *artist*”.

particular, Norwid's attitude towards 19th-century positivist science, and especially towards the critical theology of David Friedrich Strauss and Renan, which owed much to antiscientific Catholic polemics, the role of which (I think, *inter alia*, of a multi-volume *Encyclopaedia* published by a French redeptorist, Father Migne [1800- 1875] and the great importance it had for Norwid) has not yet been sufficiently investigated.

The "reporter's" approach to translating Norwid's poetry necessarily results in many losses, impoverishes the text (it has to be remembered that an important aspect of Norwid's poetic language is its self-critical nature, especially at the level of stylistic choices in various layers: lexicon, morphology, syntax, prosody, semantics of poem formats, genre conventions etc.), but at least it does not falsify its intellectual significance. Meanwhile, the attempt to find equivalents for all layers of Norwid's poetry has often led the translators astray. This is mainly due to the underestimation of the importance of cause-effect logic for this poetry which, after all, often refers, for instance, through the choice of the form of poetic treatise (a treatment which unlike Miłosz's treatise strategy is not streaked with irony), to the tradition of didactic poetry prevalent in Enlightenment. Unfortunately, this has just happened in the case of the new translation of *Rzecz o wolności słowa* into German provided by a poet, novelist, translator, editor and critic, Peter Gehrish who rendered great service for Polish-German literary (but also "personal") relations. The translator's ambition to reflect the multi-layered style of this work in its whole complexity and ambivalence⁶, coupled with the wrong situating of Norwid's poetry in the literary tradition results in the selection of an inadequate translation strategy, which intensifies the obscurity and impenetrability of the poetic language of *Vade-mecum's* author. The translator apparently thinks that this historiosophical treatise uses language in a similar way to the poetry of Mallarmé, who – as we have seen – avoided in his works discursiveness and sought to write a completely self-referencing work – *The Book*, although otherwise – at the "theoretical" level – Gehrish seems to be well aware that in Norwid's worldview, the concept of the word is associated primarily with the Christian *Logos* and the various stages of its historical self-manifestation. It is striking, however, that in his afterword Gehrish avoids the term, perhaps because of its "religious" connotations that could hinder German – "West European" – readers from appreciating the "innovative" nature of Norwid's poetry. Thus, Gehrish subordinates (as op-

⁶ One cannot deny Gehrish his sense of historical nuances of the German language. Sometimes he creatively uses archaisms but, at the same time, he runs a risk that the reader is not aware of the obsolete meaning of a word, especially in the contexts where the present sense also allows for a coherent – albeit mistaken – understanding of the passage (e.g. when he uses the word "Menschheit" in the old sense of "humanity" instead of "mankind" [see below]).

posed to Jadwiga Puzynina who in the foreword to the volume associates “freedom of the word” with “the voice of God resounding in the man, his conscience”⁷) the specificity of Norwid’s works, and especially of *Rzecz o wolności słowa*, to broadly understood poetic language (e.g. in the form of the concept of poetic language as a specific kind of memory of national languages; it is even a fairly accurate intuition!). It is exactly right here that Norwid proves to be a worthy rival for “modernist” poets better known in the West:

Rodzaj języka poetyckiego zahacza o dzieło artystów jego epoki, którzy stopniowo emancypowali się z tradycyjnego sposobu pisania, Baudelaire’a, Rimbauda, Mallarmégo itd. Nagle otworzono nowe drzwi, pojawiają się metody, nadmierna obfitość obrazowania, synestezje, niezwykle związki składniowe, innowacje w interpunkcji i w akcentowaniu, zlewianie się temp, zacinięcie się, milknięcie powodujące aporetyczne zdziwienie, jakby poeta, pisząc, dostrzegł bardziej odległe obrazy i jakąś nową współzależność powodującą olśnienie, coś w rodzaju obrazkowej zagadki, w której różne warstwy nakładają się, otwierając rozmaite pola wzrokowe i semantyczne, odświeżając ducha, zupełnie inaczej niż w przypadku różnych zatwardziały filozofów języka, których się czyta „jak myśli archiwariuszy, archeologów i nekrofilów” [quote from a well-known book by Julia Kristeva *La révolution du langage poétique*].

Die Art der poetischen Sprache des Dichters tangiert das Werk von Künstlern seiner Epoche, im Begriff, sich von tradierter Schreibart zu emanzipieren, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé usf. Plötzlich sind neue Türen geöffnet, Methoden kommen ins Spiel, überbordende Bildgestaltung, Synästhesien, außergewöhnliche Kombinationen der Syntax, neuartige Interpunktion, Akzentuierung, Verschmelzen der Tempi, Stocken, Verstummen, aporetisches Stutzen erregend, so, als erblicke der Dichter beim Schreiben entferntere Bilder und einen neuen Zusammenhang, der eine Blendung erzeugt, ein Vexierbild in einer Art der Überlagerung, die neue Blick- und Sinnfelder öffnet, Frische des Geistes erregend, anders als etwa bei den eingewurzelten Sprachphilosophen, die sich lesen „wie die Gedanken von Archivaren, Archäologen und Nekrophilen”. (Norwid/Gehrisch, p. 189).

Dithyrambic characteristics, lack of precision in the categories and comparisons defining Norwid’s poetics referred to by the translator (Norwid had often positive associations with archaeology; it enables to visualize the layers of the word as an expression of the historicity of the man himself) are reflected in the critical reception of the translation of the treatise into German. It is also typical that reviewers who are generally not experts in Polish literature (thus, they try to determine Norwid’s status in the historico-literary process based on Gehrisch’s

⁷ Norwid/Gehrisch, p. 6.

findings⁸) tend to pick up on less accurate (but, at the same time, closer to the domesticated image of the historico-literary dynamics in the 19th century which associates “progress” with symbolism, naturalism, expressionism etc.) characteristics of Norwid’s style. In a review in *Leipziger Internetzeitung*, Ralf Julke compares “Norwid’s great poem” with the works of poets as diverse as Walt Whitman (“Could he have known Whitman? Or maybe this predisposition to great gestures could have been felt in the air? An attempt to capture the world as a whole, in its shortness of breath and incomprehensibility”⁹), Nietzsche and Strindberg (“Both raged exactly the same over the obsolete intellectual edifices, they prove, cite, refer, and deny one’s honour and faith”), Baudelaire (“difficult to understand and perverse like Baudelaire’s [works], whom *The Flowers of Evil* once inspired”¹⁰) and even Richard Wagner and Milton.

The second review, written by a Russian poet Oleg Juriew, residing in Germany, evokes more consistent contexts, distinguishing – a bit briefly – two varieties of modernism in Poland, with one deriving – according to the reviewer – from Russian literature (Tuwim, Gałczyński, Bruno Schulz), and the other rooted in the Western traditions (its most important representative proves to be Czesław Miłosz). These two modernisms permeated each other and their common inspiration is the artistic work by Norwid, who (Jurjew refers here to the testimony of Joseph Brodsky) was a greater poet than Baudelaire (the critic emphasises, however, that today he rejects this kind of categorising of artists; nevertheless, this trend was typical of his youth and Norwid’s poetry “indeed has celestial qualities”). Interesting, however, is yet another observation made by the Russian poet and critic:

In the long poem *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [...] Norwid explores all possible areas of philosophy, history and religion with a somnambulist’s confidence. The form may seem obsolete, pre-Romantic, even classical. However, the reader gradually understands that this is about the freedom of the Word itself, and not the freedom of the man who uses the word¹¹.

⁸ It is interesting that in these attempts to determine Norwid’s historico-literary status it is generally not the critics that benefit from the foreword by Jadwiga Puzynina. They are interested almost exclusively in Gehrish’s afterword.

⁹ <http://www.l-iz.de/Bildung/B%C3%BCcher/2012/01/Cyprian-Norwid-Ueber-die-Freiheit-des-Wortes.html>

¹⁰ Gehrish approves Gomulicki’s opinion that Norwid must have known *The Flowers of Evil*. Therefore, he argues that *Vade-mecum* is an answer to Baudelaire’s famous collection, repeating its composition.

¹¹ <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/jurjews-klassiker-jedes-wort-hat-sein-bewusstsein/8621840.html>

Subsequently, Jurjew mentions a new poetic language, based on “self-reliance of the poetic word”, but probably not in the sense of an autotelic artifact, since this language has a kind of subjective consciousness (cf. the review title “jedes Wort hat sein Bewußtsein” [each word has its own consciousness]), and the poet’s task consists in ensuring the word fulfils itself.

One may wonder how Jurjew came to this fairly adequate characteristics of Norwid’s poetry in relation to the historico-literary process (suspended between pre-Romanticism, Romanticism and Modernism of poets creating already after the domination of Symbolism, such as Miłosz, Brodsky and – implicitly – Mandelstam). Was it the result of reading the translation of *Rzecz o wolności słowa* into German, or perhaps vice versa? In the second case, the model of poem reading proposed by Jurjew would derive from the modern Russian “culture poetry”, which, somewhat similarly to Norwid’s creative practice, combines time with the process of the development of civilizational beings that is executed by the word. The following attempt by Joseph Brodsky to capture the specificity of Mandelstam’s rhyming seems to me – despite all differences – not a bad commentary to the practice of Norwid, the author of *Quidam* and *Rzecz o wolności słowa*:

[...] there is here, by no means, seeking irretrievably bygone days, obsessive attempts to re-capture and re-think the past. Mandelstam rarely looks back in a poem; he is all in the present – at the moment, which he makes last, delay beyond its natural limits. [...]

[...]

Greece was always present in him, just as was Rome, and the biblical Judea and Christianity [how much does this characterisation of Mandelstam’s poetry owe to Brodsky’s reading of *Quidam*, unfortunately, cannot be determined – A.v.N.]. These foundations of our civilisation are treated in Mandelstam’s poetry more or less the same as they were treated by time itself: as a unity – and in their unity [Norwid would say “entirety/whole” – A.v.N.¹²]. Claiming that Mandelstam is a follower of one of these ideologies (especially the latter), is equal to not only belittling him, but it distorts his historical perspective, or rather his historical landscape. Thematically, Mandelstam’s poetry repeats the development of our civilisation; it flows north but, simultaneously, the streams in this current merge with each other from the outset. (J. BRODSKY, *Śpiew wahadła*, Warszawa, 2014, pp. 100, 101-102, essay *The child of civilisation*).

¹² In the foreword to Gehrisch’s volume, Jadwiga Puzynina strongly emphasises the importance of the idea of entirety/wholness to Norwid’s poetry. She does this in a way somewhat reminiscent of Brodsky’s arguments about the unity of Mandelstam’s poetic worldview: “Das Ganze, das was der Autor den Lesern zu suchen aufgibt in diesem und in all seinen Werken: in der Geschichte, im Wort, im Erleben des Alltags [...]. So verstanden, kann das Ganze – nach Meinung des Dichters – immer auch der Anfang ‘einer neuen Schöpfung’, eines neuen Wertebegriffs sein” [Norwid / Gehrisch, p. 7]. When we compare Puzynina’s foreword with Gehrisch’s afterword, we may sometimes have an impression that they write about different poets.

In a sense, this characteristic of Mandelstam's poetry is more accurate for Brodsky (as well as for Norwid) than Mandelstam, who was presented here as a modern "Quidam" of civilization. Does understanding of Norwid (I mean, of course, the ability to create a wider civilisational context allowing to explain the specificity of his culture poetry; detailed interpretations may be less accurate) presuppose existential experience of an immigrant from Central and Eastern Europe?

3.

It seems to me that referring by Peter Gehrish to rather unfortunate historical and literary contexts and the wrong understanding of Norwid's poetic word that accompanies it underlie the majority of errors and misunderstandings in the translation of his works. Gehrish realizes that the originality of the poem against the background of that period results from its multi-layered character, whereby these layers do not come together in a smooth surface that allows for an easy reading. It is this lack of roundness (associated by Norwid with the concept of "serio-falszywe" [serious-false]) (PWsz III, 598-599), together with the gradual erosion of meaning which becomes painless, while "Wolność-słowa musi w PORÓD stękać" [the freedom of the word must grunt in CHILDBIRTH] (PWsz III, 600) constitutes, according to Gehrish, the text dominant. Hence, in his translation, he tries to reconstruct this feature. The problem is that because of this the translation becomes even more obscure than the original. Equally important in the case of *Rzecz o wolności słowa*, however, is the selection of genre convention, i.e. the form of a treatise – even taking into account that, it was enriched with an "Orphean" element (PWsz III, 566) (after all, ancient singers were not enemies of reason; on the contrary, "mythical reason" governing their poetry prepared the ground for later Hellenic philosophy). Gehrish believes (or perhaps rather assumes – maybe subconsciously) that the unroundness of poetic language (it is this element that de-automatises both the nonproblematic discursivity of treatise poetry of the Enlightenment era and the Orphean character of Romantic historiosophic poems) that distorts the communicativeness of the text (fragmentariness, ellipticity – a phenomenon that Michał Głowiński associated with the concept of "stirred form") becomes a value in itself. Some fragments of *Rzecz o wolności słowa* cannot be – or at least it seems so at first glance – be translated into simple discursive "prose". The result of this attitude of the translator is certain interpretive laziness. Apparently, he thinks sometimes that the passage has no "intellectual" sense that could be extracted from the shell of the "mosaic" of "multi-coloured boulders" (PWsz III, 598), but it is only a multi-layered, bizarre conglomeration of various images emerging as

a result of poetic procedures, which become independent. Therefore, the translator tries to construct a similar multi-layered (but in principle non-discursive) equivalent of such a passage (one has to admit that in this respect, the translator is never a “vulgariser”, from his point of view *Rzecz o wolności słowa* was written by the “author” who walked “w c i e m n o ś ć, by wydarł jej światło” [into darkness to snatch its light]” (PWSZ III, 594), but he was not always successful at that).

Maybe that is why the translator quite often does not recognise inversions typical of Norwid’s treatise poetry (also well-known from Polish Baroque and Enlightenment poetry), but he believes that Norwid used catachresis often deliberately, distorting (in order to create unique verbal artifacts) plain discursive language until it became incomprehensible. But these are just appearances. Undoubtedly, a sharp clash of different layers and styles in Norwid’s poetry, in particular, in *Rzecz o wolności słowa*, are usually subordinated to discursiveness in the sense of cause and effect logic. These rhetorical treatments thus highlight certain intellectual message, in which theology and philosophy of history complement each other (symbolists did not practice “philosophy of history”, and their theology was limited to an attempt to determine the status of the *poetic* word exclusively). Linguistic complications, i.e. intricate, sometimes extremely rhetorical syntax (a derivative result of the same phenomenon is Norwid’s laconicity, or put differently: ellipticity) and archaic vocabulary of this poetry, on the other hand, have two-fold purpose. The aim is not only the de-automatisation of the reading model resulting from genre conventions of a didactic poem, but also, through accumulation of semantic obstacles, the maximisation of the informative value of an utterance. The receiver, faced with apparent linguistic chaos, communes with “the freedom of the word” itself, which “must grunt in CHILDBIRTH” (PWSZ III, 600). There is a close relationship between the “performative” (as we would refer to it now) nature of Norwid’s poetry and its “stirred” form, however, this relationship was not constructed in opposition to the discursive factor. Norwid’s philosophy of history is nourished by the often “impure” (because rooted in the realm of “phenomenal” empiricism) content of the science of Norwid’s time, i.e. in the case of *Rzecz o wolności słowa* – mythology and comparative linguistics.

In contrast to the poetry by Nerval and Mallarmé (but similarly to Brodsky, T. S. Eliot and Miłosz), Norwid did not melt these scientific contents into “pure” poetry. They abide by treatise poetics as yet another aspect of the unencompassed reality determining the human existence “here and now”. The same applies to theological, philosophical and general social issues. In this respect, *Rzecz o wolności słowa* is a typical example of deliberately “impure” poetry, similarly to *Traktat poetycki* [A Treatise on Poetry] by Miłosz. The problem is that, owing to Norwid’s semantic alchemy, these impure contents are poetically turned into something unusual, gaining

almost material density, and the reader accustomed to the line of symbolist modernism (Gehrisch is its fairly typical representative) may miss – or ignore – non-literary connotations of such elements, treating the collision of stylistic layers, the presence of neologisms or archaisms (archaic use of colloquial words) and convoluted syntax as purely linguistic, self-referencing treatments. Then, if a longer periodic sentence does not reveal all its secrets at first reading, or even seems grammatically or logically inconsistent, the translator may fall victim to the aforementioned temptation to treat this – as it appears to him – catachresis as a poetic materialisation of existential opacity and, in the process, lose a lot of important intellectual meanings.

4.

In the next part of this contribution I would like to look more closely at a few passages from the translation of *Rzecz o wolności słowa* provided by Peter Gehrisch, where we can find the abovementioned misunderstandings and translation mistakes. I will focus on the passages that are connected with the categories basic to Norwid's poetics and worldview, such as "word", "spirit", "letter", "entirety", "the whole", "ruin", "victim", "parliament". I am primarily interested if Gehrisch's translation allows the receiver to reconstruct the discursive sense of the utterance. Considerations of artistic nature are treated as secondary. It is not them that is the most important criterion for the translation evaluation of a poem rooted in the treatise tradition. Thus, I believe that only the so-called "reporter-style" translation can do justice to the main meanings of *Rzecz o wolności słowa*.

The following part of this contribution would not have been possible without the significant support of the co-author of this article, Anna Wołkowicz who provided "philological" translations for the most important passages of the Gehrisch's translation of *Rzecz o wolności słowa* analysed here. The juxtaposition of literary and "philological" translation helps highlight specific translation problems with which every translator of Norwid's works has to deal. Anna Wołkowicz also draw my attention to the many linguistic nuances of the original, which a foreign Polish philologist and non-native speaker of Polish (despite using specialised and historical dictionaries) could otherwise overlook.

Jakież? jest bowiem słowa cel i arcydzieło,
 Jeśli nie to? – by Ludzkość wszelaką przyjęło,
 A dotrzymało Boskość i świeciło astrem,
 Złagodzoną wytwornej lampy alabastrem.
 (PWsz III, 590)

A masterpiece has therefore a dual nature, like Christ himself: it mediates between a man and God, it is thus a representation of the Logos. Consider Gehrish's translation of these lines:

Welches? ist Ziel für das Wort und das Werk eines Meisters,
Wenn nicht darin, daß die gesamte *Menschheit* es übernahm,
Und die *Göttlichkeit* aufrecht erhielt und erglänzte wie Sterne,
Beruhigt [?] durch albasternen Glanz einer Lampe.

(Gehrish/Norwid, p. 129, emphasis A.v.N.)

Already at the very beginning we encounter a problem. In modern German “Menschheit” refers primarily to “mankind” in the sense of all the people, not “humanity”, i.e. “Menschlichkeit” (*Słownik Wileński* [Vilnius Dictionary]¹³, p. 600, under the entry “Ludzkość” [mankind] gives the first meaning of “human nature, humanity” and only as the second “mankind”). It has to be admitted, however, that in more archaic German “Menschheit” may refer to “humanity”. In Grimm’s dictionary it is listed first, “art, eigenschaft, wesen eines menschen: humanitas”¹⁴, e.g. “Würde die Menschheit jemals so entmenscht” [Klopstock]). It is therefore possible that Gehrish deliberately used here the old ambiguity of this word, just as Norwid did at the beginning of *Rzecz o wolności słowa*, “Co? znaczyłaby Ludzkość, gdyby kto ją zmierzył, [...] Tak L u d z k o ś ć, bez B o s k o ś c i, sama siebie zdradza [...]” (PWsz III, 563-564) (“Die Menschheit, was stellte sie dar, würde sie jemand danach bewerten. [...] So wäre die *Menschheit*, gottlos, womit sie selbst sich verrät” (Norwid/Gehrish, p. 79). We argue, however, that in “reporter-style” translation (as only such translation can render the most important meanings of the poem) this kind of ambiguity should be avoided.

This complaint is associated primarily with the less successful choice of the translation strategy. Unfortunately, however, in these few lines there are a lot of real errors. It seems to us that they result from insufficient knowledge of not only the specific idiom used by Norwid, but also the Polish language understood as an organism developing over time. First, we provide a “reporter-style” translation of this passage:

Denn welches? ist das *Ziel* und die Meisterleistung des Wortes, wenn nicht *dieses*?:
dass es jegliche Menschlichkeit in sich aufnimmt und (aber) die Göttlichkeit bewahrt; und
so als ein Stern (Aster) leuchtet, (dessen Leuchtkraft) durch den Alabaster einer kunstvoll
gearbeiteten Lampe gemildert (wird). [trans. A. Wołkowicz]

¹³ *Vilnius Dictionary* (1864) is available online: <http://eswil.ijp-pan.krakow.pl/index.php>

¹⁴ See <http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/genFOplus.tcl?sigle=DWB&lemid=GM04162>

Gehrisch did not understand (or maybe he considered it irrelevant) that “słowa” [word-s] (Genitive) is associated not only with “cel” [objective] but also “arcydzieło” [masterpiece]. We will translate his version of the line back into Polish: “Jaki? jest cel słowa i arcydzieła” or “Jaki? jest cel słowa i arcydzieło”. Both variants do not take into account the interdependence of “cel” and “arcydzieło” through their common origin from “słowa”. “Aufrecht erhalten” [sustain] is less accurate (can “słowa cel i arcydzieło” [the aim and masterpiece of the word] “sustain” divinity?) than “bewahren” (cf. *Vilnius Dictionary*, p. 246, sense 3. “zachować w sobie do czasu”). It is unknown why “gwiazda” [star] (“aster”, singular) is used by Gehrisch in the plural. In the end, it is difficult to imagine why the light of the star “uspokaja się przez alabastrowy blask lampy” [calms down through alabaster glow of the lamp] (in Gerisch’s translation the lamp ceased to be “wytworna” [refined] or “kunsztowna” [elaborate] as befits a “masterpiece”). The point is that the moment of the embodiment of the word is modified by its energy, which “shines” through the form.

Consider now the further part of this passage:

Ten tylko ma swe serce, który go używa,
Ile ono jest sercem i tak się odzywa;
 Ten podobnie z energią całą może działać,
 Kto razem zdolny mieć ją i razem nią pałać.
Nieszczerość stąd pozorna?...prawda! – lecz szczerota,
 Choć jest powietrzem cnoty, nie jest żadna cnota,
 Ona jedyną chwila-cnoty-triumfalną,
 Gdy wykrzykuje: Patrzcie! Jam dzielną i walną!”
 (PWsz III, 590, emphasis mine, A.v.N.)

Gehrisch translated these lines as follows:

Ein solcher hat denn sein Herz, der es verwendet,
Um wieviel Herz ist vorhanden, so macht’s sich bemerkbar;
 Ähnlich der alles umfassenden Energie, kann wirken,
 Wer dazu fähig ist, sich zu erschaffen und gemeinsam mit ihr zu brennen.
 Daher die scheinbare Unehrlichkeit?... Wahrlich! Doch Scheinheiligkeit,
 Obwohl der Atem der Tugend, sie ist keine Tugend,
 Sie ist nur der Tugend triumphaler Moment,
 Wenn sie hinaus schreitet: „*Schau, ich bin tapfer wie auch erwählt!*“
 (Norwid/Gehrisch, p. 131)

We propose the following “philological” translation of these lines:

Nur der *besitzt sein Herz*, der es gebraucht, *sofern es* [wirklich] Herz ist und sich entsprechend äußert; in ähnlicher Weise kann [nur] der mit voller Energie wirken, *der imstande ist, Energie zu haben und gleichzeitig davon zu entbrennen*.

Dass das zur *scheinbaren* Unehrlichkeit führe? ...schon wahr! – aber Ehrlichkeit, obwohl sie der Tugend als Luft dient, ist doch selbst keine Tugend; sie ist ein einzelner Triumph-Augenblick der Tugend, wenn sie ausruft: „*Seht her! wie bin ich doch tapfer und vortrefflich!*“ [trans. A. Wołkowicz]

Again, we can find a lot of misunderstandings in Gehrish's translation (e.g. he interprets “ile” [how many/ as] in terms of “quantity” rather than “as/since”; “cała [energia]” [entire] does not mean “all-encompassing” (“alles umfassend”) but rather “complete”, “its entire volume” (*Vilnius Dictionary*, p. 136), “mieć ją” [have it] does not mean that a man should “create himself” (“sich zu erschaffen”), but this fragment refers again to a kind of incarnation, owing to which the human nature is transformed. In the next line, Gehrish's translation even completely reverses the meaning. “Szczerota” does not mean “Scheinheiligkeit” [hypocrisy], but “the simplicity of the spirit [sic!], openness, ingenuousness; naivety” *W dziecinnej szczerocie swojej nie znał Jagiełło cienia obludy, nie umiał ukryć niczego. Bo to w cnocie i szczerocie, W wiejskim domku uchowane* (*Vilnius Dictionary*, pp. 1623-1624) (it is difficult to explain this error, given that Gehrish translated “nieszczerość pozorna” [apparent insincerity] correctly as “scheinbare Unehrlichkeit”). “Powietrze” [air] is here simply “Luft” and not “Atem” [breath]. Another major mistake is the rendition of the word “walny” as “erwählt” [selected] instead of “vortrefflich” [excellent] (cf. *Vilnius Dictionary*: “walny” [1. common, general, main] 2. Splendid in its kind, excellent, brainy, delicious, exquisite; *Walny był z niego gospodarz. Walny chłopiec* (p. 1806).

Consider now the next segment. In the original it is – we have to admit – quite convoluted. Without deciphering the basic meaning of these lines, it is, however, impossible to understand the sacred structure of *Rzecz o wolności słowa*, consisting in the ubiquity of the concept of incarnation at various levels of being as the “parliamentary” topic is situated here in the sacred structure of the Trinity:

Ten się nareszcie różnić potrafi ofiarnie,
Kto i s y m b o l e m zdoła być parlamentarnie,
Tym szczerzy! że w całości zdanie wypowiada,
Nawet gdy nic nie mówi – powstawa? lub siada?
Będąc nie tylko o j c e m swych słów, lecz i s y n e m,

I d u c h e m, i dopiero uroczystym c z y n e m!...
(PWSz III, 590)

Once again consider first Gehrish's translation:

So kann jeder letztlich, opfernd, Unterschied zeigen,
Der durchs Symbol auch imstand ist, parlamentarisch zu sein,
Dies um so wahrer, als er im ganzen ausspricht den Satz,
Auch wenn er nichts sagt – steht auf er? – setzt er sich hin?
Nicht nur als Vater der eigenen Worte, doch *auch als Sohn*
Und als Geist – und dann erst mit der erhabenen Tat!...
(Norwid /Gehrish, p. 131)

We provide now a “reporter-style” translation of this passage:

Der kann schließlich aufopfernd streiten [sich aufopfernd unterscheiden], der es auch versteht, parlamentarisch ein Symbol zu sein; um so ehrlicher! als er auch dann einen Satz in Gänze ausspricht, wenn er nichts sagt – [sondern] sich erhebt? – oder niedersetzt? Wobei er nicht nur der *Vater* seiner Worte ist, sondern auch deren *Sohn* und *Geist*, und somit erst recht eine feierliche Tat!... [trans. A.Wołkowicz]

Once again we can encounter here a lot of problems. It is questionable whether due to the “parliamentary” context of this passage (where politics turns out to be rooted in the *sacrum*) the solution applied by Gehrish “Unterschied zeigen” [show the difference] raises the right associations (*Vilnius Dictionary* offers the following senses for “różnić się” [differ] 1. be different [...] 2. be of different opinion: *Różnimy się co do tego*. 3. not agree with someone, argue: *Różnią się i godzą ustawicznie*). We believe that “streiten” [sense 3] better reflects the meaning. “Ofiarnie” does not mean here that someone is making a sacrifice of something to someone (“opfernd”), but rather that those who “differ” parliamentarily, in a sense, sacrifice themselves (“aufopfernd”). A complete misunderstanding is Gehrish's suggestion that someone “can be parliamentary through the symbol” (“Der durchs *Symbol* auch imstand ist, parlamentarisch zu sein”). The symbol is not here a means used by a man, but the man himself becomes a symbol (once again we deal here with a kind of incarnation, which we would now refer to as “performativity”). A man-symbol, through his very existence, embodies the sacred structure of the Trinity. A mistake in the translation of a passage often contributes to subsequent failed translational decisions. This is also the case here. In the following lines, Norwid stresses the Trinitarian foundation of the parliamentary word in a person acting parliamentarily. It is because of this that the man himself is a specific act (“Będąc nie tylko [...], lecz [...] i dopiero uroczystym c z y n e m!”). The solution adopted by Gehrish suggests, however, that only after the implementation of the parliamen-

tary word does a man set about performing a “noble act” as if these moments could be separated from each other (“und dann erst mit der erhabenen *Tat*”). The main problem here is the meaning of the conjunction “dopiero” (cf. *Vilnius Dictionary*: “dopiero”: 6..... until, until then. *Dopiero miecza szukać, gdy się już czas potykać. Dopiero wierzymy, kiedy cierpiemy*). A pedant would also note that “uroczysty” (cf. *Vilnius Dictionary*, p. 1780: 2. solemn, steadfast. *Słowo uroczyste. Przysięga uroczysta*) is not quite the same as “erhaben” [elevated].

Lack of translator’s determination to laboriously decipher the convoluted – but otherwise imposed by the principles of periodic sentence construction – syntax used by Norwid was his undoing also in the following passage from the same Song 11 of the poem:

Wszelako bez słusznego l i t e r y uznania
 Ciągu nie ma i toku, lecz – fazy i drgania.
 Fazy, przez same następstw wywołane starcie
 Chemiczne, nie zaś z ducha czerpane otwarcie;
 Próżne myśli i woli... odbrzmiewania czasów, [in Gehrish’s edition – lack of ellipsis]
 Które ledwo być winny kreskami nawiasów! [in Gehrish’s edition – full stop instead of exclamation mark]
 Namiętne dziś, dopokąd odpór jest ich siłą, [in Gehrish’s edition – lack of comma]
 Jutro puste, pojutrze – ani wiesz, co było.
 T c h n ą ć możesz bez litery i bez jej uznania,
 Ale dać nic nie zdołasz: ona rękę skłania.
 [...]

(PWsz III, 605; Norwid/Gehrish, p. 158)

We juxtapose this passage with Gehrish’s translation:

Indessen, ohne berechtigte Achtung der *Letter* gibt es
 Nicht Folge, noch Fortschritt, doch Phasen und Stocken.
 Phasen, entstanden aus chemischer Reibung,
 Doch keine Geschöpfe aus freiem Geist,
 Der leeren Gedanken und dem Willen zum Wiedererklingen der Zeiten,
 Durch Klammer-Zeichen kaum zu beschreiben.
 Heute ist wichtig, solange der Widerstand noch seine Kraft ist,
 Der Morgen ist leer, der folgende Tag, du weißt nicht, was war.

Ohne Buchstaben *Atem* zu schöpfen, gelingt dir, und ohne ihn anzuerkennen,
 Aber mit Geben ist nichts fertig zu bringen: die Hand lädt er ein.

(Norwid/Gehrisch, p. 159)

This passage, once again, abounds in risky shifts of sense and common misunderstandings. We shall start with the fundamental issue. Gehrisch does not realize that “próżne” does not mean here “containing nothing, empty” (*Vilnius Dictionary*, p. 1211) but “free, far from something” *Próžen troski, próžen trwogi...* (ibid.). Of course, one cannot understand this passage, when the basic meaning of the word “próżne” remains unidentified, but apparently Gehrisch believed that Norwid deliberately obscured (deconstructed) the syntactic layer, using a kind of avant-garde catachresis. It turns out that thoughts are empty, while the actual meaning was that the “phases” are devoid of thoughts etc. The consequences of this misunderstanding are even more devastating, because the words “namiętne” [passionate] (“namiętne dzisiaj”) and “puste” [empty] (“jutro puste”) refer to these “phases”. Thus, in Gehrisch’s translation it appears that it is not the “phases” that are “passionate Today” and “Tomorrow empty”, but “today” is “important” [!] (“wichtig”) and “Tomorrow [is] empty”. The entire passage is completely meaningless without proper recognition of the sentence grammar and it is difficult to understand why the translator did not ask any Norwid specialist for expert advice. Instead, he decided to translate this passage as unintelligibly as it appeared to him – as a result of his insufficient knowledge of the 19th-century Polish language – in the original, treating it as artistic device.

This passage could be translated into German as follows:

Doch ohne gehörige Wertschätzung des *Buchstaben* gibt es keine Kontinuität und Verlauf, sondern – Phasen und Schwingungen. Phasen, hervorgerufen allein durch chemischen Reaktion (Zusammenprall) dessen, was da aufeinander folgt, nicht offen [direkt? frei?] aus dem Geist geschöpft; [das Folgende bezieht sich auf die „Phasen“] bar des Gedankens und Willens... Widerklänge von Zeiten, kaum wert, Klammerstriche zu sein! Heute leidenschaftlich, solange der Widerstand ihre Kraft ist, morgen leer, übermorgen – weißt du nicht mehr, was sie waren.

Ohne den Buchstaben und seine Wertschätzung kannst du zwar *einhauchen*, jedoch nicht geben: er ist es, der die Hand dazu geneigt macht. [trans. A. Wołkowicz]

Let us consider also some of the other solutions adopted by the translator that seem at least debatable. “Ciągu” means here “Kontinuität” [continuity], not “consequence” (“Folge”). “Drgania” means “Schwingungen” [vibrations] and not “inhibition” (“Stocken”). “Starcie” [reaction/collision] is not the same as “tarcie” [friction] as the translator apparently thought. It is unknown from where Gehrisch took “Geschöpfe aus freiem Geist” [creations of a free spirit], but certainly not from Norwid’s text. The following lines of the translation are unfortunately just

incomprehensible (which I already mentioned). Equally disastrous is Gehrish's failure to recognise the meaning of the verb "tchnąć". Of the two possibilities given by *Vilnius Dictionary* ("tchnąć": 1. a. pant, breathe [...] 2. give breath, breathe in, p. 1697) he selects the first, which is an obvious misunderstanding.

Now back to the parliamentary subject:

A kto by mi zaprzeczył doniosłości słowa,
 I że nie wstaje przezeń istność narodowa,
Ni stworić to parlament, co historia, zdolny:
 Ten wszystko może umieć i znać – prócz że wolny!
Nie rodzimność to bowiem języka zrobiła
W Ameryce parlament, ale Słowo-siła [in Gehrish's text – "słowo-siła"
 not capitalised]
 Tworząc świat cały nowy, jak niebieskie ciała,
 Za dni pierwszych, gdy Twórczość byty wymawiała. [in Gehrish's text –
 "twórczość" not capitalised]
Nie język prze-najczystszy genezą korzeni [in Gehrish's text – "przejnaj-
 świętsza" not hyphenated]
 Waszyngtonowi orła dał i garść promieni,
 Lecz Ten, co ze wszech-figur i ze wszech-przymiotów [in Gehrish's text
 no hyphens]
 Ze wszystkich łkań¹⁵, ze wszystkich uciszeń i grzmotów
 Czyni ogromną aurę wolności sumienia:
Wysokość sfery-słowa, nie wartość korzenia!* [Gehrish
 omitted the footnote]

*U nas tylko ciągle korzonki płukają, a do wysokości słowa zbiorowego nie dochodzą, i takowa jest umarłych zwłok umywaniem.

(Norwid/Gehrish, p. 154-156; PWSz III, p. 603-604)

Let us compare these two long periodic sentences, which focus on the relationship between the Western political tradition (parliamentary) and the sacred structure of the word, with Gehrish's translation:

Und wer wollte mir leugnen das Erhabne des Wortes,
 Durch welches das Wesen des Volkes entsteht,
Zur Schaffung des Parlaments, zu dem die Geschichte verhilft:
 Ein solcher kann und weiß alles, außer dem – er ist frei!
Im Parlament der Amerikanischen Staaten hat nicht das Heimatgebundene

¹⁵ In Gehrish's edition there is a typing error: "tkañ" instead of "łkań", but it has no impact on his translation.

Sprache gebildet, aber die Wort-kraft
 Schuf eine ganz neue Welt wie einen himmlischen Körper
 In jenen Tagen, den ersten, als sich die Schöpfung zur Sprache bewegte.
 Nicht die reinste Sprache als Wurzel der Entstehungsgeschichte
 Gab Washington den Adler und eine Handvoll von Strahlen,
 Sondern Jener, der aus allen Figuren und Eigenschaften,
 Von allen Seufzern, aller Ruhe und den Gewittern
 Die gewaltige Aura der Gewissens-Freiheit bildet:
Die Höhe der Sprache, und nicht – die Werte der Wurzel!
 (Norwid/Gehrish, p. 155-157)

First, we will translate Gehrish's rendition back into Polish:

„Kto mi zaprzeczy wzniosłości Słowa, dzięki której powstaje istota¹⁶ narodu, w celu stworzenia parlamentu – historia pomaga w tym; Taki człowiek potrafi i wie wszystko, z wyjątkiem że jest wolny! W parlamencie Stanów Zjednoczonych nie to, co rodzime, stworzyło język, lecz siła-słowa stworzyła zupełnie nowy świat jak ciało niebieskie w te pierwsze dni, kiedy Stworzenie poruszało się [?] ku językowi. Nie najczystszy język jako korzeń dziejów powstawania [narodu?] dał Washingtonowi orła i garść promieni, lecz Ten, co ze wszystkich figur i przymiotów, ze wszystkich westchnień, całego spokoju i burzy uformował olbrzymią aurę wolności sumienia: wysokość języka, a nie wartość korzenia!”

And now we juxtapose Gehrish's translation with a philological rendition:

Wer mir aber die Tragfähigkeit [Bedeutsamkeit] des Wortes leugnen würde, und [wer leugnen würde] dass dadurch [durch das Wort] das nationale Sein erstet, und [wer leugnen würde] dass das Parlament das zu erschaffen vermag, was die Geschichte erschafft, der mag alles können und wissen, bis auf eines – dass er frei ist! Denn es war nicht die Bodenständigkeit der Sprache, die in Amerika das Parlament gemacht hat, sondern die WORT- Kraft: [und zwar] indem sie eine ganze neue Welt erschuf, wie die Himmelskörper in den ersten Tagen [geschaffen wurden], als die SCHAFFENS-Kraft das Sein der Geschöpfe aussprach. Nicht die durch die Genese ihrer Wurzeln aller-reinste Sprache gab Washington den Adler und das Bündel Strahlen, sondern die [Sprache], die aus allen Figuren und Eigenschaften, aus allen Schluchzern, aus allem Stillewerden und allen Donnern eine riesige Aura der Gewissensfreiheit erzeugt: die Höhe der Wort-Sphäre, nicht – den Wert der Wurzel!*

*Bei uns hören sie nicht auf, bloß Wurzelchen zu spülen, und zur Höhe des gemeinsamen [kollektiven] Wortes kommen sie nicht – welche Reinlichkeit dem Waschen von Toten-Leichen gleicht. [trans. A. Wołkowicz]

¹⁶ Normally we do not treat the essence in the philosophical sense as something [a]rising; perhaps it would be better to translate “istność” as “byt” [being] (See the entry “istność” in *Vilnius Dictionary*, p. 54), although the meaning of “essence” cannot be excluded.

Here we can challenge at least three translator's decisions resulting from his misunderstanding of the original text (so called "normal mistakes", not interpretive differences). First, in the original Norwid argues that – to paraphrase – "the one is wrong who says [...] that the parliament cannot create what is created by history", whereby both the parliament and the national being (similarly as history) derive from word-Logos. In his translation, Gehrisch, falling victim to the complicated syntax of this passage¹⁷, suggests, however, that this passage is merely about the historical pedigree of the parliament, and not about the creative force of the parliamentary system. Second, in Norwid's text, the American parliamentarism is not linked to a particular ethnic or local language ("rodzimość" [native character]), but is an incarnation of the energy of the original word (logos) in the history of mankind. In his translation Gehrisch suggests that the American parliament is only a place where certain stage of the implementation process of the Word is occurring (the false origin of language begins not from the true source, but from the "native character") and not its result (the translator might have not understood that the word "języka" [language] depends on the noun "rodzimość"). Such mistakes are associated with fairly extreme way in which Norwid uses the grammatical properties of the Polish language which due to the highly-developed system of inflection allowing to build complex syntactic structures with no loss of communicative value (in this respect the poet almost matched the creative rules of Baroque rhetorical poetics). I already pointed out earlier that these complex syntactic structures are not some "avant-garde" embellishment, but "performatively" capture the process of giving birth to the Word at different levels of being "Wolność-słowa musi w PORÓD stękać" (PWsz III, 600).

Let us now turn to the third mistake. It results from the wrong – or maybe rather incomplete – reconstruction of the "ideological" context, in which *Rzecz o wolności słowa* was created. Norwid's reflection on the roots are associated with his interest in linguistics at that time (see some of his *Notatki etno-filologiczne* [Ethno-philological notes]), or more specifically the "roots" (French: "racines"; in Norwid's lifetime – cf. *Vilnius Dictionary* – the term "pierwiastek" [element] was used, but in a bit different, non-historical sense¹⁸) of the words, which enabled to reconstruct proto-languages (or maybe even a single proto-language¹⁹ - it is known

¹⁷ I loyally admit that initially I also misunderstood the first fourlines featuring this double negation. In such cases, assistance of a native speaker with philological competence is essential [A.v.N.].

¹⁸ "4a) basic core; sounds of a word constituting its properties and the properties of all its derivatives" (*Vilnius Dictionary*, p. 999).

¹⁹ See ethno-philological note no. 104 (PWsz VII, 393). This note takes reference to the fol-

that Norwid read the collection of lectures by a famous 19th-century linguist Max Müller, who devoted much attention to the “roots” [“racines”] that make up words²⁰). The poet did not think, however, that the indisputably important discoveries of historical linguistics finally explained the process of the development of word and language, which in the context of the poem is acknowledged in his humorous footnote on “korzonki” [little roots/radicels], unfortunately omitted by the translator. Gehrisch, however, does not realise that the word “roots” can be interpreted in the linguistic context: “Not the purest language as the root of the history of creation” (“Nicht die reinste Sprache als Wurzel der Entstehungsgeschichte”) instead of “not the purest language is the origin of roots [...]” (“Nicht die durch

lowing passage of Max Müller’s work *La science du langage* [Paris, 1867]: „Or, j’avoue que, quand j’ai vu soutenir mainte et mainte fois qu’il n’est plus possible de parler de l’unité primitive du langage, depuis que la philologie comparée a prouvé l’existence de diverses familles de langue, j’ai senti que l’argument n’était pas concluant, qu’il allait, en tout cas, beaucoup plus loin. Le problème, envisagé sous son véritable aspect, se réduit à ceci: – «Si vous voulez affirmer que le langage a eu des commencements différents, il faut prouver qu’il est impossible que toutes les langues aient eu une origine commune.» (p. 419)”.

²⁰ In the mentioned work of Max Müller *La science du langage* (translated from English) the issue of language “roots” (“raciness”) plays an important role. Norwid mentions “roots” (“raciness”) in a mythology note no. 85 (PWsz VII, 254). He distinguishes between “racines monosyllabiques”, “bisyllabiques” and “3-syllabiques”. Max Müller claimed, however, that “raciness” are generally monosyllabic (nevertheless, he differentiated three types of “raciness”: “premières”, “secondaires”, “tertiaires”, depending on how consonants are combined with vowels: “Une Racine est nécessairement monosyllabique [Müller refers here to Wilhelm Humboldt]. On peut toujours prouver que les racines composées de plus d’une syllabe sont dérivées, et même dans les racines monosyllabiques il faut distinguer ce que nous appellerons les racines premières, secondaires et tertiaires” (M. Müller, p. 334). There exists, however, a striking similarity between the German linguist and Norwid. He seriously ponders over the question of how these “roots” (which are phonetic in nature) became the signs of “general ideas”: “comment le son peut-il exprimer la pensée? Comment les racine sont-elles devenues les signes des idées générales?” (M. Müller, p. 485). The answer is that these roots are “phonetic types, created by the force specific to the human spirit” (ibid., p. 486). Thus, both belong to the realm of nature and Spirit, and only on the second level they are significant. The German linguist refers here to Plato, agreeing with him on the divine provenance of nature: “Ces racines ont été créées par la nature, comme dirait Platon; mais avec le même Platon nous nous hâtons d’ajouter que par la nature nous entendons la main de Dieu” (ibid., p. 486). The author believes, however, that personal confession of faith does not have major consequences for linguistics as a science (one would like to add: “exact”). Using scientific methods one cannot achieve a direct transition from the level of phonetics to the level of language (“langage”) and signifying words. These “roots” (“raciness”) are not yet a language (“langage”), although it is difficult to imagine a language without “roots” (ibid., p. 488). Norwid certainly liked such an approach to the puzzle of language origin as it left some room for spiritual factors (e.g. “sanctity of the word”) as triggers of this qualitative leap. From the point of view of scientism, the introduction of supernatural factors is obviously unauthorised and Max Müller never tried to integrate science with faith.

die Genese ihrer Wurzeln aller-reinste Sprache“). In this context, “Wurzel” only means “foundation” (the meaning here is consistent with the linguistic context) and, as a result, typical Norwid’s tensions between Christian providentialism and modern scientism (Norwid attempted to work out a context in which the discoveries of the 19th-century positivist science were not inconsistent with the Revelation) become blurred. The fact that Norwid writes of the roots first in the plural (“the genesis of the roots”), indicates this linguistic meaning, which may not be listed in *Vilnius Dictionary*, there is the meaning “beginning”, “basis”, “foundation” (*Vilnius Dictionary*, p. 67, sense 3). In Gehrisch’s translation the relationship between figurative meaning and linguistic terminology is thus unrecognisable.

We would like to briefly draw attention to several other shortcomings and mistakes in this passage, which do not involve syntax but can be attributable to lexical nuances. “Donisłość” [significance/momentousness] here is by no means the same as “das Erhabene” [grandeur/loftiness], but refers to “the power of reporting something”, in German “Tragfähigkeit” (figuratively and literally; cf. *Vilnius Dictionary* under the entry “doniosłość”). “Ruhe” [peace] is too static and stereotypical a translation of a more processual word “uciszeń” [hush/silence] (“Stillewerden”; Gehrisch is of course aware of bizarre quality of Norwid’s poetic language, but he does not always consistently implement this in his translation). The phrase “jak Twórczość byty wymawiała” was translated by Gehrisch not literally as “als sich die Schöpfung zur Sprache Bewegte”, unfortunately this was unnecessary as, in this way, the fairly traditional view that beings are words (directly or indirectly) uttered by God disappears. Finally, it is unknown why the translator resigned from the literal translation of the phrase “Wysokość sfery-słowa” (translated by A. Wołkowicz as “die Höhe der Wort-Sphäre”).

We shall yet briefly consider a few lines from the famed ending of *Rzecz o wolności słowa* set in the Syrian desert among the ruins of the ancient city of Palmyra. Particularly important in this passage is the intuition that the whole underlying a given word is present at all levels of being, even if at first glance we may have an impression that the reality of human culture consists of some loose pieces which cannot be put together. In Norwid’s work even the ruin turns out to be the whole:

Patrzyłem i wydziwić się nie mogłem onej
 Całości rzeczy, w całość ruiny zmienionej,
 Pięknej: ogółem, który powstał ze zniszczenia,
 Z potracenia, zdeptania i zlekceważenia. [In Gehrisch’s text –“lekceważenia”]
 Gdy rzędy kolumn, jakby skamieniała lira
 Niewzruszenie a ciągle śpiewały „P a l m y r a !”
 (PWSz III, 616)

Gehrisch's translation of this passage is as follows:

So blickte ich hin und konnte vor Staunen nicht fassen,
 Die Ganzheit der Dinge in Ruinen verwandelt zu sehen,
 So herrlich: im Ganzen, was durch Zerstörung entstand,
Durch Ahndung, Beschmutzung und Niedertracht,
 Als sei die Reihe der Säulen eine versteinerte Lyra,
 In unangerührtem und unaufhörlichem Singen: „*Palmyra!*”
 (Norwid/Gehrisch, p. 179)

Already a superficial comparison of the original and the translation reveals that the translation omits the most important element. Gehrisch changed “*Całość rzeczy*” [the whole of things] into simple “ruin” (i.e. “ruins”, in the plural) and not “the whole-ruins”. It is difficult to justify the omission of this, from a point of view of the concept of the word, vital detail, even more so given that this passage could be easily translated into German literally:

Ich sah hin und konnte mich über jene Ganzheit der Dinge nicht genug wundern, die in die Ganzheit der schönen Ruine verwandelt war: über die Allgemeinheit, die aus der Zerstörung entstand, aus dem Schubsen und Niedertreten, aus der Geringschätzung. Während die Säulenreihen, wie eine steingewordene Lyra, unverwandt und ununterbrochen „*Palmyra!*” sangen. [trans. A. Wołkowicz]

Gehrisch's choice (in this case, I suspect that it was intentional) results probably from his underestimating the importance of discursive elements in the text, and overestimating poet's aesthetic intentions. The aim was thus for the lines to “sound good” since in poetry “terminological accuracy” is secondary. However, the problem is that *Rzecz o wolności słowa* is a historiosophical poem which combines the elements of epic and treatise poetry. The translator's choice to ignore here terminological accuracy brings about simply disastrous consequences. The idea of “the whole” oxymoronically modifying “the ruin” is moved by him to the next line: “So herrlich: im Ganzen [...]”. But here again Norwid uses the concept essential to his philosophy of the word: “*Ogół*” [the whole], “die *Allgemeinheit*”. This decision also seems very risky, even more so that “*Ogół*” returns at the end of the song, and there Gehrisch translates this word more adequately: “Doch er schien mir mit dem Gesamten verbunden” (“Lecz zdał mi się [kamień] ogółem łączny ze wszystkimi...” (PWsz III, 617; Norwid/Gehrisch, p. 181). A more detailed comparison of other lines of the analysed passage with Gehrisch's translation reveals several other unnecessary shifts in meaning (see my underlining) which could be easily avoided²¹, but their consequences are less destructive for the basic meaning of the poem.

²¹ See also the short list of identified mistakes at the end of this contribution.

5.

Can we not say anything good about the translation of the most difficult poem by Norwid into German? Certainly, there are some lines and passages where translation does not raise any objections, for instance, the following verses:

...Kierunkiem więc trzeci m,
Orfejskim, pójdę, którym, choć wątpimy, lecim,
A który nieraz w tęczę mieni chmurny temat,
By ludzie o nim rzekli: „to – nic... to – poem a t!
(PWsz III, 566)

...In die *dritte* Richtung also,
Die orpheische, geh ich, in die, obzwar zweifeld, wir fliegen,
Und welche zum Regenbogen häufig ändert das Wolkenmotiv,
D a ß d i e M e n s c h e n s i c h d a r ü b e r ä u ß e r n .
„Das – ist doch nichts – nur ein *Poem!*“
(Norwid/Gehrisch, p. 85)

Such successful solutions do not change the general point that reading *Rzecz o wolności słowa* in the German version does not allow the receiver to create a proper image of the contents of this poem (this would be the aim of a “reporter-style” translation) or understand the worldview of the mature Norwid (it is in this extremely complex work that it found its fullest expression). Does the translator bear full responsibility for this spectacular failure? Certainly, he did not lack the courage and good intentions, but it appears he did not use specialised dictionaries and seek advice of experts in poet’s work (Norwid’s poetic language is quite “exotic” even against the background of the era – i.e. the 1860s). It cannot be ruled out that the translator turned for help to prominent experts specialising in Norwid Studies too late (interestingly, in the first parts of the translation there are less misunderstandings than in the later ones!). We have already pointed to the discrepancy between the image of Norwid’s artistic work in the foreword by Jadwiga Puzynina and the image of the poet presented in the afterword by Gehrisch: they put the author of *Vade-mecum* in completely different historical and literary contexts.

It has to be acknowledged, however, that the failure of the translator is not only a result of the translator’s insufficient preparation in the field of Norwid Studies (although he undoubtedly overrated himself). In fact, the poem abounds in passages, the understanding of which (sometimes even at the syntactic level) still poses many problems. I think it would be worth “translating” *Rzecz o wolności słowa* into Polish “prose”. Such an undoubtedly very time-consuming and unrewarding task would have to go hand in hand with the reconstruction of Norwid’s

worldview in the last years of the Second French Empire (Napoleon III). This entails, however, the need to read a lot of books and magazines (mostly texts written by conservative French Catholic polemicists), which at the time of the Third Republic, after the victory of the revolution in politics and the arts, had lost their topicality (let us recall again the unlucky consequences of the unilateral inclusion of Norwid's artistic work in only one, symbolist-*cum*-modernist context, although, at the same time, this context cannot be ignored). The pioneering nature of Norwid's work is in fact also based on certain archaicity of his. Only a possibly complete reconstruction of the literary, philosophical and theological context (both French and Polish) would create the conditions for a comprehensive reading and a meaningful interpretation of the most ambitious poem by Norwid. Without meeting this demand, it is futile to dream of adequate translations of this text.

A short list of identified mistakes:

Drawing up a list of all the mistakes and incorrect or disputable interpretations of specific fragments of the poem in the translation by Peter Gehrisch is impossible here, since it would exceed the volume of this contribution. It is worth, however, to draw attention to a few more examples:

1. "[...] Prawidła w wymowie (PWsz III, 585)"; „[...] Ausspracheregeln” (N/G, p. 119), i.e. “pronunciation principles” (however, “wymowa” refers here to “art and study of speaking and writing correctly” [...] *Prawidła wymowy i poezji* (Vilnius Dictionary, p. 1983);

2. “Lektury publiczne nie są żadnym nowym wynalazkiem” (PWsz III, 561); “*Allgemeines Schriftgut* ist keine neue Entdeckung” (N/G, p. 77) (Gehrisch's translation is a complete misunderstanding: “allgemeines Schriftgut” would translate back approximately as “the content of literary archives [in a figurative sense] of a community”; the translator did not understand that we deal here with a calque from French: “lecture publique”, i.e. “public reading, lecture, declamation etc.”, see, for instance, *Carnets* by Victor Hugo, 30 October 1870, during a siege of Paris by the Prussians: „J'ai reçu la lettre de la Société des gens de lettres me demandant d'autoriser une lecture publique des Châtiments dont le produit donnera à Paris un canon qu'on appellera le Victor Hugo.” <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53038284r/f107.image.r=victor%20hugo%20carnets.langDE>]

(Misunderstanding by the translator of the basic meaning of this phrase has serious implications for the further part of this passage.)

3. “Słowo, brzmiać nieustannie, z przestrzenią i czasem/ Znosi się – obraz każdej myśli jest nawiasem:” (PWsz III, 582); “Das Wort, mit seinem

ständigen Klingen, mit dem Raum und der Zeit,/ Erhebt sich – das Bild ist jedes Gedanken Umfassung. (N/G, p. 115); Gehrisch confuses “znosić się” (*Vilnius Dictionary*, “znosić się”: 1. “unite, come together, fraternise” (p. 2239)) with “wznosić się” [rise];

4. “I kiedy archeolog, nie idąc za trafem,/ Poczyna być sztukmistrzem, a nie fotografem”. (PWsz III, 568); “Und, wenn ein Archäologe nicht das Treffende findet,/ Beginnt er Zauberünstler zu sein und nicht Fotograf. [N/G, p. 89] (“Sztukmistrz” refers to an “an artist showing off his art” (*Vilnius Dictionary*, p. 1650), and not – as understood by Gehrisch – to “juggler” or “wizard” (cf. *Vilnius Dictionary*, under the entry “Sztukmajster”);

5. “Benedyktyn milczący w jaworowym lesie,/ Za nim posąg J a d w i g i, który w ręku niesie/ Model Jagiellońskiego-Uniwersytetu...” (PWsz III, 606); “Der schweigende Benediktiner im Bergahornwald/ Dahinter, das Bildnis der Hedwig in seiner Hand./ Das Modell der Alma mater der Jagellonen... (N/G, p. 161) (change of perspective – it is not the model of Jagiellonian University that is holding a painting [“Bildnis”] of Jadwiga, but on the contrary, the statue of Jadwiga is holding in her hand a model of Jagiellonian University, which should be rendered in German as: “Ein schweigender Benediktiner in einem Ahornwald, hinter ihm eine Statue der Jadwiga, die ein Modell der Jagellonen-Universität in der Hand trägt” [trans. A. Wołkowicz]);

6. “[...] tę nową zaś rację/ Lud uwiadomił rzymski przez manifestację/ Na Monte-Sacro idąc w porządku i grozie/ Takiej, że Epopeja zdziwiła się prozie...” (PWsz III, 585); “[...] Dies neue Recht,/ Per Manifest hat das römische Volk es verkündet,/ Schreitend in Ordnung und Ehrfurcht über den *Sacro Monte*,/ In einer Weise, die Verskunst war überrascht von der Prosa...” (N/G, p. 121) (Gehrisch captures the confrontation between “Epopeja” [epic poem] and “proza” [prose] as the opposition between verse and prose, whereas in this passage social connotations, such as – in the case of prose – “strictly practical, tangible, common understanding of things” (*Vilnius Dictionary*, p. 1209) is equally important. The aristocratic spirit of “epic” (“poema bohaterkie” [heroic poems], *Vilnius Dictionary*, p. 299) is not a self-sufficient value; Gehrisch insufficiently exposes the figurative nature of this opposition);

7. “Któż? mniej od Zbawiciela bywał tu pojęty?!” (PWsz III, 594); “Wer denn? geringer als der Erlöser – ist hier zu denken?!” (N/G, p. 137) (Gehrisch did not understand the fundamental – and very simple – meaning of this sentence: “who was here less understood than the Saviour”).

Translated by Rafał Augustyn

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BALCERZAN E., „Spotkanie tłumaczy Norwida”, [in] *Cyprian Norwid. W 150-lecie urodzin*, ed. M. Żmigrodzka, Warszawa 1973, pp. 221-231.
- MÜLLER M., *La science du langage*, [Paris, 1867].
- NORWID C.K., *Über die Freiheit des Wortes. Poem*, aus dem Polnischen von P. Gehrish, Leipzig 2012.
- STEINER G., *Real Presences*, London, 1989.

CYPRIAN NORWID – PETER GEHRISCH,
ÜBER DIE FREIHEIT DES WORTES
(RZECZ O WOLNOŚCI SŁOWA)

S u m m a r y

This article is a critical appraisal of the recent German publication entitled *Über die Freiheit des Wortes*, which is a German translation of the well-known Norwid's poetic treatise *On the freedom of the Word*, also including some other translations of his poetic works, e.g. *Fatum*, *W Weronie* [In Verona], *Bema pamięci żałobny-rapsod* [A funeral rhapsody in memory of General Bem], *Ironia* [Irony] or *Fortepian Szopena* [Chopin's Grand Piano]. Yet, preeminent in the volume is the title treatise in verse, if not for the fact that the volume offers the first ever German rendition of this work. According to the author of the article, the translator Peter Gehrish sometimes happens to fall into interpretation traps that Norwid's texts are full of: semantic convolutions, phraseological ambiguities or – above all – stylistic and syntactic complications. Another limitation that is evident in the German rendition is that Gehrish strove very much to preserve in his version the original versed form of the treatise. The result is not always optimal if one considers the senses of the particular phrases or larger fragments.

Key words: German rendition; *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [*On the freedom of the Word*]; Peter Gehrish; Norwid.

Słowa kluczowe: przekład niemiecki; *Rzecz o wolności słowa*; Peter Gehrish; Norwid.

ARENT VAN NIEUKERKEN – PhD, lecturer at Slavonic Department, University of Amsterdam, foreign member of the Polish Academy of Sciences; e-mail: a.j.vannieukerken@uva.nl

Publication financed within the programme of Minister of Science and Higher Education under the name of 'National Programme for the Development of Humanities' in the years 2016-2021.